

## THE BALOCH IDENTITY IN SINFE-AAHAN: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Muqadas<sup>\*1</sup>, Dr. Sumra Ashfaq<sup>2</sup>

<sup>\*1</sup>BS Scholar, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Bahria University Islamabad Campus, Islamabad, Pakistan

<sup>2</sup>Ph.D. (Linguistics), Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Bahria University Islamabad Campus, Islamabad, Pakistan

<sup>\*1</sup>[muqadasbaloch1@gmail.com](mailto:muqadasbaloch1@gmail.com)

### Corresponding Author:

Muqadas

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20741024>

Received  
20 April 2026

Accepted  
31 May 2026

Published  
18 June 2026

### ABSTRACT

This research explores the portrayal of Baloch identity in the Pakistani TV drama *Sinfe-Aahan* using Teun A. van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The study examines the character of Pariwesh Jamal to understand how language, visuals and narrative techniques represent Baloch identity in terms of power, gender, ethnicity, and state ideology. The study argues that the drama presents Baloch identity as a site of transformation: from marginalisation, tribal oppression, and social subordination to empowerment through education, merit, and military inclusion. At the micro level, the analysis highlights lexical choices and semantic binaries that contrast the "oppressive Sardar" with the "benevolent state." At the meso level, it explores institutional production and the discourse of national integration and managed feminism. At the macro level, it situates the drama within broader socio-political debates on Balochistan, ethnic representation, and state-sponsored media narratives. The study reveals that *Sinfe-Aahan* breaks some stereotypes by depicting a Baloch woman as educated, empowered and strong. But this positive portrayal is not without ideological constraints, as it ultimately prioritises national identity over ethnic identity and positions the military as the saviour of progress and liberation. The research concludes that the drama provides a managed representation of Baloch identity, while erasing political tensions and promoting a state-centred nationalist ideology. It contributes to scholarship on media representation, ethnic identity, and feminist discourse in Pakistani television by showing how empowerment can be simultaneously enabling and ideological.

**Keywords:** Baloch identity, *Sinfe-Aahan*, Critical Discourse Analysis, Teun A. van Dijk, managed feminism, state ideology, ethnic representation, Pakistani drama

### Introduction

The TV serial *Sinfe-Aahan*, produced by Next Level Entertainment and Inter-Services Public Relations, is a landmark in the "image building" efforts of the Pakistan Armed Forces (Haider, 2023; Musarrat et al., 2021). As a state-sponsored media project, it is a platform for the projection of a particular form of nationalism, especially among youth who have exhibited declining interest in military-focused narratives in the last decade

(Musarrat et al., 2021). This study examines the character of Pariwesh Jamal, a Baloch protagonist whose journey from a tribal village to the Pakistan Military Academy is a key discursive space for exploring ethnic integration and national identity (Khoso, 2025; Mansoor & Khalid, 2024).

The Baloch identity has historically been a site of tension within the Pakistani federation, marked by a "Baloch question" that includes socio-economic issues, autonomy demands, and historical disputes

(Iqbal, 2017; Khoso, 2025). In *Sinf-e-Aahan*, the narrative of a Baloch woman's decision to join the military is not just one of empowerment but a "reconciliation frame" (Khoso, 2025; Mansoor & Khalid, 2024). It aims to challenge the historical "Othering" of the province, where ethnic identities have been linked to "anti-state activities" or "militancy". Through the portrayal of the military as an inclusive space where the "Pakistan Army is ours", the drama seeks to reconcile the federal state and the marginalised province (Khoso, 2025). But this "managed representation" begs the question: does the drama address ethnic grievances or does it demand the subordination of ethnic identities to "federal loyalty" (Khoso, 2025). This research employs CDA to examine the representation of Baloch identity in *Sinf-e-Aahan*, with an emphasis on discursive strategies that might indicate power dynamics and marginalisation.

### Objectives

- To conduct a critical discourse analysis of *Sinf-e-Aahan*, with a focus on the Baloch character (Pariwesh Jamal), to determine how her identity is linguistically represented.
- To analyse scenes and dialogues to understand how power dynamics (e.g. feudal versus modern, male versus female) are represented in the Baloch character's narrative.
- To compare the representation of Baloch identity in the series with existing media discourses to determine if it challenges or reinforces dominant narratives.

### Research Questions

- How is Baloch identity represented linguistically in *Sinf-e-Aahan*?
- How are power dynamics (e.g. local elite vs commoners, centre vs periphery) represented in the Baloch character?
- How does the drama's representation of Baloch identity compare to other media and state representations of Balochistan?

### Research Gap and Problem Statement

Although media scholars have analysed *Sinf-e-Aahan* as a feminist discourse that promotes empowered women and national integration, no

research has centred on the portrayal of the Baloch character or ethnic diversity. Similarly, critical studies of Pakistani media often reveal that Balochistan is either portrayed as a den of terrorists or its voices are ignored. There is limited scholarly research on how a popular military-approved serial represents a Baloch character: whether it acknowledges the real issues of the region or conflates Baloch identity with a nationalist narrative. The issue is the absence of research on the representation of gender and ethnic identity in Pakistani dramas, especially in relation to a marginalised group. This research fills this gap by critically examining the representation of a Baloch woman in the power-laden discourse of *Sinf-e-Aahan*.

### Aim of the Study

This research seeks to critically analyse the portrayal of Baloch identity in the Pakistani television series *Sinf-e-Aahan* using discourse analysis. In particular, it explores the relationship between power and marginalisation in the language and narrative position of the Baloch character. In doing so, the study aims to reveal ideological messages about ethnicity and nationhood in the series' discourse.

### Significance of Study

The study will provide insights into the representation of an ethnic minority (Baloch) in the mainstream Pakistani media in a state-sponsored narrative, contributing to discussions on inclusion and propaganda. It will show whether *Sinf-e-Aahan* represents Baloch voices or integrates them into a national narrative. The use of CDA adds to the methodological understanding of media as a social practice in which language is used to maintain or contest power relations. The study can inform media practitioners and academics about the need for genuine representation of minorities in entertainment, responding to calls for "balanced journalism that includes the voices of the marginalized".

## Literature Review

### Media, State Ideology, and the Role of ISPR

In Pakistan, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) is a key player in the national security discourse through "scripted television" (Haider, 2023). Studies show that ISPR dramas play a significant role in cultivating a "fervent attitude" towards nationalism in young people (Musarrat et al., 2021). These dramas are not just entertainment but "public image-building" for the Pakistan Armed Forces (Haider, 2023). The blending of the military world with the "feminised" world of the drama serial allows the state to "humanise" the institution and its ideology to a civilian audience (Haider, 2023).

The move towards "hybrid products" in the post network television industry enables the military to have "consistent messaging" while working with popular creative teams (Haider, 2023). This blending of the military and civil worlds is a shift from the previous monopolistic state control, but when the two worlds intersect in the narrative, the military world "prevails upon the civil world" (Haider, 2023). This is crucial for building a narrative of national unity in which the military is positioned as the saviour of the state and the family (Haider, 2023; Musarrat et al., 2021).

### The Taxonomy of Baloch Representation

The portrayal of the Baloch minority in the Pakistani media is marked by a complex taxonomy of ideologies (Khosro, 2025). Academics categorise the representation into three main clusters: Federalists, who support state institutions; Nationalists, who demand provincial autonomy within the federation; and Secessionists, who demand independence (Khosro, 2025). Historically, the Pakistani state has favoured an "Islamic" identity over ethno-linguistic identities such as the Baloch, which has resulted in a view of these groups as "warriors" or "fighters" who need to be brought into the state fold to be seen as loyal. In the media today, the Baloch issue is often framed through a "security lens" where local issues are subsumed under security chronicles and "militancy" (Iqbal, 2017). In times of high national security threats, the media tends to take a "propagandist and nationalistic approach" (Iqbal,

2017). In *Sinf-e-Aahan*, the character Pariwesh Jamal is a staunch "Federalist" where the rhetorical strategy is to assert that the "Pakistan Army is ours" and thus outbidding the "Nationalists" and "Secessionists" as the "de facto" representatives of the Baloch people (Khosro, 2025). This representation serves as a "mental model" that reduces the political complexities of Balochistan to a binary choice between state-approved empowerment and feudal tribalism (Khosro, 2025; Riyanti, 2023).

### Women's Empowerment and "Managed Feminist Discourse"

*Sinf-e-Aahan* is often celebrated as a "positive step" in challenging gender stereotypes and depicting women in positions of power (Mansoor & Khalid, 2024). The show's theme song is also considered a means of "breaking gender stereotypes" and challenging traditional patriarchal attitudes in Pakistan (Noor, Saud, & Shafique, 2025). For the Baloch protagonist, empowerment is seen as a break from a "tribal system" that is often depicted in state narratives as "dead" or a hindrance to national development (Khosro, 2025).

But this empowerment is often "controlled" by the state (Mansoor & Khalid, 2024). The "feminist discourse" in the screenplay is employed to promote an idea of empowerment that is tied to the military's discipline and the state's "new womanhood" (Mansoor & Khalid, 2024). The characters are strong and assertive, but their empowerment is geared towards serving the federation, implying that gender equality is a byproduct of the main objective of national security and institutional branding (Haider, 2023; Mansoor & Khalid, 2024).

### Critical Discourse Analysis and the Socio-Cognitive Model

Critical Discourse Analysis is an interdisciplinary field that aims to explore the connections between "discourse, power, domination, and social structure" (Riyanti, 2023). Teun A. van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach is relevant in this context because it suggests that there is no direct relationship between discourse and society; rather, they are connected through "social cognition"

(Gyollai, 2020; Riyanti, 2023). Social cognition refers to the "mental representations" of language users, such as their prejudices, knowledge and ideologies (Masroor et al., 2020; Riyanti, 2023). Van Dijk refers to "personal cognition" (individual mental models) and "social cognition" (socially shared representations) (Al-Saaidi & Abdul-Hussain, 2022). In media representation, these mental models can be understood as subjective representations that mediate between individual experiences and broader social realities (Riyanti, 2023; Gyollai, 2020). Through the analysis of "micro-propositions" (individual ideas) and "macro-propositions" (global themes) in a text such as *Sinf-e-Aahan*, researchers can determine how "prejudice" or "group schemata" about ethnic minorities are reproduced or contested. Van Dijk's approach is concerned with the "reproduction of social inequalities" and the "abuse of power", making it a powerful framework for examining how state media handles the representation of minorities (Liu & Guo, 2016; Riyanti, 2023).

### Methodology

#### Methodology: Van Dijk's Three-Level Analysis

This research adopts Teun A. van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to Critical Discourse Analysis to analyse the portrayal of Baloch identity in *Sinf-e-Aahan* (Riyanti, 2023). The analysis was done on three interrelated levels:

**I. Micro-Level:** This level is about describing the content of the drama by examining its "vocabulary, grammar, and text structure" (Huda, 2022). It looks at the particular "lexical devices" and "rhetorical structures" in the dialogue of Pariwesh Jamal and other characters to determine how her "Baloch-ness" is linguistically represented (Riyanti, 2023).

**II. Meso-Level:** This level examines the "productional process" of the discourse (Huda, 2022). It explores how the producers of *Sinf-e-Aahan* used their "awareness, prejudice, or knowledge" to create the hybrid military-civilian narrative (Haider, 2023; Riyanti, 2023). This includes examining the "mental models" that the producers seek to implant in the audience (Osisanwo, 2021).

**III. Macro-Level:** This involves explaining the discourse by connecting it to "sociocultural practices" and "power relations" (Huda, 2022; Shah et al., 2021). The study places the drama in the context of the "Baloch question" and the "Othering" of the province by the Pakistani state (Khosro, 2025).

### Data Collection

The research employs purposive sampling to identify the most relevant scenes and dialogue from *Sinf-e-Aahan* for the construction of Baloch identity (Musarrat et al., 2021). This includes:

- Scenes depicting Pariwesh Jamal's life in Balochistan, highlighting her cultural identity and the "tribal system" (Khosro, 2025).
- Crucial scenes of her joining the army, where the theme of "federal loyalty" is explicitly mentioned (Khosro, 2025).
- Conversations with army instructors that position the "Army as ours" and encourage national unity (Khosro, 2025).

### Data Analysis

The analysis began at the "local level" to determine the local meaning of the text and progressed to the "global meaning" or macro-theme, as per van Dijk's approach (Riyanti, 2023). The research coded the data for "ideological aspects" and "power relations" in particular, how the discourse constructs the "loyal federalist" versus the "disloyal secessionist" (Huda, 2022; Khosro, 2025). Through the analysis of these three aspects, the study demonstrates how *Sinf-e-Aahan* is used for "mind control" and the "legitimation of political power" over the Baloch minority (Khosro, 2025; Masroor et al., 2020).

### Findings

This chapter outlines the results of the Critical Discourse Analysis of the drama serial *Sinf-e-Aahan*, with a particular focus on the portrayal of Baloch identity through the character of Pariwesh Jamal. The analysis follows Teun van Dijk's three-level socio-cognitive model, which considers the micro-level (linguistic and visual signifiers), meso-level (discursive practices and production), and macro-level (socio-political and ideological structures). Through the analysis of the selected

dialogue from Episodes 1, 2, 5, 6, 12 and 20, this chapter seeks to address the research questions about the construction of Baloch identity, the role of state institutions in this representation, and the contestation of traditional gender and ethnic stereotypes.

### Micro-Level Analysis: Lexical Choices and Semantic Binaries

At the micro-level, the analysis examines the lexical and semantic choices in the dialogue that set up the initial "marginalised" status of the Baloch subject and its subsequent transformation.

#### "Dust of Feet" and Tribal Power

**Father (18:17):** beti. Woh sardar log hain. Hum log uske paon ki jooti ke barabar nahi hain.

**Translation:** Daughter, they are Sardar people. We are not even equal to the dust of their feet.

**Pariwesh: (18:25)** Aisa mat kaha karein aap. Allah tala ne hum sabko insaan banaya hai.

**Translation:** Please don't say that. Allah created all of us as humans.

**Father: (18:30)** Haan beta, hum insaan hain, woh sardar hai.

**Translation:** Yes child, we are humans... but he is a Sardar.

The initial dialogue in Episode 1 creates a deep power imbalance between the ordinary Baloch citizen and the tribal elite. When Pariwesh proposes to meet the Sardar to resolve a land dispute, her father's response, "Hum unke paon ki jooti ke barabar bhi nahi" is a pivotal linguistic marker of social exclusion. The use of the word "jooti" (footwear/shoe) functions as a metaphor for social inferiority and exclusion, implying that in the tribal hierarchy, the individual is worthless in comparison to the Sardar (Nasr et al., 2025).

This is also evident in the father's binary: "Haan beta, hum insaan hain... woh Sardar hai." This linguistic binary implies that "Sardar" is a category that is above "insaan" (humans) and has a god-like status that cannot be challenged or bargained with by "insaan". This semantic construction establishes a level of oppression that the rest of the narrative aims to undo through state intervention (Nasr et al., 2025; Saleem & Khalid, 2023).

#### Commodification of the Female Subject

**Mother (19:13)** Sardar zameen chhorne par tayyar hai.

**Translation:** The Sardar is ready to give up the land.

**Mother (19:28):** Rishta maanga hai tumhara, usi mulazim ke liye.

**Translation:** He has asked for your hand in marriage for that same servant.

The mother's speech about the Sardar's "proposal" "Rishta maanga hai tumhara, usi mulazim ke liye" highlights the objectification of Baloch women in the tribal discourse. Pariwesh's education and agency are overlooked; she is reduced to a "commodity" to be traded for seven acres of land. This lexical choice confirms that in the traditional tribal mental model, a woman's value is reproductive and transactional, and in the service of the male elite (Chaudhary et al., 2024; Noor, Hanif, & Safdar, 2024).

#### From "Balochistan ki Beti" to "Pakistan ki Beti"

**Pariwesh:** Aap kehte thay main Balochistan ki beti hoon... lekin PMA aa kar pata chala ke main Pakistan ki beti hoon.

**Translation:** You used to say I am the daughter of Balochistan... but after coming to PMA, I realised I am the daughter of Pakistan.

**Pariwesh** Ek fard ki pehchan sirf uska mulk hota hai.

**Translation:** A person's identity is defined only by their country.

**Pariwesh** Ab main sirf Balochistan ki beti nahi, Pakistan ki beti hoon.

**Translation:** Now I am not just the daughter of Balochistan, I am the daughter of Pakistan.

In Episode 12, a micro-level transformation takes place. Pariwesh says: "Aap kehte thay main Balochistan ki beti hoon... lekin PMA aa kar pata chala ke main Pakistan ki beti hoon." The use of the word "beti" (daughter) is repeated. It preserves the sense of domesticity and familial protection, but the "parent" is no longer the provincial/ethnic entity, but the national/state entity.

Moreover, her claim that "Ek fard ki pehchan sirf uska mulk hota hai" (A person's identity is defined

only by their country) is a radical linguistic shift. It erases the "hyphenated" identity and leaves the state-centred identity. This insight reveals how the discourse employs language to shift the subject from the "periphery" of ethnic identity to the "center" of nationalist ideology (Ejaz, 2014; Ejaz & Rehman, 2022).

### Meso-Level Analysis: Discursive Practices and Institutional Ideology

The meso-level analysis focuses on how the production of the drama, in particular the role of the Inter-Services Public Relations, regulates the "social cognition" of the text.

#### Letter as a Change Agent

**Postman (17:30)** Jamal bhai, aap ke liye khat aaya hai.

**Translation:** Jamal brother, there's a letter for you.

**Postman (17:42)** Rawalpindi GHQ se aaya hai. Bohat zaroori khat hai.

**Translation:** It's from GHQ Rawalpindi. It's very important.

**Jamal** Sardar ko pata chala toh woh rok dega.

**Translation:** If the Sardar finds out, he'll stop her.

In Episode 5, the GHQ (General Headquarters) letter from "Rawalpindi GHQ (General Headquarters)" "is a GHQ functions as a discursive intervention that alters the existing power structure within the narrative. In the village, where the Sardar is the law, GHQ (General Headquarters) is a superior authority. The father's warning to keep it a secret "Sardar ko pata chala toh woh rok dega" - points to a contest for allegiance between the tribal and the state institution.

The research suggests that the military is presented as the "Third Way" for Baloch youth, a path to empowerment that does not involve the constraining "traditions" referred to by the father in Episode 1. This discursive strategy is in line with the "My Army Family" model, in which the state institution is portrayed as a protective family that saves the individual from local tyranny (Haider, 2023; Naz & Nawaz, 2025).

#### Disrupting the "Disgrace" Discourse

**Mother (21:06 - 21:19):** Acha, jo pehle tumne usey qabeele se chupkar bheja tha, padhne ke liye shehar. Tumhare shehar mein qabeel walon ko pata nahi chala. Ab jab tum usey fauj mein bhejne ja raha hai na, bohut badnami hogi hamari.

**Father (21:01):** Phir bhi hum usay bhejein ge zaroor.

**Translation:** Still, we will send her.

In Episode 2, the mother's concern that the army will bring "badnami" (disgrace) to the family is an example of the social cognition in Baloch society about women's mobility. But the father's counterargument, "Phir bhi hum usay bhejein ge zaroor", demonstrates a shift in this cognition. The show opts for a Baloch father who is a change agent, "secretly" sending his daughter to college. This challenges the "unwise" or "dominated" Baloch father stereotype of older media representations (Jamil, 2024).

#### Capability over Gender

**Neighbour (2:05)** Sardar ka beta mard hai. Kya tumhari beti bhi fauj mein kaam karegi?

**Translation:** The Sardar's son is a man. Will your daughter also work in the army?

**Mother (2:10)** Fauj mein mard aur aurat nahi dekhtay, qabliyat aur taleem dekhtay hain.

**Translation:** In the army, they don't see gender, they see capability and education.

In Episode 6, the mother's justification of Pariwesh to the village women, "Fauj mein mard aur aurat nahi dekhtay, qabliyat aur taleem dekhtay hain", is a direct expression of the state's "managed feminist discourse" (Mansoor & Khalid, 2024). The discourse's focus on "qabliyat" (capability) and "taleem" (education) positions the military as a meritocratic haven where the "gendered" and "ethnicized" village barriers are absent. This creates a "positive image" of Pakistani society and its institutions as progressive enablers of female development (Chaudhary et al., 2024; Noor, Hanif, & Safdar, 2024).

### Macro-Level Analysis: Socio-Political Structures and Ideology

The macro-level analysis places the representation of Pariwesh in the socio-political milieu of the Balochistan crisis and national integration.

### The "Oppressive Sardar" and the "Benevolent State"

One of the key insights of this study is the creation of a binary between tribalism and the state. The Sardar is portrayed as the main cause of all Baloch problems - he steals land, creates debt, and tries to force marriages. In contrast, the state (the Army) offers education, identity and international recognition.

The drama's emphasis on tribal disputes diverts attention from external political issues such as provincial autonomy or economic marginalisation from state development projects (Saleem & Khalid, 2023). The study suggests that Sinf-e-Aahan is a "counter-narrative" to the "Balochistan: Pakistan's Other War" discourse in the international media, which shifts the focus from a narrative of war to "integration and achievement" (Eijaz, 2014; Nasr et al., 2025).

### De-radicalization and Youth Empowerment

The discourse analysis shows that Pariwesh is presented as a "modal behaviour" for Baloch youth. Her journey from the "dust of the feet" to an officer who "outperforms the entire course" is meant to evoke a shift in the audience's attitudes. This is a form of "de-radicalization" that implies that the way to dignity is through the federation, not against it (Naz & Nawaz, 2025).

### Managed Feminism and Nationalist Resilience

The research shows that the "Woman of Steel" is an intersectional nationalist identity. Pariwesh's empowerment is "managed" because it is approved by a benevolent father and the state (Mansoor & Khalid, 2024). Her empowerment is "Nationalist Resilience" - the capacity of the nation to produce empowered daughters even from its "conservative" corners (Noor, Saud, & Shafique, 2025). This enables the state to present itself as a feminist nation to the world while preserving its own power dynamics (Chaudhary et al., 2024).

### Addressing the Research Questions

#### RQ1: How is Baloch identity constructed in Sinf-e-Aahan?

The results reveal that Baloch identity is constructed as "rough diamond" that is polished by the state. It is first associated with "oppressive traditions" and "subservience". But through the military's discourse, it is transformed into a "source of pride". The "new Baloch" is one who is linguistically and ideologically assimilated into the Pakistani state (Haider, 2023; Hussain et al., 2020).

#### RQ2: How does the drama serial challenge ethnic and gender stereotypes?

The drama serial challenges the stereotype of the "illiterate" or "unwise" Baloch by depicting Pariwesh as a physical and intellectual achiever. It also contests the stereotype of the "backward" Baloch father by depicting Jamal as a progressive father who prioritises his daughter's education over tribal acceptance. But the study suggests that this subversion is "controlled" because it substitutes tribal patriarchy with institutional (military) advice (Chaudhary et al., 2024; Jamil, 2024).

#### RQ3: How does state-sponsored media frame the Balochistan issue?

The state (ISPR) is the "ultimate mediator". The GHQ letter and the PMA transformation suggest that the state-sponsored media positions the military as the only institution that can dismantle the "Sardari system". The discourse successfully shifts the focus from "political alienation" to "individual meritocracy and national belonging" (Haider, 2023; Nasr et al., 2025).

### Synthesis: The Idealized Baloch Subject

The synthesis of the three levels of analysis shows that Sinf-e-Aahan creates an "idealized Baloch subject". This subject is:

1. Linguistically Reconstructed: Speaks the language of the state (Urdu/Military jargon) and identifies as "Pakistan ki Beti" (Eijaz, 2014).
2. Socio-Economically Rescued: Frees herself from tribal debt and commodification

through a "secret" pact with education and the state (Naz & Nawaz, 2025).

3. Institutionalised: Realises her "true" self and "identity" in a state uniform, which is a semiotic delete button for regional "backwardness" (Haider, 2023).

### **The "Sardar's Son" and the New Social Contract**

The conversation in Episode 20, in which the Sardar's son praises Pariwesh - "Mujhe fakhr hai ke poore course ko harane wali Balochistan ki beti hai" - is a new "social contract". The tribal elite must now acknowledge the Baloch individual who has been "stamped" by the state. This suggests that the drama does not want to eradicate Baloch pride, but to make sure that this pride is directed towards "federal loyalty" and not "ethnic disloyalty" (Ahmed & Masood, 2017; Khoso, 2025).

### **Summary of Findings**

In conclusion, the CDA of *Sinf-e-Aahan* shows that the portrayal of Baloch identity is a discursive performance. Through the "managed feminism" of Umera Ahmed's script and the institutional authority of ISPR, the drama serial successfully:

- Substitutes the "Sardar-Subservient" binary with a "State-Citizen" alliance.
- Employs the "Woman of Steel" metaphor to symbolise national advancement and resilience (Noor, Saud, & Shafique, 2025).
- Effectively transforms the "social cognition" of the Baloch identity from a site of "crisis" to a site of "national potential" (Nasr et al., 2025; Naz & Nawaz, 2025).

The study shows that while the drama serial empowers the Baloch woman on screen, it also reinforces the "military as liberator" discourse, ensuring that the discourse of empowerment is a "managed" discourse, aimed at the integration and preservation of the Pakistani state (Haider, 2023; Mansoor & Khalid, 2024)

### **Discussion**

The results of this study, based on a Critical Discourse Analysis of *Sinf-e-Aahan* using Teun van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach, provide a complex picture of the re-construction of Baloch identity in the Pakistani media. This chapter

brings together these findings, connecting them to the research questions and comparing them to other research on state ideology, gender empowerment and ethnic representation. Through an analysis of the micro, meso and macro levels of discourse, this discussion considers the consequences of portraying a "Woman of Steel" from the Baloch periphery in a state-sponsored nationalist discourse.

### **The Repositioning of Baloch Identity: From Periphery to Centre**

The aim of this research was to explore the representation of Baloch identity. The results indicate a conscious shift from the historical "marginalisation" or "erasure" of Baloch voices to a "controlled visibility".

### **Unravelling the "Unwise" Trope**

Historically, media representations of Baloch characters in Pakistan have often relied on the "uneducated" or "illiterate" trope, often reducing them to secondary characters or sources of humour (Jamil, 2024). Yet, the character of Pariwesh Jamal is discursively positioned as intellectually and physically strong. Her lines in Episode 2, in which she rejects her father's savings ("Zameen k liye paisa jama karte ho aur mujh par kharch kar dete ho") (You save money for the land, but end up spending it on me.), position her as a subject with high emotional intelligence and a sense of community.

As discussed in the findings, this reversal of the "unwise" stereotype is a deliberate tactic of the producers. The discourse, by showcasing a Baloch girl who succeeds in a merit-based national institution such as the Pakistan Military Academy, undermines the idea that the Baloch people are "backward" (Jamil, 2024). Rather, it attributes their marginalisation to the local tribal system (the "Sardar") and the state as the enabler of their potential (Nasr et al., 2025; Naz & Nawaz, 2025).

### **The "Sardar vs. State" Binary: A Macro-Level Ideological Strategy**

Much of the analysis centered on the socio-political framework of the text. The results show a clear binary between the "Oppressive Sardar" and the "Benevolent State".

### **The Tribal System as the "Other"**

In Van Dijk's macro-analysis, power is sustained by demonising the "Other". In *Sinf-e-Aahan*, the "Other" is not the external enemy but the internal Sardar. The conversation in Episode 1 "Hum unke paon ki jooti ke barabar bhi nahi" (We are not even equal to the shoes on their feet.) This positions the Sardar as a dictator who treats his people as less than humans. In reducing the Balochistan crisis to a battle between "modernity (the state)" and "primitivism (the Sardar)", the drama serial oversimplifies the history of the Balochistan crisis (Nasr et al., 2025; Saleem & Khalid, 2023).

This rhetorical move effectively shifts the focus from the issues of "political construction" and "enforced disappearances" that are at the heart of international and activist concerns about the province (Eijaz, 2014; Nasr et al., 2025). Rather, it implies that the "true" enemy of the Baloch people is their own Sardar. This analysis supports the claim that the state's media employs "Entertainment-Education" to trigger a change in behavioural attitudes, urging the youth to seek empowerment from the military rather than tribal or separatist movements (Naz & Nawaz, 2025).

### **The Military as the "Third Space"**

The letter from "Rawalpindi General Headquarters" in Episode 5 is a symbolic intervention. It is a "Third Space" beyond the village's patriarchal and tribal structures. The father's concealment of the interview ("Sardar ko pata chala toh woh rok dega") (If the Sardar finds out, he'll stop her.) suggests that the state is seen as a saviour that will "save" the Baloch subject from local oppression.

This aligns with the "My Army Family" discourse identified by Haider (2023), in which the military is presented as a meritocratic and protective haven that offers the dignity denied by the tribal system. The narrative implies that while the Sardar considers the Jamal family as "dust", the Army considers them as "citizens" and "officers". This cognitive model is aimed at creating a psychological connection between the periphery and the military centre (Naz & Nawaz, 2025).

### **Managed Feminism and the "Woman of Steel"**

The research also aimed to understand the representation of gender in this ethnic context. The results suggest a "managed feminist discourse" (Mansoor & Khalid, 2024).

#### **Gender Resistance and State Approval**

Pariwesh Jamal is a "Woman of Steel", but her steel is only used for the state. Her "gender resistance" (in her training and refusal to be sold for land) is applauded because it is in the national interest. As Noor et al., 2025 point out in their analysis of the title song, this discourse seeks to "dismantle gender stereotypes" to present a "progressive image" of Pakistan to the world (Chaudhary et al., 2024; Noor et al., 2025).

But this empowerment is "controlled" because it is within the realm of "patriotic daughterhood". Pariwesh does not challenge the state or the military establishment; she only challenges the "wrong" patriarchy (the Sardar). When she becomes the "Pakistan ki Beti", she accepts a new paternalistic guardian - the state. This is in line with the idea of "Religious Nationalism" where women's activism and empowerment is only permitted when it is in line with the collective conservative/nationalist identity (Anjum, 2020; Durrani & Dunne, 2009).

### **Challenging the "Passive Female"**

Despite her "controlled" empowerment, the study reveals that Pariwesh substantially challenges the "passive" or "negative" tropes of women in Pakistani dramas (Noor et al., 2024). Rather than being defined by her relationship with men, as is often the case with characters in local dramas, Pariwesh is defined by her "capability and education" ("qabliyat aur taleem"), as her mother says in Episode 6. This role reversal, where the woman becomes the "iron" of the family, offers a "positive side" of female representation that is absent from more conventional scripts (Chaudhary et al., 2024; Noor, Hanif, & Safdar, 2024).

### **Socio-Cognitive Connection: Shifting the National Mental Model**

Van Dijk's model stresses that discourse is a social activity that affects "social cognition" the collective

mental models of a group. Sinf-e-Aahan is a propaganda tool that seeks to change the national mental model of Balochistan.

### **For the Non-Baloch Audience: Humanizing the Periphery**

For viewers in the urban areas of Punjab or Sindh, Pariwesh "humanises" the Baloch. The drama's portrayal of the plight of a poor family against a Sardar evokes sympathy and a sense of national unity. It transforms the "fear" or "suspicion" of the ethnic "Other" into pride in a "national daughter" (Ahmed & Masood, 2017; Jamil, 2024).

### **For the Baloch Audience: A Promise of Inclusion**

For the Baloch audience, the drama provides a "promise of inclusion". It implies that the state (and the Army) is welcoming to those who opt for "integration" rather than "alienation". By having the Sardar's son praise Pariwesh in the last episode "Mujhe fakhr hai ke poore course ko harane wali Balochistan ki beti hai." (I am proud that the one who outperformed the entire course is the daughter of Balochistan), the discourse offers a symbolic win to every marginalised Baloch viewer. It assures them that they too can be "Women (or Men) of Steel" if they side with the state (Khosro, 2025; Naz & Nawaz, 2025).

### **Critical Reflections: The "Costs" of Representation**

Although the portrayal of Pariwesh is certainly more positive and prominent than before, a critical discourse analysis must also consider what is absent from this discourse.

### **The Erasure of Political Grievance**

The analysis reveals that the discourse of Sinf-e-Aahan almost completely erases the "political" and "economic" demands of Balochistan. It does not mention the province's share in natural resources, the absence of civilian infrastructure, or the political demands for provincial autonomy (Saleem & Khalid, 2023). By blaming the "Sardari system" for all the suffering, the discourse "de-politicises" the Balochistan crisis, reducing it to a

socio-cultural issue that can be "resolved" by the military (Nasr et al., 2025).

### **The One Identity Trap**

Pariwesh's statement that "Ek fard ki pehchan sirf uska mulk hota hai" (A person's identity is defined only by their country.) is the ideological culmination of the play. This is good for "national integration" but also for a "primordialist" conception of nationalism that is exclusionary for ethnic minorities. It implies that one cannot be "authentically Baloch" and "authentically Pakistani" at the same time. The "managed discourse" demands the complete subordination of the ethnic self to the national self (Ejaz & Rehman, 2022; Khoso, 2025).

### **Comparison with Other Media Texts**

The portrayal in Sinf-e-Aahan is part of a pattern in "ISPR-sponsored" media. For instance, themes of youth empowerment and de-radicalisation were also present in the drama series Darwaza, which also centred on Balochistan (Naz & Nawaz, 2025). Like Sinf-e-Aahan, these texts use high production values and emotional appeals to "soften" the state and promote "nationalist resilience" (Haider, 2023; Noor et al., 2025).

Sinf-e-Aahan is a "counter-discourse" to independent documentaries such as Baluchistan: Pakistan's Other War, which highlight conflict and human rights (Ejaz, 2014). It employs the "Woman of Steel" to present a narrative of "hope" and "progress" that counterbalances the critical discourse of the international media (Nasr et al., 2025).

### **Discussion as an Answer to the Research Questions**

#### **RQ1: Baloch Identity**

The discussion shows that the Baloch identity in Sinf-e-Aahan is represented as a "heroic transformation". The identity is divested in its "primitive/tribal" connotation and dressed in the "modern/national" attire. It is an image that romanticises the "loyal Baloch" and demonises the "traditional Sardar".

### RQ2: Contesting Stereotypes

The drama effectively challenges the stereotype of the "incapable" Baloch. It breaks the "ethnic hierarchy" that relegates Baloch characters to the bottom by depicting Pariwesh as the top student at the PMA. But it introduces a new stereotype: the "State-Dependent Baloch" whose power is only possible with the help of the military.

### RQ3: Role of State-Sponsored Media

The state-sponsored media is found to be an "ideological gatekeeper". The state "manages" the discourse of feminism and ethnicity through ISPR's production and Umera Ahmed's writing. It permits "gender empowerment" and "ethnic visibility" only within the context of maintaining and enhancing state power (Haider, 2023; Mansoor & Khalid, 2024).

### Socio-Cognitive Transformation

Element	Initial State (Tribal/Peripheral)	Transformed State (National/Central)
Status	"Dust of the feet" ( <i>Jooti</i> )	"Daughter of Pakistan" ( <i>Pakistan ki Beti</i> )
Agency	Restricted by Sardar's debt	Empowered by army and meritocracy
Identity	Provincial/Ethnic	Primarily National
Gender Role	Tradable commodity for land	"Woman of Steel" (Leader/Officer)
Socio-Cognitive Frame	Oppression and Backwardness	Inclusion and Learned Optimism

### Conclusion

The analysis of the findings suggests that *Sinf-e-Aahan* is a complex discursive "re-branding" strategy. It re-brands a historically marginalised identity (the Baloch) as a symbol of national "iron strength". This offers much-needed visibility and "positive representation" for a marginalised group, but the CDA shows that this visibility is achieved at the expense of political nuance and the complete subsuming of ethnic identity under state nationalism.

Pariwesh Jamal is a "Woman of Steel", but her steel is tempered in the crucible of the state. Her success is a "victory" for Balochistan, but it is a victory that is defined, managed and approved by the same center that she was once a part of. This "managed discourse" guarantees that the representation of Baloch identity will serve to reconcile the periphery with the center, not by changing the center, but by changing the periphery to reflect the state's own values (Chaudhary et al., 2024; Haider, 2023; Mansoor & Khalid, 2024).

### Recommendations

Although *Sinf-e-Aahan* effectively used female writers to challenge gender stereotypes (Noor et al., 2024), future dramas should include more local Baloch writers and consultants. This will help avoid the "State vs. Sardar" binary and offer a more

accurate portrayal of the socio-political realities of the Baloch people that are not exclusively defined by tribal oppression or military service. Additionally, empowerment should be portrayed in other civilian professions, such as doctors, lawyers, engineers, and artists, rather than just the military. This would help break the idea that the state is the only meritocratic institution for marginalised youth (Haider, 2023). Moreover, Media texts should attempt to recognise the "historical and political grievances" of regions such as Balochistan (Saleem & Khalid, 2023). Black-and-white portrayals can create "cognitive dissonance" among the local audience who perceive a gap between their socio-political experiences and their screen representations (Jamil, 2024). Finally, National integration should be "pluralist" rather than "primordialist". Rather than imposing a monolithic identity that erases ethnic differences, the state should embrace "hyphenated identities" (e.g., being both authentically Baloch and authentically Pakistani) to promote a more sustainable sense of belonging (Durrani & Dunne, 2009; Ejaz & Rehman, 2022).

## References

- Ahmed, I., & Masood, T. (2017). NATIONAL NEWSPAPERS' ROLE IN NATIONAL INTEGRATION AND THEIR COVERAGE OF ETHNIC ISSUES IN KARACHI. *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 56(1), 87. <https://doi.org/10.46568/jssh.v56i1.62>
- Al-Saaidi, S. K. Z., & Abdul-Hussain, I. R. (2022). A critical discourse analysis of a selected non-governmental organizations' report on violence against women in Iraq. *Arab World English Journal*, 13(3), 445-466. <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/aweij/vol13no3.29>
- Anjum, G. (2020). Women's Activism in Pakistan: Role of Religious Nationalism and Feminist Ideology Among Self-Identified Conservatives and Liberals. *Open Cultural Studies*, 4(1), 36. <https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2020-0004>
- Chaudhary, F., Khan, M. Y., & Baqar, A. (2024). Unveiling Reverse Gender Roles in Pakistani Drama *Sinf-e-Ahan*: A Textual Analysis. *PAKISTAN LANGUAGES AND HUMANITIES REVIEW*, 8. [https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2024\(8-ii\)37](https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2024(8-ii)37)
- Durrani, N., & Dunne, M. (2009). Curriculum and national identity: exploring the links between religion and nation in Pakistan. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 42(2), 215. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220270903312208>
- Eijaz, A. (2014). POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION THROUGH THE LENSES OF ALJAZEERA (THE CASE OF DOCUMENTARY FILM 'BALUCHISTAN: PAKISTAN'S OTHER WAR'). *Jimbun Gakuhō*, 53(1), 13. <https://jssh.uok.com/oj/index.php/jssh/article/view/196>
- Ejaz, M., & Rehman, A. (2022). Exploration of the foundations of ethnic conflicts in Balochistan: a theoretical perspective. *Liberal Arts and Social Sciences International Journal (LASSIJ)*, 6(1), 42. <https://doi.org/10.47264/idea.lassij/6.1.4>
- Gyollai, D. (2020). The sociocognitive approach in critical discourse studies and the phenomenological sociology of knowledge: intersections. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 21(3), 539-558. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-020-09704-z>
- Haider, S. M. S. (2023). "My Army Family": Civil-Military Representation in Military-Sponsored Television Content in Pakistan. *Critical Pakistan Studies*, 1, 206. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cps.2024.8>
- Huda, L. N. (2022). CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF ONLINE MEDIA NEWS: MINISTRY OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS BANNING ARABIC LANGUAGE. *LEKSEMA Jurnal Bahasa Dan Sastra*, 7(1), 37. <https://doi.org/10.22515/ljbs.v7i1.4911>
- Hussain, M., Amjad, M., & Bugti, K. (2020). ICONIC REPRESENTATION OF BALOCH CULTURE: A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS. *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 59(1), 35. <https://doi.org/10.46568/jssh.v59i1.324>
- Iqbal, M. Z. (2017). Conflict and Peace Journalism: Role of Media in Pakistan. *Strategic Studies*, 37(2), 90. <https://doi.org/10.53532/ss.037.02.00226>
- Jamil, S. S. (2024). Ethnic Stereotyping in Pakistani Dramas: University Students' Perceptions and the Impact on Inter-Provincial Identity. *Journal of Creative Arts and Communication (JCAC)*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.51846/jcac.v1i1.3173>
- Khan, M., & Dilawer, S. (2025). Probing Ideological Construction and Contestation: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Pakistani Drama *Bakhtawar*. *Journal of Arts and Linguistics Studies*, 3(1), 1383. <https://doi.org/10.71281/jals.v3i1.283>

- Khoso, S. (2025). *Ethnic disloyalty or federal loyalty? A case of contesting Baloch representation in postcolonial Pakistan*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2024.1476454>
- Liu, K., & Guo, F. (2016). A review on critical discourse analysis. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 6(5), 1076–1084. DOI: 10.17507/tpls.0605.23
- Mansoor, Z., & Khalid, M. (2024). Analyzing Feminist Discourse in a Pakistani Screenplay. *Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 12(3), 2822. <https://doi.org/10.52131/pjhss.2024.v12i3.2440>
- Masroor, F., Shaikh, S., Marwa, S., & Afzaal, S. (2020). Persuasion and mind control in leadership discourse: A socio-cognitive approach towards selected political speeches. *Journal of Communication and Cultural Trends*, Fall 2020.
- Musarrat, R., Zahra, M. F., & Ashraf, A. (2021). ISPR Productions vs. Nationalism, Inclination to Join Army and Image Building: Case of Pakistan's Military Operations. *Global Social Sciences Review*, 1. [https://doi.org/10.31703/gssr.2021\(vi-iv\).01](https://doi.org/10.31703/gssr.2021(vi-iv).01)
- Nasr, M., Iqbal, S., & Tariq. (2025). BALOCHISTAN CRISIS: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF PAKISTANI AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA. *Al-Aasar*, 2(4), 217. <https://doi.org/10.63878/aaj949>
- Naz, A., & Nawaz, D. (2025). De-Radicalization and Youth Empowerment in Balochistan: A Discourse Analysis of the Drama Serial "Darwaza". *Journal of Linguistics Literature & Communication Studies*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.63456/jllcs-1-1-19>
- Noor, A. A., Hanif, M., & Safdar, A. (2024). Female Representation in Pakistani Digital Media: A Comparative Critical Feministic Study of Rehman's "Mere Pas Tum Ho" & Ahmed's "Sinfe-Ahan." *Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.52131/pjhss.2024.v12i1.1989>
- Noor, M., Saud, N., & Shafique, I. (2025). Unveiling Gender Resistance in the Discourse of Sinfe-Ahan Title Track: A Study of Empowering Strength and Dismantling of Gender Stereotypes in Pakistani Society. *Indus Journal of Social Sciences*, 3(2), 626. [10.59075/ijss.v3i2.1481](https://doi.org/10.59075/ijss.v3i2.1481)
- Riyanti, E. D. (2023). The philosophical basis of critical discourse analysis. *Kanz Philosophia: A Journal for Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism*, 9(2), 371–394.
- Saleem, B., & Khalid, R. (2023). Ethnic Identity and Political Construction: An Anthropological Analysis of Baluchistan's Struggle for Autonomy in Pakistan. *Global Pakistan Studies Research Review*, 65. [https://doi.org/10.31703/gpsrr.2023\(vi-i\).06](https://doi.org/10.31703/gpsrr.2023(vi-i).06)
- Shah, M. I., Ahmad, S., & Danish, A. (2021). Controversies in political ideologies: A critical discourse analysis of speeches of Indian and Pakistani premiers on Pulwama incident. *Register Journal*, 14(1), 43–64. <https://doi.org/10.18326/rgt.v14i1.43-64>