



**“Mujhay Na Kha Jana¹!”: Women and Food in Faseeh
Bari Khan’s “Burns Road Ki Nilofer”**

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a materialist feminist study of Pakistani writer, Faseeh Bari Khan’s comedic telefilm, “Burns Road Ki Nilofer”, translated as “Nilofer of Burns Road”. A recurrent motif in Pakistani comedic telefilms is of women, both married and single, portrayed as beasts with voracious appetites and insatiable consumption patterns. This paper expounds how Khan’s female characters are portrayed as women of agency who, by claiming the right to comment on the desiring, economy and distribution of food, rise beyond their stereotypical representations of gluttonous eaters. Following Lisa Angelella’s scholarship on food and feminism, I posit that both Nilofer and her mother, Saeeda, try to negotiate their sense of selfhood and approach what it means to be a woman and a human via their conversations on food in the telefilm. My research aims to unravel the underlying dominant factor in their crippled sense of self while also retaining within it a muffled identification of female agency when the female characters consume as per their desiring. The void that women wish to fill while devouring great amounts of food, is occasioned by the absence of women’s positionality as a class in a patriarchal capitalist society where, as materialist feminist scholar Christine Delphy propounds, they are not made part of the system of “exchange of values” despite their domestic “labor” (“The Main Enemy” 73). Thus, this research reimagines womanhood and women’s exploitation in a domestic mode of production within Pakistani patriarchal capitalist cartographies.

Keywords: Materialist feminism, feminist food studies, Pakistani television, female selfhood, female appetite

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¹Translated as ‘Just don’t eat me’.

Introduction

This paper situates itself in the field of materialist feminist studies and food studies as it explores the conversations around food—its desiring, economy, production and distribution—expressing women’s desires and anxieties in Faseeh Bari Khan’s comedic telefilm, “*Burns Road Ki Nilofer*”, translated as “*Nilofer of Burns Road*”, aired on ARY Digital in 2008. This 93-minute telefilm is one of the many written by Khan in the ever-growing and well-received genre of comedy in Pakistan. The telefilm—written, directed and recorded in Urdu which is my native and first language—is also uploaded alongside English subtitles on *YouTube*, which paves the way for an unimpeded analysis in my research. The nuances that colour the process of translation have thus been carefully engaged with, owing to my command over both languages.

This paper borrows from Lisa Angelella’s concept of “alimentary subjectivity” as a means for women to take up a “desiring” position with respect to eating and in so doing, develop a sense of selfhood in themselves that poses “a threat to patriarchal culture” (“*A Marxist Feminism Is Possible*” 174). Yet, following Christine Delphy’s scholarship on materialist feminism, I expound that the selfhood propelled by alimentary subjectivity is only a crippled expression of one’s desires and anxieties since it is not equipped enough to take the economic and materialist realities of women into account. Thus, the realization of their absence from the realm of exchange of value, despite their domestic labour in a patriarchal capitalist society, makes Khan’s female characters at least question, if not overthrow, patriarchy in a Pakistani middle-class paraphernalia. Where this paper engages with Western scholarship both on food and women’s materialist realities, it also reveals a lack of Pakistan-specific theoretical nexus of food and feminist studies as well as praxis.

Food—an Interpreter for Female Subjectivity

While there are many aspects that can be studied in the light of materialist feminism in the telefilm, I have selected food as the propellant of my discussion on the anxieties of women in a familial domestic landscape based on Terry Eagleton’s idea that states “food is endlessly interpretable, as gift, threat, recompense, barter, seduction, solidarity, suffocation” (204). I take this concept to borrow only conversations and scenes of eating, feeding, preparing and distributing food from the telefilm to study how it “is actually a relationship” (Eagleton 204) between the consumers and providers in a domestic arena. This will further lead to interpreting the social and individual perplexities and desires of both consumers and providers

in the text. On this account, food is not simply a cultural prop for filling in the different frames of the telefilm, rather it is a symbolic and agentic tool for social commentary.

Further, I explore the relationship between women and food, as the title of my research states, by taking into consideration Roland Barthes' extension of Brillat-Savarin's ideas. Invoking Brillat-Savarin, Barthes states that historically and mythologically food was "men's business" while women were only confined to its serving and denied any gustative pleasures that are "the internal [or personal] pleasure" related to food (252-53). Barthes' mythological and historical perusal of food, and the gender biases exposed in the process guide my own study which postulates that a stark difference is observable in the attitudes of men and women regarding food in the telefilm under study. How women engage with the gustatory and economic aspects of food in "Burns Road" when they aspire to question patriarchy is seen here in the light of Sheila Bauer's discourse on food in her study, "Eating Away: A Study of Women's Relationship with Food in Literature". This study charts the destructive yet defining relationships of women with food, adding a new dimension to feminist studies (1). Bauer reasons that "[i]n a traditionally patriarchal society, women have been granted very little autonomy so they have taken advantage of any elements they could control. Food was one such element" (1). Saeeda and Nilofer are shown as women confined to the domestic sphere of life, spending most of their time either preparing food for the family or indulging in conversations around the gustatory pleasures or denials that their living conditions harness. Thus, food is the only element they have a little autonomy over.

Following Barbara Haber's scholarship on food that, like gender, she takes as a legitimate and fundamental area of feminist study, laying bare "the deepest or most hidden truths of people and groups" (69), this paper looks into how the deepest truths of a middle-class family in Pakistan are brought to light via their access to or denial of food. My research ventures to reveal different contours of the "hidden truths" (Haber 69) of women and men as distinct groups in Pakistani society where women are removed from the "zone of exchange" (Angelella 72) by men. The "truths" (Haber 69) laid bare in this study relate to women's aspirations for a more just position as a class in a patriarchal capitalist scheme of affairs that they are subjected to, and to men's manipulative schemes of countering these aspirations. While Haber assumes a more comforting relationship of food with women and their historicity, I explore the more agentic relationship between discourses on food and women paving the way for a retaliatory politics of women in the text.

Women Approaching Subjectivity in Khan's Telefilm

Khan's female characters in "Burns Road", despite engaging in an alimentary subjectivity, fail to address their hunger and plight, owing to their materialistic and capitalist exploitation. Angelella approaches "alimentary subjectivity" as an emancipatory mode of selfhood enacted by women as they "take a desiring, interactive position toward their worlds and manifest themselves as subjects" and not merely objects of men's desires (174). I approach this concept by analyzing the instances in the text where Nilofer and Saeeda take a desiring position towards food consumption. I further posit that the domestic mode of production in which Nilofer and her mother, Saeeda, operate excludes them from "the zone of exchange" at the market level and denies them any "exchange-value" for their services as they are only seen in relation to either their father or husband that holds the status of the patriarch of the family (Angelella 72-73). It is this lacking and unequal socio-political positionality as opposed to men that generates discontent and revolt in their attitudes towards food, something they have a responsibility to prepare. But as American sociologists, Alex McIntosh and Mary Zey postulate in "Women as Gatekeepers", "responsibility is not equivalent to control", Saeeda and Nilofer, therefore, do not have "control" over the means of food production despite being "responsible" for its preparation (133).

In "Burns Road", Nilofer and Saeeda deviate from the normative televised portrayal of an ideal image of a good woman in Pakistani society by eating voraciously on screen and/or indulging in debates on food in all its varying aspects. Khan projects both women as having a bulky physique, allocates a considerable amount of screen time to them, and provides them with dialogues that question their own miserable and exploited position as a mother/wife or a daughter in the household. A good woman happens to be the complete opposite of such representations. According to a holistic research carried out on six television dramas aired on private Pakistani television channels, Ayesha Ashfaq and Zubair Shafiq contend that the "perfect women" of Pakistani television dramas are "expected to be weak, dependent, timid, soft spoken, emotional and submissive" (60). Khan's female characters' deviation from this ideal image functions as a discursive and praxic model for women as rising subjects in power, breaking free from their stereotypical representations on Pakistani television. Considering Taoufiq Sakhkhane's contention on speech being "the privileged catalyst of agency; lack of speech [being] the absence of agency" (42), Nilofer and Saeeda reach and practice their feminine agency and further dismantle stereotypical female ideals through their dialogues between each other and with other members of the

household.

Nilofer and Saeeda are presented respectively as voraciously consuming food and being fed in two very important scenes in the telefilm. By not feeding men but being fed by them, they might seem to be discarding and ascending from the position of alimentary “servile subjectivity”² (Angelella 176), and enacting “alimentary subjectivity” (174). Men are shown to be at women’s service instead of the opposite normative conception that the audience of Pakistani television is acclimatised to, that is of a woman feeding and serving her husband, father, son or any male relative in the familial domestic space. In the opening montage with Nilofer’s on-screen narration for the scene where her father, Abrar, is feeding her mother “chicken tikka and stuff”³, she confides in her audience that such an episode of feeding is succeeded by the birth of a new baby in the family (“Burns Road” 00:07:23-00:07:38). This coaxing strategy of her father, the patriarch of the home, at the surface, appears merely as a tool of her mother’s sexual subjugation. In fact, it brings to the fore Abrar’s intention of binding Saeeda to the status of an unpaid provider in the domestic space that he controls as the patriarch. Christine Delphy, a French feminist sociologist and theorist, expounds this double subjugation of women as mothers/wives and domestic laborers by contending that:

Since raising children requires work, and since this work is extorted from women, it can be argued that men are afraid women will try to escape motherhood, or excessive motherhood, by limiting the number of children they bear. Men therefore ensure they always have the means to withdraw control of childbearing from women. (*Close to Home* 26)

Abrar, in this light, controls Saeeda’s childbearing capability to bind her to the domestic sphere and ensure her subservience to his family.

Despite the onerous consequences of this repetitive feeding episode for Saeeda, she is shown as enthusiastically participating in a food-centric scene and enjoying herself as is evinced by her muted playful smiles and seducing gestures towards her husband (“Burns Road” 00:07:23-00:07:48). In envisioning this representation of womanhood, drawing on Hélène Cixous’ conception of “the genesis of woman go[ing] through the mouth, through a certain oral pleasure” (133), Saeeda is close to gaining an “alimentary subjectivity” as Angelella conceives of (174). According to Angelella, women can embark on the journey of selfhood, a comprehension of their position and manifestation as “subjects” in the world, in

² Angelella contends that a woman represents an “alimentary servile position”, which shows the “opposite of alimentary subjectivity”, in instances where she is “alienated from her own bodily needs and desires” (176) and indulges in “devoting herself to others’ needs” (180).

³ *Chicken tikka* is a famous street food in Pakistan, especially relished by middle class and lower middle-class people. It is a dish of marinated and barbecued chicken pieces usually sold at night-time.

“eating” (174). I argue that Saeeda’s consent in eating via Abrar’s hands lacks agency and hardly leads towards a sense of selfhood, considering the repercussion of this consumption leaves her with an augmented amount of unpaid domestic labour with more children to rear, while Abrar is exempted from both. Her acquiescence thus emanates out of her economic insecurity at the hands of a patriarch who could deny her social security if she wishes to “escape motherhood and excessive motherhood” (26; emphasis added).

An exchange on a similar subjugating account is depicted when Nilofer is on a date with Hamid, a cable operator residing in the same building that her family lives in. This five-minute conversation (“Burns Road” 00:33:47-00:38:50) shows only Nilofer consuming a variety of street food while Hamid watches her eat, and uses this feeding superiority over her to coax her into eloping with him, and thus, betray her family and put her social reputation at stake for his pleasure. Nilofer, in spite of being put in a vulnerable social position here, keeps devouring and commenting on the quality and quantity of the food. Her devotion to devouring in this instance might be understood by the audience as evidence of her alimentary subjectivity, for her “[e]ating mobilizes [her] desires, pleasures and physiological processes which exist outside of the regulation of social etiquette” (Angelella 175). Hamid’s claim, “I don’t feel like eating after listening to you” (“Burns Road” 00:35:58-00:36:02) comes into play when Nilofer orders “two burgers and a Fanta”, insisting she alone is going to consume it all (00:35:48-00:35:54). Her appetite appalls him as it questions the lady-like norm of denying appetite that he is socially conditioned to project on her. American philosopher, Susan Bordo expounds how via “micropractices of appetite denial, women perform their subordinate identity” (qtd. in Angelella 175). It is this subordinate identity, that Hamid wishes to confer on Nilofer, owing to his assumed patriarchal supremacy over her, which manifests in his quintessential dialogue guiding my research, “*Mujhay na kha jana!*” translated as “Just don’t eat me!” (“Burns Road” 00:38:2-00:38:27; emphasis added). In the light of this dialogue, I argue that Hamid fears that Nilofer will devour his societal conceptions, and thus, his agency that generates out of them, erasing his masculine position which functions only due to its counterpart, that is Nilofer’s feminine position. Hamid is apprehensive of her appetite as it makes her a transgressor who passionately approaches language for the manifestation of her experiential position. Nilofer, in this scene, not only enjoys eating but also talks about her gustatory pleasure explicitly, assuming the position of a woman who consumes language as desirously as food.

Nilofer’s dialogue with her parents later in the thematically significant

'family meal scene' resonates with Hamid's fear and disgust at her appetite when her position as a woman is degenerated upon being called animal names like "a camel", "an elephant" and "an elephant's kid" by her father, owing to her "non-human appetite" as perceived by her mother ("Burns Road" 00:24:08-00:27:33). Tamar Heller and Patricia Moran write that "[m]aternal approval . . . depends upon acquiescence to a feminine code of self-abnegation" (10). Thus, only a certain kind of appetite is sanctioned for her as a daughter and as a woman who later has to be married off, thus assuming the role her mother holds at the current stage. To Saeeda's discontent, Nilofer keeps digressing from this "[m]aternal approval" throughout the telefilm (10).

I argue that Nilofer's subjectivity yet falls short of any agency as she keeps eating while being body shamed and demurred by Hamid when he calls her a "watermelon"⁴ ("Burns Road" 00:34:22-00:34:25), equating her disposition with an edible item and resultantly condemning her to the status of a social and sexual 'other'. His derogatory commentary on her dietary proportion, which is unladylike, overshadows and subjugates her desiring stance. Even in desiring [read: eating], her agency is muffled and she is depicted as a caricature of a woman who wishes to rise out of an "alimentary service" to her patriarch in order to become an "alimentary subject"⁵ (Angelella 180). The argument here is that Nilofer's consent in being fed by Hamid does not lead her towards a sense of selfhood, considering this consuming episode leads to her physical derogation. She bears this demeaning episode, owing to a lingering fear of upsetting the only suitor she finds agreeable compared to the ones proposed by her parents. In this light, Angelella's argument that women pose "a threat" to the "patriarchal culture" in taking a desiring alimentary stance (175) consequently falls short of agency in the telefilm. Following Helene Cixous's scholarship on oral pleasures and femininity, I make the case that Nilofer's oral alimentary pleasure is not a passage to the agentic feminine power. And hence, it diverts from Cixous's contention that states "the genesis of woman [and her feminine power or agency] goes through the mouth, through a certain oral pleasure" (133).

Women outside the Zone of Exchange of Values

Khan's female characters are portrayed as dissatisfied women in relation to their socio-economic status as mothers, wives, daughters and sisters. This bizarreness

⁴ In a Pakistani context, calling someone a watermelon is based in a mockery of their weight, particularly of a plump physique.

⁵ Angelella's research carves out a stark difference between the two positionalities. A woman is subjected to "alimentary service" when she literally has to "serve" food to family and outsiders without any chance of denying this service in a patriarchal domestic sphere. A desiring "alimentary subject", contrarily, is a woman who "reject[s] the norm of alimentary service" and has "no one to serve" in the domestic sphere. (180).

in their familial and sexual relations emanates from something other than mere alimentary servility that they are expected to accept unquestioningly. The void that women wish to fill in their lives and their sense of selfhood is evinced in the 'family meal scene' where Saeeda serves mutton curry to her family. Her appetite is not elided in this scene as she not only serves but consumes as well, but her agency as a woman in a patriarchal capitalist society is neglected. This scene stands in stark contrast with the former ones I have delineated because it does not show Saeeda being fed by the patriarch. It is here and now that she admits she cannot raise the family single-handedly and needs a maid for domestic chores ("Burns Road" 00:24:28-00:24:32). Moran, an English scholar on women's literature, maintains that a family meal when "[d]eliberate, planned, [and] orchestrated, ... enables the stable family to coalesce around the kitchen table, where the mother can feel good about the food—and herself" (225). Saeeda's 'planned meal' does not engender the motherly affections and emotions that literature on women suggests, especially in a South Asian context. Instead, she comprehends this feeding service as domestic labour. Taking cue from Marjorie DeVault's scholarship on food practices and construction of family, I argue that it is "through the work of feeding" that Saeeda "quite literally produce[s] family life from day to day" feeding (13). Her demand for a maid is thus occasioned by her understanding of her selfhood in relation to her domestic work in her family, and not by her "desiring" for food (Angelella 174) and the "internal pleasure" that it provokes (Barthes 252).

Instead of gratitude and care, her conversation around food in the 'family meal scene' underscores her exclusion from the perks of her labour's "exchange-value" at the hands of her husband (Angelella 73). Delphy in her research on materialist feminism, contends that "women's production always has an exchange-value—that is it can always be exchanged by them—except when they work within the framework of the family" ("The Main Enemy" 73). Inspired by this perspective, I suggest that Saeeda equates her domestic work with that of a maid, a woman who gets paid for her work when she operates in a household, not as a family member but as an outsider. Saeeda does not require monetary exchange for her services knowing that her position as a wife and mother in a patriarchal capitalist sphere does not sanction her any economic rights. She enlists all the domestic tasks she has to perform without aid from any family member or an outsider's help all day long that resonate with a house help's areas of service namely "cooking, washing, mopping and dusting" ("Burns Road" 00:24:47-00:24:51). Her alimentary subjectivity in this instance thus fails to fill her void that is ruled by her economic subjugation in a familial landscape.

Saeeda's protests against her domestic drudgery punctuate her labour as a mother too. Her pleas for a maid stem from her admission that she "cannot look after nine children", and sarcastically asks her husband to take up her task to understand her condition ("Burns Road" 00:24:28-00:24:44). I take Saeeda's remark as mere sarcasm since throughout the telefilm, Abrar is not even once seen holding, feeding or rearing his own children. He is the aloof patriarch who fulfils the position of a supervisor as if his "family is a group of individuals who owe their labor to a particular 'boss'" (Angelella 67). Saeeda's repeated pleas for a maid are met by Abrar's cold comparison of her state with that of his mother who raised fourteen children on her own ("Burns Road" 00:25:4-00:25:44). I read his appropriation as textured by Delphy's scholarship that contends "[p]art of a woman's labour power is still appropriated since 'she must fulfill her family responsibilities'—that is, she must do the housework and raise children without pay" ("The Main Enemy" 73). Saeeda and her mother-in-law are thus appraised via one fixed model of motherhood in a patriarchal scheme. Any digression on Saeeda's part is deemed as uncanny and denied any potency by the patriarch. If she fails to compete with Abrar's mother, she will fail in the consolidated fixed image of the mother.

Nilofer, by virtue of her mother's expectations of her, follows in this lineage of oppression. In the family meal scene, while she eats what is perhaps the favourite dish of Pakistani society, roasted meat curry, she is continuously criticized by her parents on account of her limited participation in domestic chores. Her plea to her mother to "not curse [her] food" ("Burns Road" 00:24:12-00:24:15), that is to let her enjoy it without judgment, is muffled by her mother's complaints about her little contribution to the household chores. This culminates in her leaving her meal in the middle and being exiled from the one space that she takes pleasure in the most, that is, the serving of meals or food. Being a woman and a daughter, as long as she does not partake in the domestic labour her mother is condemned to, she will remain exiled from the pleasures of alimentary subjectivity. Thus, Angelella's contention fails to be empowering enough to emancipate women from the real onus of society, that is, women's condemnation to merely domestic work without any monetary exchange of their labour. Delphy, in her essay, "A Materialist Feminism *Is* Possible", peruses the nexus of capitalism and patriarchy and propounds:

The power of the husband and the power of the father are not opposed; they are both the power of the head of the household, and that power accounts for the appropriation of the labour of the children as well as of the wife, and that

of unmarried female or male relatives and other dependents. (171)

It is to this power of Abrar as the head of the family that both Saeeda as a wife and Nilofer as the eldest daughter are condemned to. I say the eldest daughter and not a child because of two reasons. Firstly, none of Nilofer’s brothers and sisters are expected to partake in the domestic tasks, calling attention to her gender status here and by extension, her oppression owing to her status of a woman. Secondly, since she is the eldest offspring and falls into the category of an adult woman, she is close to getting married and thus, taking the position of a wife in another family. In the latter sense, she is closer to Saeeda’s experience and sphere of oppression than her siblings.

Although to a lesser degree, Nilofer too experiences exclusion from the “zone of exchange” (Angelella 72) in a Pakistani economic sphere. In a scene where she is preparing food with her mother in the kitchen, her alimentary desire of eating street food “*kulchay nihari*” and “*malai paratha*”⁶ instead of “*anda dabal roti*” (egg and toast) in breakfast is subsumed into the domestic labour she is yoked in (“Burns Road” 00:44:27-00:44:38). The items she desires to eat require more time, expertise and resources to prepare than a simple and cheap English breakfast of egg and toast and ergo, considered as culinary delicacies in Pakistan. While she delves on her desires, her mother keeps reminding her to speed up lest her father comes and raises a ruckus over a delay in ‘serving’ him food (“Burns Road” 00:44:00-00:47:27). I argue that Nilofer’s indulgence, in this sense, on “devouring and rending” leads to the “transgression of former [patriarchal] limits” that her family imposes on her (Angelella 175). Thus, she poses “an obvious threat in a patriarchal culture” that she operates in (175). Via food, she desires something luxuriant in a middle-class family and thus wishes to break from the barriers of not only her gender but her economic class as well. Yet, this threat is not potent enough to be even registered by her mother as she ignores her comments on food and keeps reiterating “move your hands faster” (“Burns Road” 00:45:32-00:45:35), revealing she is merely a pair of helping hands for her mother in the arena of domestic labour.

At another point, Nilofer weeps before her mother, claiming she never endeavoured to understand what her daughter wanted. This emotional breakdown is instigated by Saeeda forcing her to mince the meat for kebabs by hand on a sill instead of using machines to do so⁷—an exhaustive task that leaves Nilofer’s hands “hard as stone” (“Burns Road” 01:15:00- 01:15:12). While the thought of

⁶ Both are expensive breakfast delicacies in the South Asian context.

⁷ The method of making mince on a stone or metal slab is considered to produce a tastier consistency of mince, and hence widely desired in a Pakistani or South Asian context.

the gustatory pleasure, arising from such a method of making kebabs, may have willingly led Nilofer to do the task, she prefers to lay bare the inhumane effect of this domestic practice on her. Saeeda employs her to the task since she herself is alone and rooted in such grinding practices. Both the women are paralyzed by the “impossibility of exchanging [their] labour, which stems in turn from the impossibility of changing employers” (Angelella 76). Neither of the two women is permitted to leave the domestic stronghold that Abrar, their “employer”, in this context rules over (76).

Women Forging New Identities within the Familial Domestic Sphere

Having said that, Saeeda and Nilofer are the only characters in the telefilm who bring to the fore the unjust power structures as highlighted by Delphy that “women are now saying ‘there is no mystery: we are oppressed because we are exploited. What we go through makes life easier for others’” (“A Materialist Feminism *Is Possible*” 180). These ‘others’ are men who gain advantage by the unpaid and non-retaliatory domestic labour of their wives, mothers and daughters. Saeeda’s dialogue, “[f]or God’s sake, is it possible to serve a whole battalion with one kilo of meat?” (“Burns Road” 00:25:04-00:25:08), uttered during the family meal scene when one of her younger daughters asks for another piece of meat is juxtaposed with her husband’s silence on the unjust and dissatisfactory economy of food served before them. She alone indulges in commenting on the oppressing state of nourishment in her family in this significant scene while the patriarch keeps pacifying her rage and disregarding her demands for a more just system of food distribution in the family. Abrar’s reaction here echoes McIntosh and Zey’s postulation based on their historical and interdisciplinary research that:

[M]en’s control over the family finances, [and] women’s obligations to produce a harmonious family life...increase the likelihood that men will ultimately control family food decisions...the issue of food control reinforces the impression that women maintain little power over their own consumption-producing activities. (137)

This “little power” (137) that women hold echoes the inadequate political and economic potency of alimentary subjectivity for Pakistani middle-class women when they are yet trapped in a materialistically and patriarchally stifling social structure.

Reviewing Delphy’s work on materialist feminism, American art critic Laura Cottingham emphasizes that the “appropriation of women’s labor is, unlike other labor exploitation, mystified as labor ‘freely given’ or produced out of ‘love’”

(21). I argue that while the mystification of labour “produced out of love” (21) holds its oppressive grip over women’s agency, the female characters of Khan’s telefilm forge another identity out of their emancipatory dialogues and commentaries on food. In the family meal scene, Saeeda chides her eldest son when he sneakily steals a piece of meat from his younger brother’s plate while commenting on the malnourished state of her younger child. Even in her own positionality as a victimized and silenced labourer in this scene, she is the only retaliatory voice against the unjust distribution and access of food in her family. Thus, Khan’s female characters, while staying within the oppressive domestic space, employ an agency that Pakistani women can associate with and find solidarity in. Motherhood can thus be seen in the light of resistance against the unjust economic and patriarchal outlines of a Pakistani society. It is therefore imperative that we see women in a position of challenging the impact of these repressive contours not merely on themselves but on every other member of a domestic field. “Nilofer of Burns Road” is therefore a feminist text that charts new identities for women within the miniscule yet definitive sphere of domesticity.

Conclusion

In her essay, “Protofeminism and Antifeminism”, Delphy states that “values are produced by societies, human societies, as are all phenomena... The idea that a society’s values could originate outside it is simply a return to Platonic universals” (203). It is the formation and re-formation of these values that women are in a process to imagine and postulate in a patriarchal structure of Pakistani society. “Nilofer of Burns Road” is a product of this feminist processual praxis in Pakistani television and film studies. Through their conversations on the economy of food, and not merely their desiring of it, Khan’s female characters approach in their own capacity and via their unique positionality, the idea of selfhood and the pathway to finding one’s agency. In her review on Delphy, Cottingham posits that “it is culture which dictates what ... differences mean” in terms of men and women and not the anatomy of their being (21). And as media and television are dominant players in the formation, reformation and portrayal of culture in any society and to be precise, Pakistan, then a materialist feminist text like “Burns Road” can bring about considerable changes in the cultural precepts through a discourse that uniquely and boldly portrays women of agency.

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