

**RESEARCH PAPER****Unveiling Reproductive Oppression: An In-depth Analysis of Radical Feminism in *Joyland*****<sup>1</sup>Filza Riaz and <sup>2</sup>Turs Mohi Ud Din Chan\***

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**ABSTRACT**

This research analyzes the portrayal of reproductive oppression, a persisting societal issue in a Pakistani drama film, named *Joyland*. Radical feminism emerged in the mid-20th century as a branch of the second wave of feminism and offers a powerful framework to comprehend and tackle this issue. Rooted in the belief that women's oppression stems from patriarchal dominance, Shulamith Firestone advocates for restructuring society to dismantle this power and liberate women in her book *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*. Analyzing *Joyland* through her feminist lens, this research delves into the root causes of reproductive oppression by exploring how ingrained patriarchal norms relegate women's bodies. The film is treated as a text of its own, analyzing its staging, grammar, and emotional portrayal to unravel the patriarchal branch it critiques. The results reveal how patriarchy as described by Firestone in *Joyland* confines women to restrictive roles and deprives them of control over their own bodies. The research also incorporates radical feminist principles in cultural discourse and policymaking to deal with reproductive oppression, advocating for systemic changes that empower women to gain freedom and autonomy.

**KEYWORDS** Joyland, Pakistan Cinema, Patriarchy, Radical Feminism, Reproductive Oppression**Introduction**

This research advocates that female subjugation stems from the patriarchal system. Be it any occupation, patriarchy interferes with the lives of women and directs them. As a result, women start to lose their identity. This issue has been highlighted through the media. In the rich tapestry of cinematic narrations, certain films stand out as a reflection of societal complexities. One such film is a Pakistani drama film, *Joyland* which emerges as a canvas reflecting the nuanced struggles of human beings while navigating an intricate landscape of social dynamics, gender oppression, and reproductive rights. This study aims to unravel the layers of reproductive oppression, and the reign of patriarchy ingrained within the narrative through the lens of radical feminism.

The director of the film is Saim Sadiq. Sadiq states that the patriarchy prevailing in society urged him to direct *Joyland*. He always felt perplexed by the relationship between masculine and feminine powers and their impact on forming a good or a bad society. The film allowed him to showcase all the important aspects of patriarchy and oppression with the mission of bringing awareness to the audiences (Give me the backstory: Get to know Saim Sadiq, the filmmaker behind "Joyland", 2023).

The film, *Joyland*'s story revolves around a lower-class family, residing in the inner-city Lahore. This Rana family is run by the patriarchs, by the eldest named Amanullah. From the tapestry of the kitchen to the realm of the outside world, Amanullah tries to shape everyone's destinies and roles according to his demands and the expectations of society. For example, he yearns for a grandson, passionately believing his family tree will only thrive through males. His eldest daughter-in-law, Nucchi must give birth to four daughters just to give the family a male heir. Likewise, when his youngest son, Haider secures a job as a backstage erotic dancer in a local theater, Haider prefers to lie to his father. Otherwise, his father will not allow him to work as it is neither a respectable profession nor acceptable. Mumtaz, wife of Haider, is an aesthetician in a beauty salon and foreshadows a promising future in this field. Soon after Haider gets a job, Amanullah orders her to quit her job immediately as Haider can provide for her now. When she tries to resist, he commands her to help her sister-in-law with chores as it is her main responsibility. Suffocated within the four walls of the house, Mumtaz not only starts to lose her individuality but also her husband who becomes infatuated with a transgender person, Biba at his workplace. She also starts to feel both unloved and oppressed. However, Mumtaz's life takes a tragic and depressing turn when she comes to know that a tiny life is growing inside her womb without her consent. Deprived of her husband's attention and denied rights over her body, she tries to escape reality multiple times; however, she miserably fails every time. In the end, she decides to gain control over her reproductive rights by committing suicide during her pregnancy.

Reproductive oppression is referred to as systematic control and restrictions exercised upon women's bodies, contributing to the perpetuating cycle of inequality, social injustice, and oppression. This concept includes different forms of discrimination ranging from forced pregnancy to the denial of the right to safe and legal abortions. Without gaining reproductive rights, a woman can neither stand equal to men in society nor can she succeed in her life (Cottais, 2021).

The movie *Joyland* sheds light on those societal and patriarchal aspects that limit women's power and agency in society. Through the female characters of Nucchi and Mumtaz, the film talks about the layers of reproductive oppression prevailing in South Asia. All the female characters in the movie undergo oppression due to the overpowering system of patriarchy.

The portrayal of reproductive oppression in the film is scrutinized through the lens of radical feminism depicted in Shulamith Firestone's book, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*. Fashioned during the second wave of feminism, radical feminism addresses women's rights by analyzing the root causes of their oppression. Radical feminism posits that women are oppressed and marginalized in society because men exert their power and control on all aspects, such as political, social, and economic aspects of life. Within this theory, the term patriarchy refers to the dominant system wherein males yield their power not only to familial bonds but also over the female's body, sexuality, and labor (Cottais, 2021). Firestone adds to the theory by postulating that "natural reproductive difference between the sexes" created the foundation of female oppression (Firestone, 1970).

In 1960, radical feminism emerged during the second wave of feminism in Western countries, such as England, Canada, France, and the United States, in opposition to liberal and Marxist feminism. Radical feminism asserts that women can gain equality and freedom by cutting the roots of patriarchy and establishing a new society.

Born in Canada in 1945, Shulamith Firestone was a seminal figure during the second wave of feminism. Published in the 1970s, her book, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* analyzes all the feminist movements and asserts that radical feminism is the "most

important movement" in history (Firestone, 1970). Furthermore, she focuses on gender, patriarchy, biology, and reproductive technologies to understand and abolish female oppression.

"The patriarchal family was only the most recent in a string of 'primary' social organizations, all of which defined woman as an unusual species due to her unique childbearing capacity" (Firestone, 1970). She further explains that the term 'family' was first used by Romans, where 'familia' meant the total number of slaves owned by a man. Firestone asserts that the institution of marriage is synonymous with patriarchal institutions as marriages allow men to take control over women's bodies and foster the constitution of enslavement and exploitation. In the past, marriage was an 'economic arrangement' where a man knew his role, fulfilled his physical needs, and shared his role in reproduction. Likewise, a woman accepted her role as an obedient wife and gave the 'ownership' of her body, her skills, and household duties completely to her husband. In return, she would get limited control over her children and house (Firestone, 1970). To this day, this same institution of marriage thrives (Firestone, 1970).

Besides this, reproduction or motherhood is considered essential by society even if it is against the will of a woman as this 'fundamental inequality' emerges from natural (biological) causes. Even if a woman's husband allows her to work after marriage, childbirth leaves her utterly incapacitated (Firestone, 1970). It is also observed that such pregnancies cost women more than their physical health, they cost them emotional and physiological well-being, and sometimes early signs of aging and death (Firestone, 1970).

This paper discloses reproductive oppression and its causes through the perspective of radical feminism analyzed by Firestone. The research also highlights the solutions to eradicate oppression from society. In addition, the exploration underscores the social and cultural aspects of Pakistani society; thereby, offering a complete and comprehensive understanding of all the factors that contribute to shaping a woman's destination and sustenance of patriarchy in the society.

## Literature Review

A girl learns about her rights and position in society from her home. By observing her mother, she learns about her role and manifests her rights. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie preaches that all mothers should teach their young daughters to gain control over their bodies from an early age. Likewise, they must know that sex is not only limited to the "controlled act of reproduction" (Adichie, 2017).

Biology is employed to justify female oppression and male supremacy. To illustrate this, a male is superior to a woman because God granted him more brawn than a female. His physical superiority over women is a fact but it does not justify the oppression of females. When a woman gives birth to a child, society calls the child by the father's name and most women do not know the reason behind it. From the very start, they are taught that a child belongs to a father first. Slowly, they start to accept male supremacy in other aspects of life as well. The belief that society has declared that biology justifies a man enjoying more social, individual, and economic rights than a female, begs the question: why a child is not identified by the name of the mother for when a child comes into this world, everyone is more certain of its mother than of its father (Adichie, 2017).

Callaway focuses on the significance of the matriarchal system for forming and maintaining a new social order. As in the novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*, authoritative women shape the future of other women. The handmaids must conceive children due to the extreme

pressure coming from other authoritative women. Similarly, the housewives make sure that the handmaids do not eat anything that may lead to delayed pregnancies or miscarriages. The epilogue of the novel suggests that “the best and most cost-effective way to control women for reproductive and other purposes was through women themselves” (Atwood, 1985). Through the handmaid training systems and household system, female solidarity and unity are destroyed in both public and private aspects of life (Callaway, 2008).

Female rights cannot be earned with a handful of women. “It took more than one woman to do things differently. It took a world of them” (Etaf Rum, 2020). Gender equality becomes a reality when all women start to see that they can emancipate themselves from the culture imposed on them. They can mold their roles according to their will and desires. Acceptance of their submissive and marginalized identities will only strengthen the fortress of patriarchy in their lives and weaken the existence of women.

### **Material and Methods**

A film narrates a story through its plots, characters, scenes, and actions, it can be referred to as a narrative. A film can also be considered a text with its own events and plots stemming from the cause-effect relationship of the characters and states. In the case of *Joyland* being a movie, this study will adopt a text-based approach (textual analysis) toward the content of the film and will depend upon the cinematic expressions, character interactions, and emotions to hold up the arguments. This study has used qualitative methods to analyze the data and incorporated the film’s subjective interpretation through discursive reasoning.

### **Results and Discussion**

*Joyland*, a Pakistani drama film directed by Saima Sadiq (2020) revolves around a lower-class Rana family living in inner city Lahore. The family is run by the head of the house, Amanullah. Unsatiated by this obedience and submission, he wants his younger daughter-in-law, Mumtaz to shape her actions pleasing to him and society. Devoid of her identity and her husband's love, loyalty, and attention, Mumtaz chooses to commit suicide in the end.

This section has focused on the dialogues of Mumtaz, Nuchi, Fayyaz, Haider, and Amanullah and the scenes from the film to reveal how the characters contribute to the chain of female oppression.

### **Role of Patriarchy and Motherhood**

Amanullah exercises his agency over his daughters-in-law in multiple ways. He wants them to grant him a grandson even if it costs happiness and the mother’s health in an already poor family. He not only designs their life but also ensures that they follow those set patterns. For instance, when Mumtaz objects to his decision to leave her job, he asks her, “Kia ham nay tumhy kabhi kam karny sy roka hai?” (meaning: did he ever stop her from working?) to remind her of his power (24:17). Besides this, he advises her to maintain a traditional “balance” in life, where men will earn, and women will run the home (24:22).



Fig. 01. Scene from *Joyland*, (01:16:14)

The course of a woman's life is predetermined by the men in her family. They will manage all her matters starting from birth to funeral. The opinion of a woman is neither asked for nor does it matter. After Nocchi and Mumtaz leave for the amusement park, Joyland, their neighbor, Fayyaz comes to take care of handicapped Amanullah. So, she spends a night at his house (Sadiq, 2020). In Pakistani society, spending a night at a man's house without marriage is considered a shameful act and a major sin, overlooking all the contributing factors. The following morning, the son of Fayyaz arrives and belittles her as she has brought shame onto her whole family. When she tries to put forward her opinion, he says, "Ami! Ap to do minute chup rahain, ham kar rahy hain na baat yehan pay," translated: Mother! Stay quiet for a while as we, the men are talking (01:16:40). However, Fayyaz, wearing the heavy cloak of courage, stands up for herself and says that she does not care what anyone else thinks. If she wants to live with Amanullah, she will, reflecting her wish to get married to Amanullah. This infuriates her son and Amanullah's son, Saleem who leaves the meeting showcasing his disapproval of the union. Instead of standing up with Fayyaz, Amanullah defends his own position and says, "Apko Haider ghar chor aye ga," (translated: Haider will walk you home), leaving Fayyaz speechless and heartbroken (01:19:34). In a society where men are asserting their power, a woman speaking for herself becomes a matter of honor for the whole daily. Therefore, they try to mute their voices under the guise of "family honor" (Cottais, 2021).

Hooks (2000) asserts that a woman's mind is first shaped by her mother and then by a patriarchal society. This mutual thinking reinforces the culture of rape and reflects the failure of the whole society in battling physical and mental oppression. When all the relatives, friends, and close ones gather to celebrate the birthday party of Amanullah, they constantly urge Mumtaz to conceive another child shortly after the birth of the expected one. Mumtaz questions their mentality by saying, "Pehli baar mein he itna lucky ho gia na, baby boy! to dusry baby ka kia kran hai?", (translated: We got lucky the first time as we will have a boy, why would we need to try again?) to which they have no answer (01:40:00). Her statement depicts her feeble desire to seek emancipation. Moreover, Mumtaz's existence is treated as an achievement by everyone. According to Firestone (1970), "To be worshiped is not freedom", and this is manifested through her as she is celebrated and respected by all, yet she is deprived of basic freedom and individual rights.

Patriarchy thrives in a society because it changes hands from one generation to another. The elder son, Saleem maintains his authority successfully. Likewise, Amunallah asks Haider to assert his masculinity over his wife. Most of the time, all the characters, especially, Amannullah, Saleem, and Haider remain silent when confronted with logical questioning regarding their rights and duties. Sometimes, their silence symbolizes their ignorance to bow before societal norms. For example, when Nucchi confronts Haider about his duties, he remains speechless. Other times, it becomes the symbol of their victory of. For example, when Amanullah orders Mumtaz to “Ab tum choty haider ki tyari karo” (You should think about having a boy now) and Mumtaz resists, he or Haider assert their authority through silence (24:53).

### **Female Subjugation in *Joyland*:**

*Joyland* takes its title from a theme park situated in Lahore. The city’s walls barely permit the park’s colorful lights to peek out (Nicholson, 2023). Sadiq uses Joyland as a metaphor to reveal how society presents itself as a perfect land that offers joy to the people, while it suffocates them to either death or blind subjugation. Additionally, Joyland, situated afar from inner City Lahore, stands as a symbol of transient moments of freedom for Nucchi and Mumtaz who experience immense joy and happiness there.

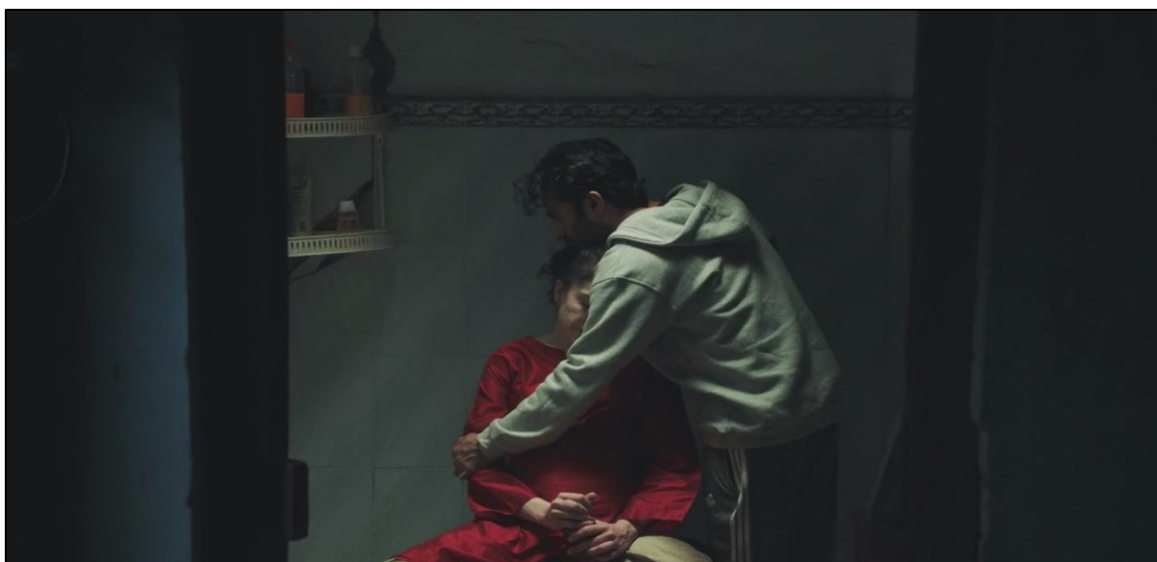


Fig. 02. Scene from *Joyland*, (01:45:50).

After Mumtaz takes a sip from the bottle of floor cleaner, Haider knocks at the bathroom door and asks Mumtaz if she needs anything. Without watching the bottle of poison in her wife's hand or even smelling the strong poison, Haider hugs her wife and rushes back to his bedroom. Ironically, he tries to show his support without looking at her (01:45:50). Her irritable and exhausted mood is also associated with pregnancy hormones many times and is treated as a natural (biological) process. On the other side, holding the very bottle in her hands, Mumtaz reduces to a mere picture of tragedy. She prioritizes embracing death to assert her choice, freedom, and identity. Her death also demonstrates the consequences of going against society.

The following day after Mumtaz's death, Saleem blames her for killing his unborn nephew, showcasing that a woman, alive or dead, is subject to eternal criticism, and scrutiny, and especially if she has chosen herself above everything, she will be called names even after death. Neglecting all the contributing factors, the family save Nucchi opine that Mumtaz committed suicide because she was a selfish and insensitive woman. Saleem goes on to say

that “Aik mah ruk jati phir jo mrzi krti” , (she should have waited to deliver the baby boy only) (01:54:11). His statement again implies that her leading role was to give birth (motherhood). Saleem’s and other’s extreme criticism is like the concept of a ‘patriarchal nuclear family’ where women are both subjected to contempt and mockery (Firestone, 1970).

Whenever a marriage is defined by society, it is marked by fulfilling a man’s sexual needs only, excluding the needs of a woman’s body (Cottais, 2021). For example, a man must satiate his physical needs, but a woman’s physical pleasure can be controlled and therefore, must be controlled. Haider’s failure to fulfill Mumtaz’s sexual needs urges her to seek pleasure from other sources. Fascinated by a man engaging in erotic calls, she tries to fulfill her sexual needs. But she also fails here, and this act becomes a source of shame for her. Radical feminism also posits that women should have the authority to have ‘non-reproductive sex’ (Cottais, 2021). Mumtaz’s intimate moments are constantly being hindered due to multiple factors, like lack of privacy. When she has intimacy with Haider, she must bear the burden of a child.

After confirming that Mumtaz is carrying a boy, everyone gives her extra love while Nucchi is deprived of it, raising a question on traditional customs as to why two women are being served with different treatments when both go through the same process of childbirth.

Firestone postulates that with the changing duties and roles of a man in history, a woman has always ‘tried’ to fit in according to man’s needs. For instance, when college boys needed ‘groovy chicks’ for intercourse, women obliged. Likewise, Nucchi forces Mumtaz to wear tight clothes to seduce her husband as looking ‘hot’ will stop Haider from cheating (40:39).



Fig. 03. Scene from *Joyland*, (01:03:06)

Surviving in a patriarchal society is already paramount for females, it becomes even more difficult for the ladies residing in Pakistan; a country where submission and blind obedience are forcefully threaded into the garland of religion. A good and devoted woman can never think to say no to his husband, father, and sometimes her brothers and sons, just like Nucchi. Sitting on the rooftop, Nucchi tells Mumtaz “Main nay b interior designing ka

course kia hua hai pr Saleem ny kaha apny ghar ko set karo dusron k ghar ko set karny ki kia zarorat hai" (I have a degree in interior design, but Saleem did not allow her to workhouse) (01:03:06). So, she agreed to stay at home for she should do what is expected of her.

### **Conclusion**

The Pakistani drama film, *Joyland* serves as a poignant reminder of gender oppression, reproductive rights, and societal complexities. The female characters suffer from sexual oppression. When they try to speak for themselves, they fail miserably. By employing the work of Shulamith Firestone's radical feminism, the narrative of the film unravels the prevalent patriarchal system that gives birth to female oppression and subjugation. especially in Pakistan This thesis utilizes a text-based approach and qualitative methods to analyze the film's content. As the film has been analyzed through the lens of gender dynamics and queer rights, this research has explored the concept of reproductive oppression and further leaves room for researchers to explore the other aspects present in the movie.



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