



Fear, Silence, and Survival: An Analytical Study of Narrative Techniques and Symbolism in Pakistani dramas

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Abstract

This study explores the deep psychological and social dynamics of fear, silence, and resistance in patriarchal societies, using the Pakistani television drama *Dar Si Jati Hai Sila* as a case study. The research aims to understand how silence operates both as a sign of suppression and a quiet form of survival. Through qualitative textual analysis, the study looks closely at how the drama uses limited dialogue, long pauses, and symbolic domestic spaces to represent the hidden struggles of women living under social and family pressure. These symbols show how private trauma often mirrors collective social denial and how cultural expectations of obedience and honor shape human behavior. Using ideas from feminist theory and social psychology, the study interprets Sila's character as more than an individual victim. Her gradual move from fear to speech represents a wider process of reclaiming identity and voice within restrictive cultural norms. By treating *Dar Si Jati Hai Sila* as a social and psychological text rather than mere entertainment, this study highlights how media narratives can uncover hidden layers of experience, question dominant cultural values, and inspire dialogue about gender, trauma, and change. The findings suggest that television dramas, when analyzed critically, can serve as tools for understanding emotional realities and social attitudes in patriarchal cultures. Ultimately, this research shows how storytelling in media can contribute to social awareness, empathy, and transformation by giving voice to those who are often silenced.

Key Terms: Silence, Fear, Trauma, Victimhood, Oppression, Patriarchy, Gender inequality, Emotional suppression

Introduction

Pakistani television dramas have long served as a cultural mirror reflecting both the aspirations and anxieties of society. Traditionally known for their family-centered plots and moral lessons, these dramas have evolved to engage with darker and more complex social realities based on topics, once considered too sensitive or taboo for the screen. Among these, *Dar Si Jati Hai Sila* emerges as a particularly poignant and daring text, challenging audiences

to confront the silences that enable abuse within the most intimate spaces of the family home. Written by Bee Gul and directed by Kashif Nisar, the drama does not merely narrate the trauma of its central character, Sila, but carefully constructs an atmosphere where fear, silence, and survival are interwoven into the very fabric of its storytelling.

At the heart of *Dar Si Jati Hai Sila* lies a narrative strategy that resists overt exposition and melodrama. Silence in this drama is not empty; it becomes a language in itself, communicating what words cannot. The close-up shots of Sila's withdrawn expressions, the darkened hallways and staircases, and the persistent presence of closed doors and corners transform domestic spaces into symbols of entrapment and psychological isolation (Rehman, 2016). These narrative choices immerse viewers in Sila's lived reality, where fear is internalized, and the threat is made more terrifying precisely because it remains largely unspoken. This approach challenges the audience to engage with the narrative actively, reading meaning into what is deliberately left unsaid.

The drama's title '*Dar Si Jati Hai Sila*' itself immediately positions fear as central to Sila's identity. The narrative follows Sila's transformation from a victim consumed by internalized shame to a survivor who dares to confront her abuser. This journey is neither linear nor triumphant in a simplistic sense; rather, it is fraught with hesitation, social pressure, and the lingering scars of trauma, offering a realistic portrayal of what it means to find one's voice within oppressive systems (Haque, 2016).

This paper proposes to explore how *Dar Si Jati Hai Sila* employs narrative techniques and symbolism to navigate themes of fear, silence, and survival. By conducting a qualitative textual analysis, the study has examined key scenes, visual motifs, and cinematic choices that articulate the drama's unspoken tensions and emotional truths. The paper has also considered how these techniques serve not just artistic aims but a broader social critique, challenging the normalization of abuse within family structures and highlighting the cost of cultural silence (Palade, 2015).

Furthermore, audience reception has been analyzed to understand the drama's cultural impact. On one hand, the series received critical acclaim for its sensitive handling of taboo subjects, winning multiple awards and sparking conversations around abuse that are often suppressed in Pakistani society (Khan, 2021). On the other hand, it also provoked discomfort and conservative backlash, revealing the societal resistance to publicly acknowledging these hidden forms of violence. This tension underscores the transformative potential and limits of television drama as a medium for social critique.

The significance of this study lies in its focus on narrative form as a means of social commentary. While much scholarship on South Asian media tends to emphasize thematic content such as representations of gender or class, this paper argues how a story can be as powerful tool of discourse. The deliberate use of silence, spatial symbolism, and restrained dialogue in *Dar Si Jati Hai Sila* demonstrates how narrative strategies can convey psychological states, critique cultural norms, and foster empathy in ways that direct statements cannot. By unpacking these stylistic choices, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of Pakistani television drama not merely as entertainment but as a layered cultural text that both reflects and shapes social discourse (Fatima, 2019).

In sum, this paper positions *Dar Si Jati Hai Sila* as a compelling case study in how narrative style and symbolism can transform a story of hidden abuse into a resonant commentary on fear, silence, and the struggle for survival. Through this exploration, it aims to show that storytelling itself, through what it reveals, conceals, and symbolizes, can act as a form of resistance against deeply ingrained cultural silences.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims:

1. To explore how psychological trauma, fear, and silence are represented and communicated through the narrative and symbolic techniques used in the Pakistani drama *Dar Si Jati Hai Sila*.
2. To analyze how these representations reflect and challenge the social norms, gendered power relations, and patriarchal values within Pakistani society.

Literature Review

Over the last decade, Pakistani television drama has shifted from conventional moralistic family stories to increasingly complex, socially engaged narratives. Series such as *Rehaai* (2013), which tackled child marriage, and *Nanhi* (2013), addressing child trafficking and girls' education, pioneered mainstream engagement with entrenched social problems. Later works like *Phaans* (2021) further engaged with sexual assault survivor narratives and spurred progressive conversation within national discourse. These dramas operate not only as entertainment but also as "entertainment-education" vehicles, aiming to influence attitudes and behaviors toward social change (Fayyaz et al, 2024).

Studies have shown Pakistani dramas have a significant shaping influence on public perceptions of gender and traditional norms. For instance, content analysis of serials like *Sar-e-Rah* (2023) and *Durr-e-Shehwar* (2012) found that progressive portrayals of female agency coexist uneasily with more conservative narratives, creating contradictory messages about women's roles.

While thematic studies of social issues in Pakistani serials are growing, less attention has been paid to how these dramas narratively construct trauma and resistance (Noor et al., 2025). Interdiscursive media studies using critical discourse analysis (CDA) illustrate that Pakistani dramas often encode patriarchal ideologies through dialogue, silences, and implicit visual codes (Fatima, 2019). Similarly, semiotic examinations of drama promotional materials demonstrate how symbols and visual framing communicate submissive gender roles, underscoring the importance of symbolic narrative elements (Taj & Ameen, 2025).

Moreover, recent scholarship in media studies suggests that exploring "narrative form" can reveal ideological subtexts: the absence of explicit dialogue, the framing of domestic spaces, and aesthetic restraint can all serve to highlight hidden violence rather than mask them (Khan & Sheikh, 2022; Umer et al., 2024).

Dar Si Jati Hai Sila (2017–18), written by Bee Gul and directed by Kashif Nisar, has emerged as a watershed text in Pakistani television. Critics lauded its bold storytelling and nuanced depiction of abuse cloaked in respectability. Audience blogs and forum discussions reflect polarized responses. Some viewers praised the realism and courage, while others reacted with discomfort or dismissal rooted in cultural taboos. Despite this polarization, Dar Si Jati Hai Sila garnered awards and critical acclaim, marking it as a pivotal text for discussions around trauma, silence, and survivors' agency.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and trauma narrative theory inform this study's methodological and theoretical base. CDA approaches have been applied to Pakistani dramas to reveal underlying patriarchal structures enacted through language, silence, and visual cues (Tariq & Husnain, 2025); Haque, 2016).

Trauma narrative theory suggests that silences and non-verbal expressions often hold more emotional truth than dialogue, particularly in underrepresented discourses (Zaheer, 2020). Moreover, feminist media criticism reinforces the notion that narrative form is political. Narrative silence can reflect entrenched gendered power, and symbolic fragments (locked doors, dark corridors) can map internalized oppression (Arslan & Haroon, 2022). This study aims to bridge gap by applying such frameworks to analyze the stylistic architecture of Dar Si Jati Hai Sila.

This research addresses two primary gaps: first, the scarcity of formal analysis on narrative style and symbolic storytelling in Pakistani dramas; second, limited focus on Dar Si Jati Hai Sila as a case study of trauma and resistance narrative. By decoding the symbolic and stylistic dimensions of narrative form, the study contributes to understanding how Pakistani dramas can function as cultural texts of resistance, actively challenging silence rather than simply narrating it (Malik, 2019).

Additionally, exploring audience reception, both critical and conservative, offers insight into the cultural dialectics between media innovation and societal conservatism. Through this lens, the drama can be positioned not only as a work of entertainment but as a contested site of discourse on gender, violation, and resilience (Cheema, 2018).

While existing literature has addressed thematic content and social impact of Pakistani television dramas, there is a research gap in understanding narrative style and symbolism, especially as deployed in Dar Si Jati Hai Sila to represent fear and trauma. This study positions itself within CDA, trauma theory, and feminist media criticism to unpack how narrative form becomes a vehicle for social critique. By doing so, it situates the drama within both aesthetic and cultural frameworks, highlighting its significance in challenging silence and giving voice to survivors.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in textual and visual analysis. The aim is to explore how Dar Si Jati Hai Sila constructs and conveys the themes of fear, silence, and survival through specific narrative techniques and symbolic elements. By focusing on both the content and form of the drama, this methodology allows for an in-depth examination

of storytelling strategies beyond dialogue, incorporating visual symbolism, spatial arrangement, and cinematographic choices.

The study is interpretive in nature, guided by critical CDA, trauma narrative theory, and feminist media criticism. These frameworks enable the research to uncover how narrative form not only represents but also critiques social realities embedded in cultural contexts.

Data Collection

The data set comprises the complete aired episodes of *Dar Si Jati Hai Sila*, originally broadcast from November 2017 to May 2018 on Hum TV. All episodes were collected in digital format from the broadcaster's official streaming platforms and verified copies to ensure consistency and completeness. The selection of *Dar Si Jati Hai Sila* as the case study was purposive, based on its critical acclaim, cultural relevance, and unique narrative style that foregrounds silence and symbolism. Within the drama, specific data points include:

- Key scenes portraying Sila's silence and fear
- Visual motifs such as closed doors, dark staircases, and confined rooms
- Use of minimal dialogue and close-up shots
- Character arcs reflecting transformation from victimhood to resistance

All data were organized using thematic coding to prepare for analysis.

Data Analysis

The analysis proceeded in three interrelated stages:

1. Thematic Coding

- Episodes were reviewed to identify recurring themes related to fear, silence, and survival.
- Scenes were tagged for narrative devices (e.g., use of silence, minimal dialogue, spatial symbolism).

2. Visual and Narrative Analysis

- Drawing on methods from multimodal discourse analysis and semiotics, the study examined how non-verbal elements like lighting, camera angles, spatial composition communicate psychological states.
- Symbolic spaces (such as staircases, locked rooms) were analyzed to interpret how physical settings embody abstract themes like entrapment and trauma.

3. Contextual Interpretation

- Using critical discourse analysis, findings were situated within broader cultural discourses on gender, power, and social silence in Pakistani society.

- Audience reception data were examined to assess the cultural resonance of the narrative techniques and their potential impact on viewers' understanding of taboo subjects.

Throughout, the analysis remained attentive to how narrative style and symbolism not only reflect social realities but also serve as tools for critique and resistance.

Discussion

In *Dar Si Jati Hai Sila*, fear is not only spoken of but visually and narratively woven into the structure of the drama itself. The protagonist Sila's fear is represented through recurring silences that permeate key scenes, transforming absence of dialogue into a narrative device that communicates internalized trauma. For example, in early episodes, Sila frequently withdraws from conversations, her presence marked instead by close-up shots of her anxious expressions. This absence of speech creates a heightened sense of isolation and vulnerability, forcing viewers to confront her unspoken reality.

Drawing on trauma narrative theory, such silences reflect the unspeakable nature of certain traumatic experiences, especially those embedded in family spaces where power and affection intersect. Unlike traditional melodrama, where pain is externalized through loud confrontation, Sila's muted reactions and hesitant gaze illustrate a deeper cultural truth: that fear often survives not in what is said but in what remains deliberately unsaid.

The drama's spatial symbolism further deepens its portrayal of entrapment and psychological oppression. Sila's home is rendered sinister through repeated framing of staircases, dim hallways, and locked rooms. These architectural elements symbolize confinement: staircases become pathways she hesitates to climb alone; closed doors stand as barriers separating her from safety and agency. In one particularly telling sequence, the camera lingers on Sila standing silently before a locked room, her body language and the door's immobility merging into a single image of powerlessness.

The drama strongly reflects the phenomenal truth about language either spoken or unspoken. Language is a unique human possession. It enables man to express himself. Through language, man is reflected. Language mirrors man and reflects his personality. Language is called an identity kit and it is a power tool. It is in society that man uses language and introduces himself in the shared culture of his society. Through language, he becomes a part and parcel of society. It can be rightly said that without language, man stands in a vacuum, identity-less and isolated from his fellow creatures. It is acknowledged that language is man's social need and he is recognized and accepted in society through his language. Society determines man as much as man determines society.

There are many social elements that contribute in giving man the power of speech. Many other elements are there which snatch this power and make a naturally speaking person socially dumb. But the paradox lies in this reality that silence speaks and such a silence has the power to tear the fabric of the society and unveil the filth of society that is otherwise hidden from naked eye. One such element that affects the communicative ability and power of a speech in a heart-rending way is the psychological distortion that deteriorate the man's power of speech.

Man has been rewarded the freedom of speech by nature but sometimes society snatches this freedom and puts shackles on man's power of speech. There are many factors that play their role in this. At one side social evils like class distinction, discriminating distribution of power and wealth, injustices, inequalities, racism create peacelessness in society, at the other side physical harassment is a cause of mental torture that the victim suffers and ultimately loses his power of speech. From one way or the other way, all these factors are linked with society. In a male dominated society where women are victimized by the brutal impulse of man, the case are not less in number when a woman's chastity is attacked. Such events deprive the women of their speech and distort their language. The story of Sila is also characterized with this psychological distortion and broken state of mind that deprives her of her speaking ability and her confidence that is a marked feature of effective communication.

When the story of *Dar Si Jati Hai Sila* starts, the spectators are introduced with a girl who is in her twenties. Every time she remains reluctant to speak. She is timid, coward, shy, and above all a terrified girl. The mere touch of any male character of the story gets her threatened and she starts to act hysterically. Nobody knows the reason of such an abnormal state of mind of Sila. Gradually the things are unpacked. The dramatist has used the technique of flash back through which, time by time, the audience is familiarized with the past happenings. With this technique, he is able to throw light on those elements that marred Sila's personality. The spectators get to know about the pathetic events that happened in her childhood. She was physically molested and persecuted to such a great extent that it tormented her mind also. Her physical abduction bewildered her mind. She is always suppressed and repressed by her mother to tell the truth of the savage who had maltreated her. And the reason behind this is that the mother herself is immolated by the same man. It is only by the end of the drama, that the audience gets to know the reality and Sila starts to revive her lost capabilities.

The whole story focuses on this reality that psychological distortion leads to the language distortion to such a great extent that it hinders the speaking ability of man. Many a time, the reality is covered in the dark veil in form of consciousness. And in Sigmund Freud's (the father of psychoanalysis) words, when unconsciousness is brought to consciousness, sometimes the picture is gloomy and bleak. Same happens in the play, when unconsciousness replaces consciousness, the hidden realities start to speak. Sila's psychological tattered situation makes her a hollow woman.

She stops living life after getting harassed by her own family member who looks to be a pious, innocent, and trust worthy man but inwardly he is just like a beast who has made life of a girl a 'hell'. Her mother who is aware of all the situations cannot speak and tell anyone in the family what actual case of Sila is! The social circumstances make a person dumb inspite of having capability to speak. The complication of arranged marriages and the limitation of joint family system cause of her speechless attitude. Then it was at the end of the drama, she speaks for the rights of her daughter and of her own. Then her realistic and compelling speech becomes effective and meaningful.

There is a significant and inspiring role of conversation and dialogues. Each and every dialogue has some hidden meanings, showing man's lust for power and sex and women helplessness and loss of security.

It reminds us of king Marten Luther famous quote,
“The silence of the good people is more dangerous than the brutality of the bad people”

So Sila is victim of sexual abuse, harassment and secrets within families. One of her family members plays a role of sex offender and betrays her personality. Her personality is shattered and this shattered personality is depicted in her absence of speech. Her language is affected the most and her language is affected first. This is the main thing to be discussed regarding the character of Sila. It shows that language is social factor. Society determines our choice of words. In case of happy and good situations, our language is different. And in case of bad and gloomy circumstances, our language is different. This aspect of language is evident in the character of Zaini, who is the cousin of Sila. As she is socially and psychologically secure, her language is just like a chirping bird. She is a contrast to the character of Sila.

Thus language is an inspiring tool of one's personality. It shows our culture, our social circumstances, our beliefs, and above all our personality.

Semiotic analysis shows these spaces function as external embodiments of Sila's internal fears, communicating what direct dialogue might dilute. They reveal how everyday domestic spaces, meant to shelter, can transform into sites of violence when cultural silence protects perpetrators over victims.

This narrative technique invites viewers to read between visual lines, engaging them as active interpreters rather than passive spectators. According to feminist media criticism, such stylistic choices resist voyeuristic consumption of female pain, instead foregrounding survivors' subjectivity and emotional reality.

While *Dar Si Jati Hai* Sila devotes much narrative space to silence and fear, it equally charts Sila's movement toward survival. Initially paralyzed by fear, Sila slowly begins to question the family's complicity and the legitimacy of her silence. In the climactic episodes, Sila's confrontation with her abuser 'Joi Mama' is understated yet powerful: her voice, though trembling, finally names the violence she endured. The moment is framed without melodramatic music or external commentary, amplifying the significance of her voice breaking silence.

This transformation is neither absolute nor romanticized; Sila remains visibly marked by trauma. However, the act of speaking, however hesitant, reclaims agency and exposes the cultural structures that upheld her silence. The narrative thus aligns with critical discourse analysis, showing how personal testimony disrupts oppressive discourses rooted in family honor and respectability.

The central argument emerging from this analysis is that narrative form itself, through silence, visual framing, and symbolism, acts as critique. The drama refuses to let viewers look away from Sila's fear, subtly exposing the complicity of those who choose silence over truth. Locked rooms and shadowed staircases are not mere set designs but narrative devices that echo the psychological corridors survivors navigate daily.

By centering fear, silence, and survival within stylistic choices, *Dar Si Jati Hai Sila* transcends plot to become a layered cultural text. It transforms private trauma into shared cultural reflection, questioning not only individual wrongdoing but also systemic forces that protect abusers through silence.

This analysis aligns with recent scholarship emphasizing the power of narrative style in shaping audience understanding of trauma and resistance (Fayyaz et al., 2024; Taj & Ameen, 2025). It builds on critical discourse analysis (Noor et al., 2025) to reveal how silence and space articulate what is culturally unspeakable. By focusing on narrative techniques rather than solely thematic content, this study adds to the limited body of research that treats Pakistani television drama as both artistic and political text.

Conclusion

This study has examined how *Dar Si Jati Hai Sila* employs distinctive narrative techniques and symbolism to explore the intertwined themes of fear, silence, and survival within a Pakistani cultural context. Through qualitative textual and visual analysis, the drama's use of silence, spatial symbolism, and visual restraint was shown to construct a powerful, nuanced portrayal of trauma that challenges traditional melodramatic representations of abuse. The domestic spaces, locked rooms, dark staircases, and confined corners, transcend their physicality to symbolize psychological entrapment, while minimal dialogue and close-up shots reveal the internal struggles of the protagonist, Sila.

By tracing Sila's gradual movement from silent victimhood to an emergent survivor, the drama foregrounds the complexities of reclaiming voice amid societal and familial pressures to maintain silence. This narrative journey highlights not only individual resilience but also critiques broader cultural systems that perpetuate abuse through enforced invisibility.

The analysis also underscores the significance of narrative form as a vehicle for social critique in Pakistani television dramas. By engaging viewers through subtle, symbolic storytelling rather than overt exposition, *Dar Si Jati Hai Sila* disrupts passive consumption and invites deeper reflection on taboo subjects. Audience responses, ranging from critical acclaim to conservative backlash, further illustrate the drama's role as a contested cultural text negotiating the boundaries of public discourse.

Grounded in critical discourse analysis, trauma theory, and feminist media criticism, this study contributes to a growing body of scholarship that recognizes the transformative potential of narrative style in representing marginalized experiences. It fills a gap in existing literature by focusing on the dramaturgical and symbolic dimensions of storytelling rather than thematic content alone.

Ultimately, *Dar Si Jati Hai Sila* exemplifies how Pakistani television dramas can serve as both artistic and political texts, amplifying silenced voices and challenging entrenched cultural norms. It invites scholars, practitioners, and audiences alike to reconsider the power of narrative form in shaping social understanding and fostering empathy.

The findings of this study carry several important implications for both social understanding and educational practice. They show that television dramas such as *Dar Si Jati Hai Sila* can

act as powerful tools for raising awareness about hidden psychological and social realities. By portraying fear, silence, and trauma in realistic ways, such narratives help audiences recognize how these experiences operate in everyday life, particularly within patriarchal systems where abuse is often silenced to preserve family honor. The drama highlights the importance of breaking this silence and encourages open conversations about sensitive issues like harassment and emotional manipulation, which are rarely discussed in public spaces. These insights can be used by educators, psychologists, and media professionals to promote empathy, critical thinking, and responsible storytelling. The study suggests that incorporating such media texts into classroom discussions or social campaigns can deepen understanding of gender-based issues and emotional resilience. It also underlines the need for psychological support systems and safe environments where victims can speak without fear or shame. Ultimately, the implications point toward the transformative potential of media narratives, not only to reflect society but also to challenge harmful norms and contribute to cultural and emotional healing.

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