From Discourse to Meta-discourse: A Comparative Content Analysis of Print Media's Role in Ideological Polarization on *Aurat March* in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT: *The role of media in shaping socio-political ideologies of a cultural polity is nothing short of gargantuan in the contemporary world. If analyzed through the theoretical lenses offered by Michael Foucault and Ken Hyland, media's role can be explicated in light of the conceptual categories of discourse and meta-discourse. By adhering to this theoretical slant, this study aims to identify the divergent ideological representations of Aurat March discourse by Dawn and The Nation and traces how through agenda-setting and strategic linguistic framing they generate ideologically polarized discourses. The data for this qualitative research has been selected through purposive sampling so that it can be empirically reduced to concepts and themes to interpret the research phenomenon. For this purpose, this research focuses on the selected news reports, opinion articles, and editorials published in Dawn and The Nation in the months of March of the years 2020 and 2021. The categorization of the selected content resulted in the emergence of three themes that determine the analytical schema of the study. These themes are patriarchy, violence and abuse, and women's rights. If Dawn offers an emphatically radical ideological stance in presenting the Aurat March discourse, The Nation offers an ideological stance that in being evidently conventionalist stands in stark opposition to Dawn's ideological incline. It seems safe to construe that to a great extent, the ideological polarization of Pakistani society on the subject of Aurat March is an outcome of the role played by the ideologically polarized mainstream media and their power to control the minds of the target audience by a strategic use of language.*
Key Words: Agenda-setting, Linguistic framing, Aurat March, Ideological polarization, Mainstream media.

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Introduction

If the role of media in constructing the socio-cultural realities of contemporary societies is analyzed in the context of the postmodern epistemic order of things, then the contemporary media would emerge as a field offering "conflicting discursive frameworks and pressures which operate across a social body and which interact with each other and with the conditions how people think, know and write" (Mills 63). It is but interesting to note that in order to exercise its control over how people think and know, media extends its role beyond the mere presentation of conflicting socio-cultural discourses. It can be argued that in order to effectively influence the direction of public opinion, the media extends its role by constantly developing meta-discourses on the discourses presented in the news reports. In this context, discourse can refer to the "individualizable group of statements" (Foucault 80) and meta-discourse can be interpreted as "discussion about discussion" which "calls for community members to take a meta-perspective on their own dialogue" (Resendes 51). When different media houses present the discourses and meta-discourses in line with their mutually distinct agendas, the inevitable result is ideological polarization not only in the media market but also among the masses that consume these ideologically polarized narratives (Malkawi). If this media-engendered ideological polarization is to be perceived as a "division emerging as a consequence of the rhetoric and coalitional choices of groups, more than from the actual societal divisions that they ostensibly represent", then the media's role in representing the phenomenon of Aurat March in Pakistan offers an interesting case study (Vegetti 78). With a focus on print media, this study conjectures that the mainstream print media outlets are the foremost social apparatuses for cultivating ideological polarization in Pakistani society on the emergent phenomenon of Aurat March. It further proposes that this ideological polarization is cultivated not only through the agenda-based framing of the discourse of Aurat March in the print media news reports, but also through the follow-up presentations of meta-discourses on this phenomenon in the newspaper editorials and opinion columns. This enables these media outlets to achieve the mainstreaming of these ideological discourses. In this light, print media can be seen as playing a major role in developing the ideologically divided and polarized order of opinions on Aurat March in Pakistan. In adhering to the theoretical frameworks offered by Michael Foucault and Ken Hyland to analyze the concepts of discourse and meta-discourse respectively, this qualitative study attempts a theme-based comparative content analysis of

the selected news reports and opinion articles from *Dawn* and *The Nation*. It tries to explicate their divisive ideological stances on the matter and their likely impact on the target masses who consume these discourses and meta-discourses. In that, the study focuses on the lexical choices and syntactic expressions in the news reports and opinion columns and thematically codifies the selected content. The data thus codified is subjected to a comparative content analysis in order to explicate the role of these print media outlets in engendering ideological polarity on Aurat March. Thus, the study focuses on the Aurat March coverage by two representative print media outlets and attempts to raise certain questions which are as follows: How do media outlets frame discourses of socio-cultural significance for the masses in line with their own latent agendas? To what purpose different media outlets frame and reproduce discourses and develop meta-discourses on those discourses through their opinion articles? By entertaining to ideologically distinct agendas, how do media outlets become the harbingers of perspectival dichotomies among the masses, resulting in the ideological polarization among different social groups in Pakistani society? In an attempt to answer these questions through a comparative content analysis of the data collected from two different English newspapers, this study purports to offer that media plays a major role in engendering ideologically divided and polarized socio-cultural order in Pakistani society, particularly in relation to a fairly sensitive and controversial phenomenon such as the Aurat March.

Literature Review

Although one comes across an extensive array of studies and articles on the phenomenon of Aurat March in Pakistan, however, most of these studies have been rendered with a characteristic ideological partiality that this study attempts to offer as problematic. Despite having a plethora of studies touching upon the idea of the emergence of feminist discourse, the studies commenting upon the role of media in representing the Aurat March narrative are few and far between. Resultantly, one does not come across a study offering a detailed linguistic and textual analysis of the print media representations of the phenomenon that is also underpinned by a robust theoretical framework.

It is pertinent to begin with the study titled "Portrayal of Women in Pakistani Media" (2015) by A.R. Huda and R.A. Ali. In adopting a historical perspective, this study focuses on the idea that how Pakistani women have been oppressed and objectified in media representations

despites the fact that Pakistani women have been playing an active role in the development of media. It takes into account "the image of women as presented in Pakistani print, broadcast, and social media as well as in advertisements" (Huda and Ali 12). According to this study "the news regarding women in media are judgmental and of low standard…Media can easily alter the stereotypical image of women…(but) media is biased as far as the issue of gender inequality is concerned" (18). Although the study highlights some important aspects in relation to media's role as an agent of social change, it stands wary of depicting media's role in engendering multifarious ideological perspectives on the issues related to women sort.

Another study, clearly depicting an ideological incline towards feminist movements in Pakistan, is rendered by Ayaz Ahmed Siddiqui. The study titled as "Aurat March: a threat to Mainstream Talibanism in Pakistan" (2020) only slightly touches upon the role of media in the depiction of the phenomenon of Aurat March. In laying its focus less on the media representation of the Aurat March movement and more on the liberationist movements in the highly patriarchal society of Pakistan, the study offers a few questions such as: "Those questioning Aurat March poster's morality what pragmatic solutions these critics have for Pakistan's chronic social problems, and by extension, the Arab world?" (Siddiqui 7). However, the answers provided do not encompass the full scope of the media's role in this regard.

If there are studies focusing on forwarding the agenda of Aurat March in a positive light, there are also studies that aim at questioning the credibility of such narratives in light of the Eastern vs. Western contexts of the debate, and "The Woman Activism in Pakistan: An Analysis of Aurat March" (Khushbakht and Sultana) is one of those studies. In observing the "relationship between western feminism and Aurat March activism from the perspective of the social, cultural, and religious transformation of society" the authors highlight the necessity of raising "a constructive and logical voice for women's rights" (51). However, this study too does not come full circle to elucidate upon the significant role played by print media in depicting the favorable or unfavorable narratives on the subject of Aurat March.

Two very interesting studies which discuss the media spaces for accommodating the narrative of Aurat March are "Online Feminist Resistance in Pakistan" (Rehman) and "Do-it-Yourself activism in

Pakistan: The Fatal Celebrity of Qandeel Baloch" (Alam). Both the studies in their own expressive ways highlight how media spaces are used to develop ideologically subversive and politically challenging narratives in a norm-governed society like Pakistan. However, these studies maintain their distinct focus on the space and role offered by social and digital media for the presentation of the Aurat March narrative and keeping in view their scope, these studies do not necessarily talk about the role of print media, which is the prime focus of the present study.

A slightly dated, but a significant study by Taimoor-ul-Hassan in the context of print media's role in representing and perpetuating different kinds of discourses on women's rights is titled "The Performance of Press During Women Movement in Pakistan". Although the study seems more inclined towards depicting the role of feminist movements in Pakistan through a historical perspective, particularly since the Zia era, it focusses on the news coverage of these movements in the print media and attempts "to know about the trajectory of Pakistan's press had adopted" (Hassan 311). It proposes to analyze Urdu and English print media both, to view "the trend of newspapers with regard to gender issues in Pakistan and offers a reference to judge the performance of present-day media with respect to the issue of women" (311). It also talks about the "political communication perspective" wherein "the media is supposed to provide a public sphere for a free exchange of ideas" on the subject of women's rights (316). However, despite offering a significant analytical angle, this study too stands wary of a much-needed linguistic analysis of the print media news reports on women's rights movements and how their circulation impacts the nature of public discourses.

A recent study by Eman Lakhani titled "Women's March Became Another Example in Pakistani Media's History of Promoting Patriarchy by Agenda-Setting" offers quite a descriptive title and an equally descriptive, linguistically less analytical, and ideologically confrontational lambasting of Pakistani print media in depicting the Aurat March. The study proclaims that "the Pakistani media fails to fulfill its journalistic duties and plays an agenda setting role in every era, (over different reasons) to nullify the efforts of all women demanding justice" (Lakhani 6). It also declares that in being aligned to their agenda media necessarily adheres to a negative perspective on the Aurat March through gatekeeping. That is why in the author's view, a war against a "patriarchal media" is a "war against a certain kind of mentality that is instilled in many of the men and women in charge of mainstream media" (6). Although this study brings to the fore a significant aspect of patriarchy in

the media setups, it fails to acknowledge those segments and groups of print media which have clearly taken on a pro-Aurat-March discourse and have attempted to develop meta-discourses on the subject in trying to become the influential agents of social change.

Another recent study titled "Role of Media in Representation of Socio-Cultural Ideologies in Aurat March (2019-2020): A Multimodal Discourse Analysis" by Fatima Zafar Baig, A.Z. Aslam, Nadia Akram, Aisha Malik, and Zafar Iqbal appears to be quite promising in order to analyze media's role in ideological polarization in Pakistani society on Aurat March. However, in its attempt to present a discourse analysis of the news reports and articles, it picks on too many critical issues such as ideology, power, state, political apparatuses, hegemony, media narratives, public response, influence, so on and so forth. In trying to tackle so many critical issues, it somehow blurs its own focal point of the said discourse analysis. It only broadly concludes with the idea that "media has created and represented different socio-cultural ideologies in Aurat March. Media can play a positive and negative role in language and power" (Baig et al. 414).

In the researchers' observation, the most recent study on media's representation of Aurat March and its role in promoting social polarization is "The Media and Aurat March: Friends or Foes?" by Alia Bukhari. The study engages with print and digital media both and aims to show "how the Aurat March is framed in the Pakistani print and digital media" (Bukhari). The study is important in the sense that it focuses on the agenda-setting role of media in directing people's ideological inclinations towards Aurat March. But in attempting to analyze English and Urdu newspapers in print and digital domains, it broadens its focus to a somewhat unfeasible extent, and a distinct focus on any single medium or language for an in-depth linguistic analysis of the ideological debate on the matter remains unaddressed.

In light of the detailed literature review offered above, this study locates a gap of not having a research study so far with a distinct and comprehensive focus on the language of only English print media outlets in Pakistan and their agenda-based framing of the discourses and meta-discourses on the Aurat March which is engendering a threatening ideological polarity in Pakistani society. It is important to realize that this research focuses distinctively on the print media narratives on Aurat March in the English print media and not necessarily in the Urdu print

media on account of the ideological appeal of both languages in Pakistan and its impact on the ideological narrative building processes in the country. Urdu print media indeed has a broad readership in comparison to English, however, Urdu print media in offering a more conventionalist temperament does not cover the issue of Aurat March to the extent the English print media in Pakistan highlights the same. Thus, despite having a smaller circulation in comparison to Urdu newspapers, the English newspapers in Pakistan contribute more in highlighting the pro-libertarian ideological stances or vice versa, their dissemination, and perpetuating an ever-increasing ideological polarization on the social issues with a radical incline. Therefore, this research attempts to investigate how different outlets of English print media are generating ideologically polarized discourses and meta-discourses on the subject of Aurat March and resultantly creating highly ideologically polarized debates and mindsets on the matter among the Pakistani masses who consume these media narratives.

Research Methodology

In order to undertake the proposed investigation, this study adopts a qualitative research mode. In its exploratory-cum-interpretative approach for the explication of newspaper discourses and meta-discourses on Aurat March, it opts for a comparative content analysis through the thematic codification of the data collected from two English newspapers i.e., *Dawn* and *The Nation*. The execution of this research will be made possible through the data collection method, theoretical framework, and analysis details as described below.

Data and Content Selection

The study adheres to a qualitative method to collect and analyze the data. The data for this research has been selected through purposive sampling so that it can be empirically reduced to concepts and themes to interpret the research phenomenon. For this purpose, this research focuses on the selected news reports and opinion articles, and editorials published in *Dawn* and *The Nation* in the months of March of the years 2020 and 2021. It focuses on 5-7 news reports and 5-7 opinion and editorial articles from both newspapers to analyze their ideological differences and agenda-setting in covering Aurat March and its likely linguistic framing. The categorization of the selected content resulted in the emergence of three themes that determine the analytical schema of the study. The themes are patriarchy, violence and abuse, and women's rights. The purpose of this

research design is to see the ideological incline of the newspapers in framing the Aurat March discourses and meta-discourses.

3.2. Theoretical and Analytical Framework

Since the study focuses on the ideological polarization engendered through the multifarious discourses and meta-discourses produced by print media outlets, the researchers find it pertinent to adhere to the theoretical frameworks offered by Michael Foucault and Ken Hyland on the conceptual categories of *discourse* and *meta-discourse.* According to Foucault, discourse can be understood as "the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements" (Foucault 80). If we focus on discourse as comprising only the "individualizable statements" then these statements and utterances appear to "form a grouping, such as the discourse of femininity or the discourse of racism" and in that, they can shed light on the phenomenon of Aurat March discourse (Mills 53). Foucault's conceptualization of discourse is relevant in the context of this study as it helps in understanding the discourse on Aurat March and the way it is framed and shaped by the print media to present it in form of "an individualizable group of statement" through polarized ideological standpoints (80). This understanding of discourse reflects how discourses from the powerful segments of society, such as media, shape and create different realities and influence the thinking and interpretive patterns of the general masses. So, one aspect of this study is to focus on the divergent ideological representations of Aurat March discourse through agenda-setting and strategic framing of news items by *Dawn* and *The Nation*, and in that, it is "concerned to assert that truth is constructed and kept in place through a wide range of strategies which affirm and support it and which exclude and counter alternative versions of events" (76).

Keeping in view that a pervasive and deep social entrenchment of a constructed truth depends upon recurrent and strategic promulgation of that truth, the second aspect of this study extends its theoretical framework to account for the axis between discourse circulation and meta-discourse circulation on Aurat March through the print media outlets. For this purpose, this study looks at meta-discourse as a narrative that has been developed on an already given discourse, and which attempts to create a long-term influence on the directions and ways of how readers should respond to and evaluate a certain discourse, such as

the discourse of the Aurat March. In that, the study extends its analytical focus from the discursive framing of the news reports to the meta-discursive reframing of the same in the editorials and opinion articles of the selected newspapers. For the meta-discursive angle of analysis, it draws support from the theoretical conceptualization of meta-discourse by Ken Hyland who describes the meta-discourse in the following words:

> Meta-discourse reveals the writer's awareness of the reader and his or her need for elaboration, clarification, guidance and interaction. In expressing an awareness of the text, the writer also makes the reader aware of it, and this only happens when he or she has a clear, reader-oriented reason for doing so. In other words, drawing attention to the text represents a writer's goal relative to an assessment of the target reader's need for guidance and elaboration. (Hyland 8)

The juxtaposition of the discursive and meta-discursive aspects of the print media coverage of Aurat March in this way enables us to observe its trickledown effect on the ideological orientation of the masses. It enables us to see how by using the soft and symbolic power of language, print media is able to control and shape the minds and sensibilities of its audience according to their own socio-political agendas. When there are too many ideological agendas operating in the print media discursive field on the phenomenon of Aurat March, it results in a stark "divergence of political attitudes in the mass public to the ideological extremes" on the matter (Wallsten and Toteva 998). By adhering to an integrative understanding of these theoretical frameworks, the present study develops its conceptual and analytical schema to analyze and interpret the selected news stories, editorials, and opinion articles from *Dawn* and *The Nation*. The selected content from the newspapers is coded and categorized to facilitate the emergence of interrelated themes. In line with the three themes, the chosen content is then subjected to comparative and interpretive content analysis to bring to the fore the ideologically tainted news discourses and meta-discourses on the news reports by the selected newspapers. The analytical model for the textual analysis is as follows:

Theme	Discourse Level Framing (Lexical choices and syntactic expressions in the news reports)	Meta-discourse Level Framing (Lexical choices and syntactic expressions in the

		editorials and opinion columns)
Patriarchy	**Dawn** • "Pandemic of patriarchy" (*Dawn*, 8th March 2021) • "Stains of patriarchy" (*Dawn*, 8th March 2020) • "March against gatekeepers of honor and culture" etc. (*Dawn*, 2020) **The Nation** No news item in *The Nation* which frames the Aurat March discourse to explicitly highlight this theme.	**Dawn** • "*Let us question* the self-appointed guardians of culture and morality." (Editorial, *Dawn*, 2020) • "*Let me Womansplain* the Aurat March to you." (Mohydin, 2020) **The Nation** • "*In reality, it is not exactly the patriarchy* but the sociocultural milieu which largely lies at the root of major problems." (Malik, 2020) • "*Feminists essentially presuppose* the state, the government, and the menfolk to be an integral part of the substructure of the patriarchal society. And, therefore, *they hate them.*" (Malik, 2020)
Violence and Abuse	**Dawn**	**Dawn**

	• "Protect women against violence threats" (*Dawn*, 14th March 2021) • "Innumerable real stories of violence on street" (*Dawn*, 8th March 2021) • "Patriarchy and the abuse suffered by women" (*Dawn*, 7th March 2021) **The Nation** • "Efforts for providing opportunities and conducive atmosphere to women" (*The Nation*, 8th March 2020) • "Help the women to lead a safe, secure and prosperous life: PM" (*The Nation*, 8th March 2020)	• "*No* to patriarchal violence" (Zahid, 2021) • "*We question* mechanisms of state …to silence dissent and victims of abuse." (Khurshid, 2021) **The Nation** • "*It is evident* that the *women and children* are more vulnerable to become the miserable victims of the psychological 'displacement of aggression." (Malik, 2020)
Women's Rights	**Dawn** • "Aurat Marches…for the protection of women's rights" (*Dawn*, 8th March 2021) • "Aurat March with feminist flourish" (*Dawn*, 9th March 2021)	**Dawn** • "Should Feminists Claim Aurat March's Vulgar posters? *Yes absolutely*!" (Khatri, 2020) • "Right to March!" (Editorial, *Dawn*, 2021)

	• "Slogans against discriminatory economic rights" (*Dawn*, 9th March 2021) **The Nation** • "Realizing women's rights" (*The Nation*, 8th March 2020) • "March 8th: an official day for women's rights and world peace" (*The Nation*, 8th March 2020) • "Govt. committed to empowering women: Firdous" (*The Nation*, 8th March 2021)	• "Amplifying the voice of women!" (Zahid, 2021) **The Nation** • *"I appeal to the government* to ensure the protection of women rights at workplace and educational institutions." (Haq, 2021) • "With women rights *they want to call* for giving women complete autonomy regarding her sexual choices, marriage and reproduction to the exclusion of the societal or state regulations." (Malik, 2020)

On one hand the researchers adhere to a constructivist lens offered by poststructuralist theorists to present a comparative content analysis of two different newspapers with an explicit aim to highlight their different ideological positions and their implications for the masses who consume their ideologically laden narratives as explained above. On the other hand they prefer to avoid passing a value judgment on any of the ideological stances and remain as neutral as possible in approaching the topic and the data analysis to avoid any kind of observer's paradox and latent bias against any stance offered by the media outlets.

Data Analysis

In light of its aims and research questions, the study attempts to analyze the selected data and tries to seek answers to the research questions. It proposes that *Dawn* and *The Nation*, both operate according to their own agenda settings, and all the discourses and meta-discourses which find a place in these newspapers are exactly in line with the ideological agenda-setting of these media outlets. As the following analysis will show, both the newspapers in representing the Aurat March discourse by adhering to contending ideological agenda-setting and content framing, become discursive outlets for establishing ideologically polarized groups of audience in relation to the Aurat March phenomenon. These ideologically polarized groups of people are the target audiences of these print media outlets, which appear as contesting social groups on the subject of Aurat March. The following comparative content analysis explicates how *Dawn* and *The Nation* contribute to the ideological polarization of Pakistani society on the matter.

Analysis of *Dawn's* Representation of Discourse and Meta-discourse on *Aurat March*

In recent years *Dawn* has been considered a news outlet that evidently entertains a libertarian ideological incline toward the socio-political issues of society. Naturally, its news production and discourse infiltration agenda are set likewise and the opinion of its target audience is strongly shaped and directed by what *Dawn* chooses to publicize and interpret for them. This implies that if *Dawn* "decides to give the most of time and space to an issue" with a particular ideological angle and interpretation, "it will become the most important item on the audience's agenda" too in the same way (Bukhari). Thus the news outlet becomes an ideological lens through which its audience attempts to perceive reality (Hussain and Kashifa). It is pertinent to look at the thematic categorization of different news items framed by *Dawn* on the Aurat March and the meta-discourses developed on them by the opinion articles and editorials to reinforce a particular kind of understanding and interpretation among the audience.

If we talk about the theme of patriarchy, *Dawn's* news reports make use of lexical choices and syntactic expressions to represent Aurat March's discourse which reflects their left-wing inclinations and libertarian agenda to question and challenge patriarchy in Pakistan. In a news story, the framing of content analogizes patriarchy with the Covid-19 pandemic and calls it a "pandemic of patriarchy" (Ali and Gabol). The lexical choices in another news report highlight the "stains of patriarchy" that the oppressed women of the society are bound to bear and must attempt to

wash off permanently (Ali and Gabol). In a news report on 2nd March 2021, it frames the Aurat March as a march against gatekeepers of honor and culture(Editorial). If the lexical choices and syntactic expression used by *Dawn* to frame these stories carry the potential to develop a counter-hegemonic narrative against patriarchy, a number of opinion articles and editorials, which found space in the newspaper on different dates near the Aurat March, offered emphatic reinforcement on the pro-libertarian Aurat March discourse. The editorial dated 2nd March 2021 throws a challenge to the patriarchal society by unequivocally questioning its credibility and perceives the "citadel of patriarchy once again in turmoil" (Editorial). By using the explicit meta-discourse markers (which are italicized here for the sake of highlighting) it proclaims that "*let us question* the self-appointed guardians of culture and morality" (Editorial). In an opinion article, the writer stresses her right to question patriarchy and feels the need to explain it to her target audience: "*Let me Womansplain* the Aurat March to you" (Rimmel).

In the context of the theme of violence and abuse, we come across *Dawn's* lexical and framing choices for its news reports which clearly offer a pro-left-feminist agenda. A few syntactic expressions on this theme have been framed as follows: "protect women against violence threats" (Reporter), "innumerable real stories of violence on street" and "patriarchy and the abuse suffered by them" (Gabol and Ali). We observe the opinion column writers developing on the discourse of violence and abuse with the same ideological incline. Luavut Zahid stresses the manifesto of the Aurat March and offers its constitutional and ethical justifications and declares an absolute "*No* to patriarchal violence" (Zahid). Reema Khurshid goes a leap ahead and in her meta-discursive interpretation of Aurat March discourse for the target audience tries to show how the state and media offer a "march of disinformation" on Aurat March. That is why she attempts to become an inclusive representative voice of the masses and declares that "*We question* mechanisms of state …to silence dissent and victims of abuse" (Khurshid).

We observe the same ideological slant in the news stories talking about women's rights. A news report endorsing the right of women to march states: "Aurat Marches…for the protection of women's rights" (Ali and Gabol). Another describes the phenomenon as "Aurat March with feminist flourish" with "slogans against discriminatory economic rights" (Jalil). The meta-discursive stances of the opinion writers offer a robust endorsement of confrontational voices of women to snatch their rights

back from the oppressive society. Sadia Khatri proclaims: "Should Feminists Claim Aurat March's Vulgar posters? *Yes absolutely*!" (Khatri). Luavut Zahid in her forceful opinion article reinforces the need for women to "amplify[ing] the voice of women" for gaining back their inherent and legitimate rights (Zahid).

Dawn's strategy to frame the news items on Aurat March and develop a meta-discourse on them with the evidently daring lexical choices is reflective of their latent agenda-setting i.e., becoming a representative voice of the more liberal and counter-hegemonic segments of the Pakistani society. The framing and lexical design in all three thematic categories discussed above are reflective of the Aurat March discourse as a social force that will end the "pandemic of patriarchy" and all sorts of exploitative hegemonic powers with it. These specific lexical choices to frame this discourse of dissent impart to *Dawn* news stories an obvious confrontational spirit. The presentation of this discourse by *Dawn* "is regulated by a set of rules which lead to the distribution and circulation of certain utterances and statements wherein some statements are circulated widely and others have restricted circulation" (Mills 54). The Aurat March account, as encapsulated by the news reports and furthered by their opinion columns, reflects not only the socio-political agenda of the Dawn group to represent counter-hegemonic discourses and meet discourses of society, on one hand, on the other, it asserts the power of media itself, as a significant fourth pillar in the discursive field of modern democracies. A gradual mainstreaming of the narratives of Aurat March with this ideological tinge emphatically influences the opinions, beliefs, and practices of the target audience and makes them distinct from other ideological groups in society. This elucidates the point that ideologically inclined agenda setting and content framing by media houses "does not simply translate reality into language", rather, it "should be seen as a system which structures the way that we perceive reality" (Mills 55). Thus, the unswerving agenda pursuits of left-wing print media groups such as Dawn, through their strategic mainstreaming of the counter-hegemonic narratives of power, play a significant role in creating ideological blocs among masses that starkly and confrontationally oppose the other ideological alliances.

Analysis of *The Nation's* Representation of Discourse and Meta-discourse on Aurat March

The discursive and meta-discursive design of the Aurat March coverage by the Nawa-e-Waqt group offers an ideological positioning that in being conventionalist and conservative stands in stark contrast to the ideological bent of the Dawn group. Just like *Dawn*, *The Nation's* ideological stance on the phenomenon of Aurat March offers an ideal example of the Foucauldian concept of an epistemically established network of discourses as an individualizable group of statements. However, in *The Nation's* case, it is an opposite ideological stance that we come across. *The Nation* opts to discuss "the march from the perspective of society's longstanding socio-cultural ideologies and religion more, being slightly critical of the march's posters and slogans" (Bukhari).

Since the discussion on patriarchy has more or less been considered a taboo in a more conventional mindset of Pakistani society, it is but interesting to note that the researchers did not come across even a single news story in *The Nation* in the months of March 2020 and 2021 which uses the lexical item *patriarchy* and discusses the concept at some good length. So, quite interestingly in *The Nation*, no news item was found within the scope of this research that frames the Aurat March discourse to explicitly highlight this theme.

In the thematic category of violence and abuse, *The Nation* opts for the lexical choices and syntactic expressions which are diametrically opposed to the lexical and syntactic patterns found in *Dawn's* coverage. In customarily favoring the ideological stances and agendas of the populist governments of the country, *The Nation* frames its stories to depict a positive image of the state power apparatuses, the same which *Dawn's* framing strategy appears keen on challenging. Thus it offers a divergent ideological layer to the issue (Hussain and Kashifa). A news report discussing the governments' initiatives to curb violence against women states: "providing opportunities and conducive atmosphere to women" (Staff Reporter). Another news headline offering the stance of the Prime Minister states: "Help the women to lead a safe, secure and prosperous life: PM" (Staff Reporter). The meta-discourse developed on this news presentation of the discourse of Aurat March adheres to conventionalist ideologies and lambasts the boldness inherent in the Aurat March narrative. Mohsin Raza Malik in his opinion article asserts that the "*feminists essentially presuppose* the state, the government, and the

menfolk to be an integral part of the substructure of the patriarchal society, and, therefore*, they hate them*" and that is why accuse them for violence against women (Malik). According to him, "*in reality, it is not exactly the patriarchy* but the sociocultural milieu which largely lies at the root of major problems" (Malik). If viewed from a critical stance, one observes here the employment of the shadowing technique for narrative building, through which the discourse of violence and abuse of women is not really presented as a distinct individualizable category of social narratives, rather it's coalesced with the problems faced by children as well: "*It is evident* that the *women and children* are more vulnerable to become the miserable victims of the psychological 'displacement of aggression'" (Malik).

In the thematic category of women's rights, it is again the government's stance that *The Nation* prefers to frame and gatekeep any other narrative from the marchers themselves. Through its apparently ideologically neutral lexical and syntactic choices a news report presents March 8th as "an official day for women's rights and world peace" on which one finds "Govt. committed to empowering women" (Staff Reporter). Quite in contrast to the radical emphasis of *Dawn's* meta-discourses to explain and mainstream the Aurat March phenomenon among the target masses, *The Nation's* meta-discursive stance offers to find a solution to the problems of women's rights in the government policies as the harbinger of peace for the women and other marginalized groups alike. This meta-discursive stance is offered by Siraj ul Haq who in opting for the role of public prosecutor states: "*I appeal to the government* to ensure the protection of women rights at workplace and educational institutions" (Staff Reporter). Moreover, in his opinion article titled "Women, Pakistan and Islam" (Siraj Ul Haq), he clearly takes on a religious stance and seems to achieve ideological priming of the religious discourse to address the matter of the Aurat March.

Now the lexical choices and syntactic expressions for the framing of Aurat March reports by the Nawa-e-Waqt group, evidently echo a more customary discourse of power politics to acknowledge an emergent and proliferating social narrative in the society. However, in line with the ideological agenda of this media group, all these discourses and meta-discourses are necessarily aligned with the panoptic control of the government. In depicting the government's stance in a more positive light on the subject, the Nawa-e-Waqt group reflects its own media agenda which operates through the inclusion of the conventionalist narrative and exclusion of all counter-narratives. It also reflects the politics of control in which it becomes a mouthpiece for the anti-Aurat March ideological

narratives. It is this politics of control in a Foucauldian sense, wherein it becomes difficult to distinguish between the watchers and the watched (Foucault). A gradual reinforcement of these pro-government and pro-conventionalism discourses and meta-discourses on Aurat March does not only cultivate the conventional version of reality in the minds of the target audience but also helps mainstream the likely beliefs and practices of the target audience quite in line with the media house's own socio-political agendas.

Conclusion

This study, which attempted to investigate the agenda-based framing strategies of discourses and meta-discourses by the print media outlets and their role in the production and reproduction of ideologically polarized narratives on Aurat March, shows that the agenda-setting behind the print media discourses and meta-discourses plays an important role in shaping and directing people's attention on the issues of socio-cultural significance and also in cultivating and mainstreaming related narratives and beliefs. By attempting a thoroughgoing comparative content analysis of the thematically codified lexical-cum-syntactic choices of the two English newspapers, it shows how their choices of language use fall in line with their varying ideological agendas on the phenomenon of the Aurat March. This study finally postulates that the divergent ideological stances on the matter by both the media groups perform as the stimuli to develop divergent ideological mindsets among the target audiences of these newspapers. If *Dawn* offers an emphatically radical ideological stance in presenting the Aurat March discourse, *The Nation* offers an ideological stance that in being evidently conventionalist stands in stark opposition to *Dawn's* ideological incline. It seems safe to construe that to a great extent, the ideological polarization of the Pakistani society on the question of the rights of women is an outcome of the role played by the ideologically polarized mainstream media and their power to control the mind of the target audience by strategic use of language. After all, an ideologically inclined use of language does have an influence on the "mental representation of an experience" by the audience (Van Dijk).

The discussion presented in this study offers us a few more critical questions and their likely conclusions. What role is played by media to determine the nature of discursive fields in contemporary societies, particularly in relation to its strategies of ideological control over information on socio-cultural issues? What role does media play in the

production, reproduction, and mainstreaming of new discourses and realities and simultaneously in perpetuating the already existing discourses in a society? And in line with the above two questions, what role is played by media to engender ideological polarization in society instead of "helping societies to accomplish public good with agreement on what is important"? (Bukhari). In light of the study objectives, newspaper content analysis, and these additional questions, it can be concluded that the discourses and the meta-discourses produced by media exercise fair control over the linguistic capital of our society. It is indeed the media's agenda-based monopoly over this linguistic capital and its intersection with other socio-political domains of the society which enables them to strategically influence the very concept of socio-political discourses, realities, and the beliefs emerging from the unswerving circulation of these discourses!

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