



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Machismo: Portrayal of Images in Pakistani Cinema**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study thoroughly examines the impact of machismo portrayals in Pakistani cinema on young people, emphasizing the importance of considering gender. It looks not only at how often these portrayals appear but also how they reinforce specific ideas about masculinity and femininity. The study also explores how the machismo image has changed from rural to urban settings and how this relates to gender roles. It's important to note that violence is often associated with this image, and the research investigates how this influences how people think about their own gender identity and contributes to harmful stereotypes. Additionally, the study evaluates whether these cinematic portrayals align with or challenge changing gender roles, women's empowerment, and the broader conversation about gender equality in Pakistan today. Overall, this research provides insight into how machismo images in cinema affect the experiences and expectations of young men and women in Pakistan from a gender perspective.

**KEYWORDS** Machismo, Gender, Pakistani Cinema, Masculinity, Femininity

**Introduction**

There are many values that are associated with it such as masculinity, courage, stubbornness, strength (Stevens, 1965). It is considered that the public space is reserved for men, and not for women. Men are supposed to show courage and strength. If he would not show strength, he would be termed as submissive and feminine, which is certainly non-machismo traits, further reiterates that an adult adopts behavior traits that he or she acquired social learning, and cultural values. However, his study further shows through his study that the Latin American countries are gradually becoming aware of their problems with sustaining machismo image and maintaining that the country will be solely depended on a strong and charismatic leader who will bring them back on the path to development.

The machismo male image is also based on sexism, which extensively supports the assumption that sexual division based on biological differences of male and female is a universal phenomenon. It rather than social and cultural construction, majorly focuses on physical differences, leading to superiority of male over the female, in attitudes and behaviors. This helps in turning the biases into institutionalized biases, thriving on discrimination and exploitation (McCormack, 1978). As in a study in Yugoslavia, shown that women attain agency by not only being part of the families which are essentially patriarchal in nature, but also through becoming mothers (Simic, 1983). This is also reflected in the social setup in Pakistan, in the kinship relations. This is often represented out of proportion in the cinema in Pakistan.

In an article, asserts that Machismo confines women in home and due to unequal gender relations between men and women discourages women from taking responsible positions in the public space. She also highlighted a certain term machista, meaning jealousy due to which man does not want women to work in the esteemed positions in politics,

business (Cranford, 2007). Literature is also evident of the studies where machismo complex is used as a key technique in positively bringing the male in the loop of social change. For instance, in a study funded by Oxfam GB, participation of male in the propagation of message regarding sexual health is acknowledged as an effective strategy (Sternberg, 2000), he further more talks about stereotypes that male are trapped in and are compelled to carry on with the same image, throughout their life. This not only has a negative effect on their loved ones and their families, but also on themselves. As a binary opposite, the research. It also shows the lack of participation of women in Nicaragua in public sphere, with marked difference as compared with the men.

The literature also shows the alternate perspectives to the Machismo stereotypes, leading to complex range of multiple masculinities effected by social factors, for instance (Falicov, 2010) mentioned in the study contradiction in the unitary concept of masculinities in Latino men. Review of literature does not directly link violence perpetrated in the society with the acts of violence shown on television or cinema, however prolonged exposure of children and adults to the acts of violence on Television and cinema are not without their negative impact (McCormack, 1978). Further the literature shows that violence in the western movies has been attributed to freedom of expression and individualism projected in the movies. Clinical psychologist by profession shows that freedom of expression, personal freedom can explain violence shown on television and in the movies. He believes that violence instigated by heroes on the television and in the movies, can be contagious in the society, and can influence people. It also relates to the prevalence of violence in the society, which may further instigate a person to perpetuate further acts of violence (Ryder, 1993).

### **Literature Review**

The exploration of gender, a complex and multifaceted concept, has been a prominent focus of scholarly inquiry for several decades. Within this vast field of study, the dynamic and often fluid notions of masculinity and femininity have garnered substantial attention. Additionally, the concept of machismo, frequently associated with exaggerated forms of masculinity, has emerged as a significant topic of examination, particularly within the realms of Anthropology and sociology. This literature review highlights the complex relationships between gender, machismo, masculinity, and femininity. It emphasizes the importance of considering cultural, performative, and psychoanalytic perspectives when examining the construction and manifestation of these concepts. Furthermore, it highlights the need to reevaluate and challenge traditional gender norms in pursuit of greater gender equality and inclusivity, recognizing that gender is a dynamic and evolving facet of human experience.

Author has played a pivotal role in advancing our comprehension of masculinity by categorizing it into multiple forms. He emphasizes its context-dependent nature, arguing that masculinity is not a monolithic construct but a dynamic concept with varied interpretations across diverse sociocultural contexts (Connell, 1995). The ethnographic study offers an in-depth exploration of masculinity in the context of Mexico City. His work sheds light on the intricate cultural nuances of machismo, illustrating how it permeates Mexican society, influencing not only gender roles but also shaping interpersonal dynamics, expectations, and behaviors (Gutmann, 1996).

She introduces the concept of gender as performative, positing that individuals continually enact and embody gender roles through their actions and behaviors. In this view, masculinity and femininity are not predetermined but constructed and continually reenacted in everyday life (Butler ,1990) Approaches the formation of gender identity through a psychoanalytic lens, with a focus on early caregiver-child relationships. Her work examines into how the mother-child relationship, in particular, contributes to the

development of masculine and feminine identities, shedding light on the interplay between family dynamics and gender identity formation (Chodorow, 1978)

The concept of hegemonic masculinity and its relevance in understanding power dynamics within gender hierarchies. They argue that machismo can be seen as a manifestation of hegemonic masculinity in specific contexts, emphasizing the underlying social, cultural, and economic forces shaping exaggerated masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005). This challenges the binary understanding of gender, highlighting its socially constructed nature. She contends that rigid gender norms, including those associated with machismo, can be restrictive and perpetuate gender inequalities. Lorber's research encourages a critical examination and questioning of traditional gender norms (Lorber, 1994).

### **Material and Methods**

The qualitative research method was applied; Students from the Anthropology, Defense and Strategic Studies and Sociology participated in the study, through two Focus group discussions with 15 participants at a public sector university. These discussions were centered on the key themes in the research; the study is based on qualitative research mainly contributed through focus group discussions (FGDs) with the male and female students in small groups. First, images from Pakistani movies were presented to the groups of young men and women, at Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad. The Quaid-e-Azam University offers unique opportunity as a study locale as it caters to diverse population, where Focus Group Discussions were organized with 5 male students of age group 22 to 24 years and 7 female students of age group 22 years to 26 years from different geographic areas. All the students were doing their Masters degrees (2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> semesters), from three social science disciplines of Anthropology, Sociology and Defense and Strategic Studies. The FGDs were led researcher; the study is based on social learning theory. Where other theories like social dominance theory and Feminist theory were also employed to develop detailed and focused approach toward this research.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### **Mainstream Cinema and the Machismo Image**

Since its inception, Pakistan sought after the identity that fulfills the objectives of founders and stakeholders, and to explain the social, political and cultural system. The terms Islamic and Democratic were the values considered to qualify this identity especially in the backdrop of the Objective Resolution. The cinema as a mouthpiece to portray culture has become a potent instrument to reach out to the people. The tasks were gigantic; projecting a new identity carved out of partition of the people of Pakistan, giving it a unifying, federal finesse to the federating units, with different cultures, language and ethnicities. A certain hero-worship was necessary for the male to feel good about themselves in the Promised Land. The new country has new opportunities to regain the pride lost for the Muslim male in the joint India. Hence the movies projected the classical hero, a manifestation of chivalry, upholder of family values and honor, an icon in himself, a true Machismo.

The participants in the research shared that most movies made in local language such as Punjabi and Pashto languages projected a certain type of hero, believing in male centric values of honor, chivalry, and control over women. Sindhi movies could not be promoted after the partition; however, Rampanjwani produced many movies after the partition in India when Sindhi Hindus migrated to India from Sindh. This was perpetuated in even movies made in Urdu languages, as violence seemed to be the buzz word of the cinema in Pakistan. There was less focus on creativity, on developing a good story, music and cinematography, than the lousy scenes loaded with innuendos and violence, against other men and women. This has put other creative directors in a difficult position, who now

have no option than to either resort the kind of movies that instigate violence and bloodshed, or distance themselves from movie making. This is what a male participant shared:

*"While in Pakistan movies are mix of action, melodrama, romance, humor and music. Our movies usually portray male dominance through various means".*

On the other hand, the soft images of men projected through movies have not become the talk of the town. Characters like *Maula Jatt* and *Noori Nut* became the stereotypes that lived in the memory of people, for generations, as they project larger than life reality, but have the ability to influence the society. All the male and female participants in the research were unanimous in saying that whatever is projected in the movies is not something different from what happens in the society. Historically, men dominated the public space, while women were confined to the private space of home. This is manifested in the movies in Pakistan, no matter these are in Urdu or other local languages. The same is mentioned by another male participant:

*"Movies usually project what was going on in the society, as there was no creative processes which give vent to the feelings and expressions, so the movies also project the same, since movies are also byproducts of the society."*

The female participants on the other hand, feel that the movies fell short of portraying reality, or distorted the reality, by projecting tainted view of Pakistani society, with the clear imprint of rural urban divide. As a female participant commented:

*"Our movies lately had the disconnect with the society, and only projected sensationalism."*

### **Relevance of Machismo in the Cinema to the Contemporary Pakistani Society**

The cinema as image builder of its times has projected the image of machismo male and over the passage of time has no option but to keep on using the stereotype image in the countless movies. The viewer on the other hand has no option than to accept this as the only image and internalize it as the manifestation of a Pakistani young man, with no philosophical underpinning and counting on violence and machoism as the new weapons to win hearts of the opposite sex, the female in the movies. This brings about many scenes of violent behavior and glorifying it with acknowledgement and acceptance. The masses have also accepted and internalized the image portrayed in the movies, as authentic image.

People have also got this image to complete their self by embracing the male machismo props, such as cigarette, *Gandasa* wielding, knives, axes, pistols, rifle and Kalashnikov, the ultimate symbols of violence. These were phallic symbols which a real hero who keeps these to save his honor, often a concept put to action on any damage to the female, that he has at his home, for instance, sisters or mothers. It is however his right to run and prance in the parks and what not with his heroin, and even orchestrate violent scenes suitable to this new character assumed, as an angry young man, heavily loaded with ideology, and the notion of honor, however ready to elope in the first romantic scene in the movie.

This notion of gun tottering, knife and *Gandasa* (*It consists of a long stick of wood (roughly the height of its user) with a wide blade attached to one end. It resembles a very large axe, although it is used in a different manner*), wielding very much suited the reality of that time. A large number of young men were exposed to ideology of Jihad in Pakistan in 1980s, through participation in the US led coalition to fight Soviet occupation in Afghanistan. Hence, the proxy war was taken to the new fronts across our culture through a wider acceptance of

violence, and guns and Kalashnikov culture, giving rise to the violent behavior, intolerance and justifying use of weapon in the society.

This brings us face to face with the statement that we live in male dominant society which is gradually changing according to our male and female participants but the pace of change varies in urban and rural areas, and even in urban areas, the change is not evenly spread, that it should be visible across the board. So we live in a culture of multiple masculinities, where individual, social, cultural and religious factors influence a child, especially a boy in growing up as a man, and acquires certain values based on traditional notions of masculinity, the way he is brought up at home, and his education and construction of role through expectations from him that have influenced his transition. Regarding this, a female participant opined:

*“It seemed our movies projected male dominance and nothing else, regardless of their origin in rural or urban.”*

### **Props and settings: Amplifying Machismo Image in the Movies**

The format of a movie is typically centered on a hero and heroine, characters in support role, villain(s). Humor is employed to mock the concept that is deviating from what hero wants us to believe. So the use of conflict theory and reference theory is essential to understand how the jokes and humor are used to move the story further. The reactionary male resorting to Guns, Knives and at a killer spree in the later era movies of 1980s onward show us the anger of young person having no chance to be at the helm of the affairs, and react in a violent manner. The participants in this research also mentioned other factors and props that are now being used to amplify Machismo image. As a male participant mentioned:

*“There are other factors that now seemed to catch attention of our youth and boys in their late teen such as physical fitness, six packs body, latest models of cars, expensive hotels, dressing, wearing chains, funky belts, skin tight shirts, stylish haircut, iPhone, etc.”*

The difference is not that much when questions focused to the groups of male and female participants. A female participant commented on during the interview regarding the props:

*“There is lot of pomposity in the movies that makes it larger than life, like heroes or villains showing off their moustache, speaking in loud manner. Gandasa, guns, knives are the regular feature of our movies.”*

### **Changing context: Machismo and Urbanization in Pakistan**

The depiction of male hero with the classical traits of that of machismo image is found in plenty in Pakistani movies; however this image has been gradually dominated by urban class hero. This hero has certain traits similar to the ones shown in our cinema of local language, such as Punjabi and Pushto, the dominant mainstream cinema based on local languages. As the society evolves from the rural to urban, there have been numerous opportunities created for women to assume education and livelihood opportunities in the public space. The Pakistani cinema has been incapacitated to portray the same, and could not go hand in hand with the emerging trends in the Pakistani society, as mentioned by a male participant:

*“Our movies have lately become less relevant, with the change in the society. It could not keep its pace with the modernity due to other factors such youth exposure to the mobile phones and the social media.”*

Discussion with the youth shows that there is no unitary association of men in Pakistan with the Machismo image portrayed through the media or popular cinema through projecting male dominant values. However, youth also mentioned significance of new wave of development in the Pakistani cinema since 1990s. These new movies are gradually focusing on issues and challenges faced by the contemporary Pakistani society. However, in the movies made before this time, the traditional masculine images were portrayed, which clearly distinguish role of men and women according to gender stereotypes, and male hero more representational of dominant male centered values, associated with Machismo image. The alternative construction of Machismo image through projecting soft image, and women in empowered role instead of pseudo-images of men and women, drew the attention of even those who refrained from going to cinema. For instance, participants said that now they can consider going to cinema as one of the entertainment tool as compared to before when they did not think going to cinema as an option, even in their wildest imagination. A female participant summed it up in the following words:

*“We have to convince our parents that there are good movies shown in the cinema. That there are family movies, which project soft images, instead of heroes bent upon violence. However, it is hard to convince them, due to their own experience of movies of 1970s, 80s, and 90s, in Pakistan, which only showed violence and bloodshed”.*

Discussion with the female students was evident of certain bias in their approach toward seeing the girls from rural areas as having less exposure, and thus more vulnerable to any untoward incidence, considered a disgrace to the family, such as the elopement of girls with the boys in the extreme cases and in mild cases, misuse of cell phones. They also mentioned that the same is sometime portrayed in movies and dramas, mocking girls from rural areas, pointing out to their naïve behavior. Girls also mentioned the latest trend in the movies and TV shows, such as the ones based on vampire characters. These vampire movies are now projecting hero figures as vampires, which are found attractive by the girls. It seems that Pakistani cinema and entertainment industry is oblivious of this trend a portrayal of negative image into hero, and not been able to pick on the changing trends in the society.

*“Pakistani cinema keeps on selling the same “girl meets boy story”, and have not been able to produce quality movies based on latest trends” as a girl summed it up during the focus group discussion.*

### **Construction of Male and Female and the Effect of Portrayal of Male Image**

The concept of a middle class hero could be the manifestation of white British male, who used to rule the subcontinent in contrast with the image of native lawless person who is hell bent upon knee jerk reaction, seldom rational, and disorderly being, an extension of inferiority complex. However, the folksongs also speak highly of the native hero, praising his shortcoming as virtues needed to fight back, the evil in the society, as highlighted by a male participant:

*“Our movies show violence, which makes it more acceptable for its viewers, especially the young ones who are more susceptible to such impact.”*

The female participants also highlighted lack of capacity to go with the new trends on the part of Pakistani cinema, as mentioned by a female participant:

*“With education, and exposure to movies from Hollywood and Bollywood, the traditional cinemagoer is also changed. However, most movies, especially the ones made in the old style or the local ones don’t reflect this change.”*

This is not a mere joke to survive in the difficult circumstances, hence the angry young man’s role projected in the movie fits in well in his situation, and he relates to it

instantly. In Pakistani mainstream cinema is devoid of counternarrative challenging the traditional power struggle between the urban middle class / upper class hero, and the reincarnation of colonial *Gora Sahab* and the angry young man, the extended form of native during the colonial times. Hence the traditional cinema takes the same narrative as that of used in the contemporary western movies, but does not challenge the hegemonic role of the western countries during the colonial and post-colonial times. A male participant specifically commented on the confusion that the movies lead the youth into:

*“Our movies confuse us, more than they satisfy of what we want. Some say these are for entertainment purpose, while for some others; these should be loaded with a message. To us these are just imitation of Bollywood movies, which themselves copy the Hollywood movies, and portray the hero with the western image.”*

Girls also shared that even in the latest movies, which are supposed to be based on love story, male dominance is resonated.

### **Influence of Violence Projected in the Cinema on the Social Relations**

An image affects its viewer in the binary opposites, it may get him or bores with the perpetuation of the image, or he or she may be interested to carry on with what the image intends to. Often the person commits heinous acts of violence in the name of norm, if this message is constantly hammered around through the cinema. It becomes a set practice a norm, to accept physical violence, like “this is how it happens here”, kind of attitude. One of the key points is to see why the image of machismo male was used in the movies. Is it due to the reaction to the colonial approach which termed the native uncouth, illiterate and emotional? Was the antithesis used in the movies as civil, cultural and educated a reincarnation of the dominant in the colonial rule. This was adopted in the movies in Pakistan since the independence in 1947. It is evident that young people through the feedback on the images from Pakistani movies link the stereotypes of male dominance and violence with the social constructs of machismo, as commented by a male participant:

*“The stereotypes used in the movies resort to violence. This is imitated by our youth in bullying, violence at home and in the public places. We are losing the values of our culture such as tolerance.”*

It is also highlighted during the discussion that women not only accept that violence is perpetrated by men on women, but also tries to internalize this violence through expressions, ‘boys are boys’. This shows that individuals are labelled to be perpetrators of assault and are also equally labeled to be victimized, through their appearances. Certain violent behaviors are said to be instigated by women themselves by posing or showing off in public.

All the girls during the FGDs were unanimous in saying that the cinema has its effect on the people in playing a role model, especially in the negative manner as it instigates violence; it also carries on with the traditional role of men as saviors, as protectors of the family honor. Girls shared that they feel vulnerable and depend on men in their family to do even the small errands. But they also shared that this gives them a feeling of protection. This is required as their families sometime don’t allow coming out of their home without any male member of their family, being it a younger one to them. It gives the impression that girl is not alone and those with evil intention would not treat them badly. The same is manifested through various channels, and the movies once were very powerful among these.

It is portrayed that the hero would have the right a girl out, if he finds her alone in the street, in the market, or a bus stop. The social system legitimizes man to control women through use of various means including violence and coercion. This is also reinforced by the

belief system which validates man's position viz. power. The deviatory behaviors are seldom tolerated by men, who resort to social pressure, coercion and even physical violence to neutralize violation of the social and moral codes. Since the review of literature shows the machismo in terms of male domination, as binary opposite of female subordination. Women's agency is non-existent in a society believing in machismo. This is also portrayed in most of the movies made in Pakistan.

## **Conclusion**

The multifaceted nature of machismo in Pakistan reveals a complex exchange between traditional values and developing societal norms. As highlighted in this research, machismo carries both commendable attributes and problematic implications. On one hand, it celebrates values like honor, strength, and respect, which can inspire individuals to exhibit qualities of courage and resilience in the face of adversity. These qualities are often deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric of Pakistan and have shaped the identity of many men in the country. However, the darker side of machismo cannot be ignored. Its tendency to reject or stigmatize traits perceived as soft or feminine can perpetuate harmful stereotypes and restrict the emotional expression and personal development of individuals, particularly men. This rigid adherence to traditional gender roles can impede progress towards gender equality and inclusive societies. Yet, it is essential to recognize that within the construct of machismo, there is a paradoxical respect and devotion to mothers. This unwavering reverence for mothers, regardless of the negative aspects associated with machismo, offers a glimmer of hope. It suggests that there is potential for change and growth within the concept itself. Men in Pakistan, while adhering to certain aspects of machismo, are also capable of displaying profound love and protection towards the women in their lives. As revealed through our focus group discussions, the positive aspects of machismo can serve as a foundation for initiatives aimed at bridging gender disparities and promoting affirmative action in favor of women. By tapping into the values of honor, strength, and respect, there exists an opportunity to engage men as allies in the quest for gender equality.

## **Recommendations**

1. **Promote Gender Education:** Educational institutions should integrate comprehensive gender education into their curriculum. This education should encompass the diverse and fluid nature of gender, challenging traditional stereotypes and norms.
2. **Cultural Sensitivity:** When conducting research or developing policies related to gender, it is crucial to consider cultural nuances. Recognize that concepts like machismo have unique meanings in different cultural contexts, and interventions should be culturally sensitive.
3. **Challenge Hegemonic Masculinity:** Promote discussions and initiatives that challenge the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Encourage men to redefine their roles and identities beyond traditional power structures, fostering more equitable and inclusive notions of masculinity.
4. **Parental Education:** Offer parental education programs that focus on the influence of early caregiver-child relationships on gender identity formation. By fostering more gender-neutral parenting approaches, parents can play a crucial role in reducing the reinforcement of harmful gender stereotypes.
5. **Gender-Inclusive Policies:** Advocate for and implement gender-inclusive policies and practices in workplaces and other institutions. This includes equal pay for equal work, paid parental leave for all genders, and opportunities for career advancement regardless of gender.
6. **Media Literacy:** Promote media literacy programs that help individuals critically analyze and deconstruct media representations of gender, including machismo stereotypes. By



empowering individuals to question and challenge these portrayals, media can become a more positive force for change.

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