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Visual representation of gender in flood coverage of Pakistani print media



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 29 March 2013

Accepted 2 April 2014

Available online 13 April 2014

Keywords:

Gender

Visuals

Flood

Pakistani print media

Framing

Stereotypes

ABSTRACT

This paper studies gender representation in the visual coverage of the 2010 floods in Pakistan. The data were collected from flood visuals published in the most circulated mainstream English newspapers in Pakistan, *Dawn* and *The News*. This study analyses how gender has been framed in the flood visuals. It is argued that visual representation of gender reinforces the gender stereotypes and cultural norms of Pakistani society. The gender-oriented flood coverage in both newspapers frequently seemed to take a reductionist approach while confining the representation of women to gender, and gender-specific roles. Though the gender-sensitive coverage displayed has been typical, showing women as helpless victims of flood, it has aroused sentiments of sympathy among readers and donors, inspiring them to give immediate moral and material help to the affected people. This agenda set by media might be to exploit the politics of sympathy but it has the effect of endorsing gender stereotypes.

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1. Introduction

Pakistani society is multicultural and diverse in its composition. It is strongly male-dominated, despite the recent haphazard efforts made by the government, as well as by the non-government sectors, to show Pakistani society as one of gender equality. In Pakistan, in all walks of life, men are generally found to be involved in roles of leadership, whereas women are kept at a secondary level in most spheres of socio-political influence. Women are neither considered to be strong enough to replace men in positions requiring physical strength, nor are they perceived to be capable of making wise decisions. That is why they are traditionally assigned secondary roles outside the home and only offered primary roles in traditional domestic and household scenarios. However, the recent floods have put lives at stake and upset the usual patterns of behaviour; everyone potentially faced misery and had to perform extraordinary tasks for the sake of survival. At a time, when the majority of land areas were almost submerged by floodwaters, thousands were plucked from rooftops while the dead and the vulnerable were left behind; Pakistani media brought the distress of the floods into public view with coverage that left a lasting impression in the minds of people.

The year 2010 is considered to be one of the worst years on record for natural disasters (UN, 2010). According to the report of (CRED),¹ in 2010, 89% of the 207 million people affected by disaster were Asian. Furthermore, the report showed that the estimated damage caused by the floods in Pakistan cost \$9.5 billion (Reuters,

2011; January 24). More than 97% of all natural disaster-related deaths took place in developing countries (Oxfam, 2005).²

2. The 2010 flood in Pakistan

In July 2010, unexpected and heavy monsoon rains triggered sweeping floods from the north to the south of Pakistan. According to Zamir Akrem, Pakistani ambassador to the UN centre in Geneva, floodwaters covered an area roughly the size of England. A satellite survey showed about 160,000 square kilometres of land to be underwater; this is roughly equal to the areas of Austria, Belgium and Switzerland combined (Gronewold, 2010). In thousands of villages and towns, millions of homes were destroyed and swept away by the devastating floods. The catastrophe was larger than the disasters of the 2004 Indonesia tsunami, the 2005 Pakistan earthquake, and the 2010 Haiti earthquake combined (Telegraph, 2010; 13 August).

The United Nations has rated the flooding in Pakistan as the greatest humanitarian crisis in the recent history. Ban Ki-moon, the UN Secretary General, said that he had never seen a disaster as bad as that of the flooding in Pakistan.³ According to reports from the National and Provincial Disaster Management Authority of Pakistan, an estimated 20 million⁴ people were affected. The death toll was 1985 while 2946 people were injured due to the spread of

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¹ The Belgium-based Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disaster.

² http://www.oxfam.org.uk/education/resources/climate_change_copenhagen/files/Copenhagen%20-%20QandA%20for%20teachers.pdf.

³ The Nation dated August 16, 2010.

⁴ <http://www.pakistanfloods.pk/daily-updates/situation-report>; retrieved on January 2011.

the flood throughout the country, with countless more missing due to flash floods and landslides. Although the natural disaster has come to an end, its aftermath is even more severe and challenging than the disaster. Major infrastructures such as dams, power stations, roads, bridges, schools, government buildings, agricultural installations, and water reservoirs were severely damaged. The latest assessments estimate that more than 1.89 million homes have been damaged or destroyed in 78 districts of Pakistan (Figs. 1 and 2).

3. The gender aspects of natural disasters

The effect of natural disasters is not gender-neutral (Nelson et al., 2002). The poor in both developed countries and in developing countries, of which women comprise 70% (UN, 1995), are

predominantly at risk with the least capacity to overcome the uncertainty brought by disaster. Hence, they are affected disproportionately (Drexhage, 2006). Women have been identified as a vulnerable 'population' because of the feminisation of poverty. Natural disaster magnifies existing inequality, reinforcing the disparity between women and men with regard to vulnerability and the capability to cope with natural disasters (Mitchell et al., 2007; UNDP, 2007). For example, the 1991 cyclone in Bangladesh killed 138,000 people, many of whom were women older than 40 years (Bern et al., 1993; Ikeda, 1995). Similarly, male survivors outnumbered female survivors by a ratio of almost 3:1 in the 2004 tsunami (Oxfam, 2005). It is the socially constructed gender-specific vulnerability of females that has been built into everyday socioeconomic patterns that leads to the relatively higher female disaster mortality rates compared to those of men (Mitchell et al., 2007; Neumayer and Plümper, 2007). This suggests that more

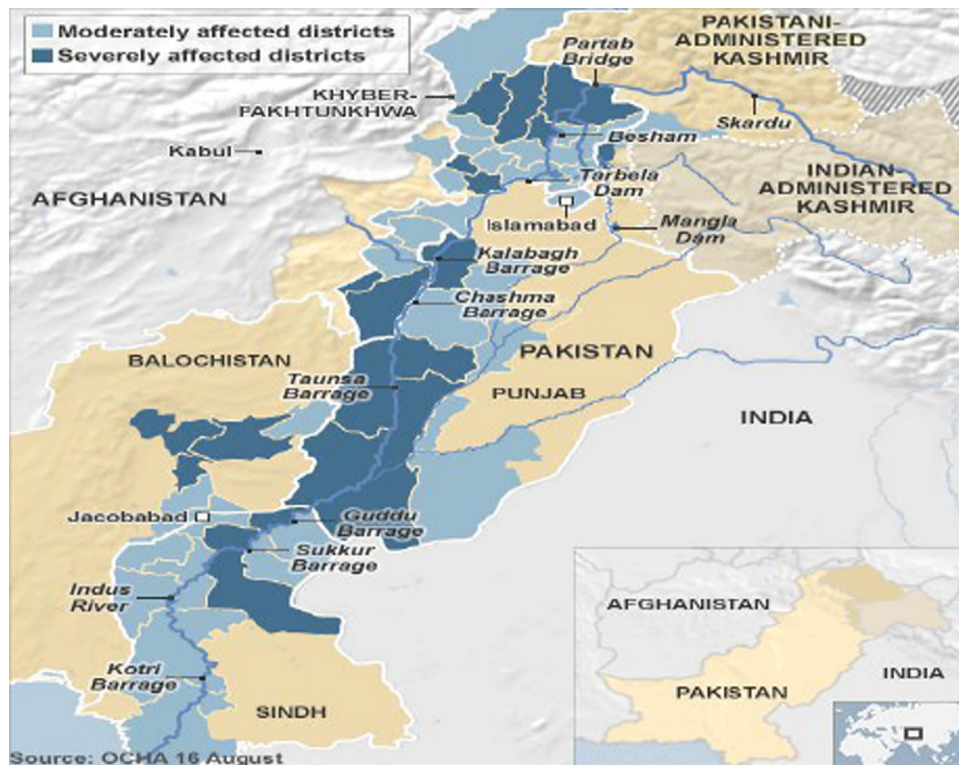


Fig. 1. Map of Pakistan showing flood-affected areas.

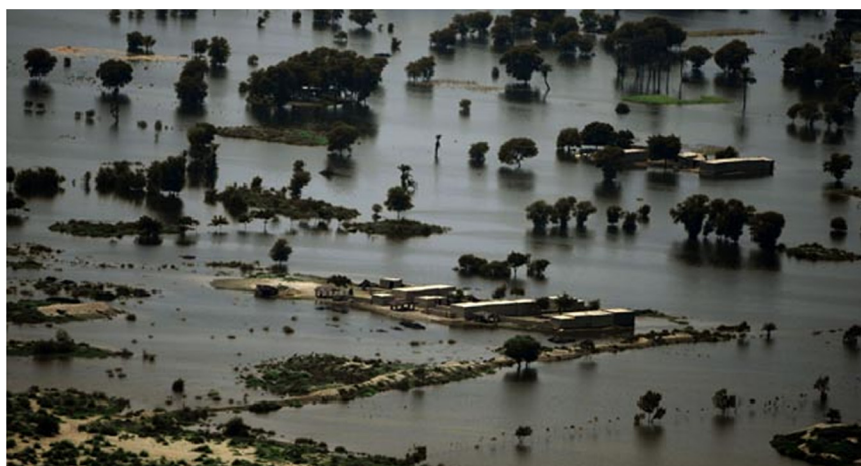


Fig. 2. By AFP published in Dawn, August 19, 2010.

needs to be done by way of providing equal access to information and life-skill development (UN, 2010), improving socio-economic status of women, safeguarding equal basic human rights and educating men to acknowledge women's equality. Media can play an active role in this regard.

In most developing countries, women are more prone to the negative effects of disaster and extreme climate events as they are often restricted by gender-specific mores such as honour, shame, the maintaining of privacy and the separation from strangers at any cost, even in the situation of the most severe environmental catastrophe. Women are more vulnerable to gender inequality before, during and after natural disaster in their exercise of human rights, political and economic status, land ownership, access to suitable housing, exposure to violence, rights to education, and provision of healthcare and, in particular, access to reproductive and sexual healthcare (Cannon, 2002; Islam, 2009). Gender stereotypes may result in women not being able to seek medical treatment for physical and psychological problems to the same extent as men. The disadvantaged position of women in terms of health means greater difficulty to cope in situations of disaster. In most developing countries, women are more calorie-deficient than men, so they take more time to recover from the negative effects of flooding on their well-being. The situation for women is further aggravated when men cannot have access to adequate counselling and other forms of stress support. The insecurity and anxiety that result in men affected by natural disaster may increase the level of violence against women, including sexual violence (Hannan, 2002). Thus, women very often suffer more as there is a direct relationship between climatic crises and vulnerability. In situations where women help to devise early warning systems and reconstruction efforts, communities are better equipped when natural disaster strikes (IUCN, 2007). The ratio of deaths among women can be reduced provided families, neighbours, local authorities, and especially those in charge of early warnings and emergency evacuation consider women in giving them related information (Bern et al., 1993). The participation of women in environmental decision-making at a high level remains limited, which restricts the integration of women's issues or gender perspectives into any policy-making pertaining to environment (UN, 2010). Many studies reveal that women express greater concern about climatic-induced calamities than men do about environmental problems (Bord and O'Connor, 1997; Davidson and Freudenburg, 1996; Lee, 2008). Therefore, women can play a very constructive role in preventive and coping strategies in the aftermath of disaster; this fact has often been overlooked. They can be active players in mitigation and adaptation strategies.

4. Print media and gender

People believe in news photography. 'They have more inherent trust in what they see than in what they read' (Lasica, 1989). Shocking visuals of scenes of mass destruction attract the attention of the masses all over the world as compared to simple factual statements. Disaster brings pain and agony for people, although language can capture a wide range of human experience, it simply fails when it comes to pain. Hence, the visual representation of natural disaster makes a lasting impression on the minds and souls of humans. The print media tries to engross audiences by publishing appalling stories and bewitching photographs as they provide information. Photo journalists' need and desire for apt shots may sometimes engage them in untoward situations, which they pursue as visuals that have more appeal and also have market value.

Women have been represented stereotypically in the media. There is a longstanding tendency to represent women as

exaggeratedly romantic, glamorous and exotic, or, in one word, simply 'other' or 'outside' or alternatively inferior in some way; as lacking in some moral quality which 'we' (the men) assume. With men in commanding positions both in the East and in the West, and equipped with better resources for galvanising their overall domination, the media favour men's interests. News has a privileged relationship to the political and economic interests of men (Mthala, 2000). When presented in the media as 'ordinary' people, women are more likely than men to be presented as passive or as acted upon rather than shown as active players in society.

In order to have their interests voiced, women deserve a correlatively significant position in media coverage. However, the print media still take sides by supporting male interests and this situation further aggravates women's vulnerability. While engaged in reporting, the media sometimes present oversimplified and distorted characterisations of the responses of women to disaster. Media, quite often, play a considerable role in propagating mistaken beliefs about female victims during disaster coverage. The media often portray women as being helpless, awaiting external aid and support, unable to cope and deserving of charity. News reports and media stories that depict female victims and survivors as being shocked and confused can create an environment of public misunderstanding. Not all are paralyzed; only a few are panic-stricken and traumatised, while most of the women, even those stricken with grief, begin an immediate evacuation, relocation and resettlement. But people believe in gender stereotypes as women as helpless victims. Among the images of victims, women, both as casualties and as survivors, figure prominently. Even those who cannot read newspapers can be psychologically influenced by the visuals. No doubt, the visuals of women have the power to grab people's attention and a picture of a woman in distress has even greater power to captivate minds. The visuals of vulnerable women in situations of flood may create greater sympathy and compassion among the people. Flood coverage through visuals encourages volunteers and donors to come forward for rescue operations and to provide food, shelter and medical aid to flood victims and those affected. To some extent, it plays a role in triggering the momentum of the relief activities. Following the 2004 tsunami, media coverage of the disaster played a role in motivating the people to generate remarkably large donations from the international community for the rehabilitation of the affected areas (Benedikt, 2007; Stirrat, 2006). On the other hand, visuals of disaster with exclusive focus on gender are an available commodity to sell in the open market of the audience. It may increase the circulation of the newspaper and thus the visuals of flood-affected women may have been used as a marketing strategy by newspapers. When considering the role of media, it is important to keep in mind that it is not just a means of information transfer; rather it is also an independent actor with its own biases and vested interests (Boykoff and Boykoff, 2004). Media sell news information as a commodity and also as a safeguard for their political agendas. Media are owned by individuals or business groups; consequently, their media content, editorial and news agendas openly reflect their political and economic interests (Monbiot et al., 2005; Oreskes, 2004). The present study gives an in-depth insight about the representation of gender in Pakistani print media.

5. Methodology

The paper focuses on the visual coverage of gender in the 2010 floods in Pakistan. In this study, the research questions are associated with the visual representation of gender in the Pakistani print media's coverage of the flood: How is gender

represented in visual flood coverage in newspapers? Did media break or reinforce gender stereotypes in visual flood coverage?

Every society has certain stereotypes; therefore this researcher will also analyse media coverage to see whether the print media have either broken or reinforced gender stereotypes in their visual flood coverage; it is intended that this analysis will provide an insight into the understanding of the cultural perspectives of the print media as revealed in gender-based visual flood coverage. The issues raised relate to photojournalism, with regard to media, gender and natural disaster; these are studied in the theoretical context of framing. The approach offers a more nuanced way of understanding gendered media representation. By 'framing', we refer to the social construction of a phenomenon by mass media, recognising that photo journalists not only convey an 'objective' picture of the events but also establish interpretative frames in presenting to their readers within which those pictorial representations acquire meanings. How women are framed in the coverage may be highly influential in guiding people's opinion of moving heart and minds. As defined by Entman (2003), 'to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient... in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described'.

5.1. Selected media

This study analyses the coverage in two national English-language daily newspapers of Pakistan – *Dawn* and *The News*, including their Sunday editions, for the one month and 10 days period of July 20–August 31, 2010. *Dawn* is the country's oldest (founded 1941) and most widely read English-language newspaper, considered as an elite paper due to its quality and targeted towards the elite class of the society, including policy makers, decision makers and intelligentsia. The circulation is somewhere between 100,000 and 200,000. *The News* is also an English-language newspaper. It has about the same circulation, and is more targeted towards the educated middle class than its competitor *Dawn*.

5.2. Sampling

Tables 1 and 2 show the number and percentage of total visuals published, as well as the number and percentage of the visuals with women and men appearing in both the newspapers.

As the tables show, there are a total of 132 visuals in both newspapers. There were a total of 91 visuals in *Dawn* during the period of the study; 36 were visuals with men and/or women and 44 were without people. There were 41 visuals in *The News*: of those visuals, there were only 3 which portrayed men and/or women and 38 of them were without people. There was a stark difference in the number of gender-based visuals in the coverage of *The News*, which had only 7% gendered visuals. Most of the visuals in the study originated from the newspaper, *Dawn*. Nearly

Table 1
Number and percentage of visuals in *Dawn*.

Serial no.	Period	Total visuals	Visuals with women and/or men	Visuals without people	File photos
1	23–31 July	2	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	0
2	1–10 August	22	10 (45%)	11 (50%)	1
3	11–20 August	29	14 (48%)	13 (45%)	2
4	21–31 August	38	11 (29%)	19 (50%)	8
5	Total period of study	91	36 (40%)	44 (48%)	11

Table 2
Number and percentage of visuals in *The News*.

Serial no.	Period	Total visuals	Visuals with women and/or men	Visuals without people
1	23–31 July	17	0	17 (100%)
2	1–10 August	12	1 (8%)	11 (92%)
3	11–20 August	12	2 (17%)	10 (83%)
4	21–31 August	0	0	0
5	Total period of study	41	3 (7%)	38 (93%)

all the visuals are included in which women are present, either alone or with men. Visuals with the absence of human beings have been excluded from the analysis. In this study, out of 39 gendered images only 23 visuals are included; all of the visuals where men appear to be in action whilst the women appear to be sitting helplessly, only a small number have been presented to avoid repetition.

6. Gender representation in visual flood coverage of Pakistani print media

The visual coverage of gender in Pakistani print media supports the feminist argument that cultural hegemony is persistent and accepted as being the norm (Danner and Walsh, 1999). The newsrooms of the Pakistani print media are no exception. Cultural hegemony is defined as '...the phenomenon of a dominant and oppressive culture order being adopted by a majority of people because of the ubiquitous nature of mass media...' (Malhotra and Rogers, 2000). In the opinion of this researcher, the Pakistani print media unwittingly contribute to masculine cultural hegemony. Women are thus symbolically excluded from an important cultural mechanism of power. A study conducted by Ali (2010) found that there were scarcely any gender visuals in the same two newspapers – *Dawn* and *The News* during the period of one month from December 1 to 31, 2009. When the situation is normal, the media consider information relating to environmental issues not as a priority but in an abnormal situation of disaster, media are under pressure to fill the information void and to disseminate more news and visuals about the catastrophe. The enhanced coverage of visual accounts also increases the overall news coverage with the use of gender-related visuals. The manner in which the Pakistani print media represented women in the 2010 flood coverage is presented in the following section.

6.1. Helplessness

The stereotype of Pakistani women is that they are helpless, sitting idle and waiting for men to help them in all situations. In Fig. 3, women are sitting in a group with their children whilst protecting their possessions. We can see that the men's vehicles such as their bicycles and a motor cycle are also there. The presence of the vehicles also implies that their men are around although they are not sitting with them. They may be busy finding a safe place for the family to stay or performing some relief and rescue activities. The absence of men in the visual gives the impression that they are somewhere busy doing something or, in other words, they are in action. However, at first glance the framing of the visual conveys the message that these women are sitting idly, doing nothing. However, in the domestic sphere, women are the frontline managers in rebuilding their lives and caring of the families. In the visual, women are sitting in groups extending the substantial and enduring practical and emotional



Fig. 3. Flood survivors sit on a high ground at a flooded area – photo by AFP published in *Dawn*, August 16, 2010.



Fig. 4. Tent cities have also been set up in Sukkur – photo by AP published in *Dawn*, August 16, 2010.

care of those dependent upon them: their friends and neighbours, as well as their immediate and extended families.

6.2. Vulnerability

Women are usually the first victims in environmental crises due to their lesser social status. The already vulnerable women are even further exposed to the perils and dangers of extreme vulnerability in the event of flood because they have little knowledge and awareness of how to make themselves secure in such a catastrophic natural disaster.

In Pakistan, when disaster strikes, the facilities available for women to cope with their household tasks or to find shelter are frequently inadequate. Fig. 4 reveals the worst conditions of the flood affected women that they have to sleep in open areas under the sky on the floor. It may be the hot weather or little space available to them in the tents that they are sleeping outside, but it reflects the problems (vulnerability) of the affected women. There is no single man in the visual and only women and children are together under the sky.

Fig. 5 shows that women have been assigned the duty of looking after the animals and children. Thus, they are forced to live together with cows and buffalos in makeshift tents; this

discloses their status in a gender-biased society. After the 1991 Bangladesh cyclone, a woman was asked the question:

Why did you not leave the house when everybody else had left? She answered shyly with a guilty look, 'I stayed to save my chicken' (Akhter, 1992).

Even after two decades, the roles and responsibilities of such rural women have not changed much; they are still assigned the same role of looking after animals and children.

6.3. The traditional roles of homemakers

Research has consistently revealed that much of the household responsibility for preparedness action, evacuation and sheltering is held by women, along with taking care of children during all the phases of a disaster; this may increase women's vulnerability and subsequently overburden them (Enarson et al., 2007; Enarson and Scanlon, 1999; Fothergill, 2004; Halvorson, 2004; Ikeda, 1995). The majority of women are called on to spend harsher, or at least more demanding, lives than their men and to be without complaint about their subordination.

Even in the situations of flood depicted in Figs. 6 and 7, the women are shown performing their traditional roles of cooking



Fig. 5. Women and children displaced by flood gather alongside buffaloes in a makeshift tent after their arrival in Karachi – photo by AFP published in *Dawn*, August 18, 2010.



Fig. 6. A family prepares breakfast as they wait for transport on a higher place to flee from an area due to heavy flooding in Qadirpur near Sukkur in Sindh province – photo by AP published in *Dawn*, August 9, 2010.



Fig. 7. A woman living along the river washes food bowls in Sukkur, in Sindh province August 3, 2010 – photo by Reuters published in *Dawn*.

and looking after children; there is not a single visual that shows men performing domestic activities or caring for children. In their everyday lives, it is the established role of women to be active and to be the primary caregivers. Certainly, this role is extended in crisis and women become even more essential in dealing with

disaster. During the Bangladesh cyclone of 1991, the following was observed by Bari:

“Their men may have lost the fishing equipment necessary to earn a living, their children may have died and their homes and

belongings were washed away but at the end of each day it was wife/mother who had to cook for whoever survived in her family.”

Here in these visuals, the women are shown in action rather than watching helplessly. However, their activities are limited to the domestic sphere that indirectly informs the viewer that women work mainly in the domestic sphere and are not much involved in recovery and relief work which is far removed from domestic life. The media subscribe to a form of reductionism in which women are restricted to gender, or to gender-specific attributes. The assignment of women's roles occurs at an individual level, rather than at community or societal level. This, however, is a misrepresentation of Pakistani women, since women also participate at the community level. However, the nature of their community work is different from that assigned to men. In the media coverage of the 2010 flood, there is not a single visual showing women's involvement in community work, thus reinforcing the gender stereotype.

6.4. Community level work

Where the women in the news are represented in media visuals, rather than being given a direct voice, they are assumed as ‘other’, thereby further highlighting the myth of female marginality. [Hartley \(1992\)](#), with reference to news coverage, elaborates by saying ‘...what happens at the edges doesn't count...’. Tuchman's concept of ‘symbolic annihilation’ refers to the ways in which women are condemned in, trivialised by, or simply invisible in the news ([Tuchman, 1978](#)). So, the invisibility of women in relief and rescue work is simply a reductionist approach of the Pakistani print media. In contrast, men have multiple representations of roles in society which is also reflected in the flood visuals. The following assignments at the level of community or society are assigned to the male family members: defence against natural calamities; the performance of tasks relating to public welfare; the involvement in self-help assignments such as building water reservoirs, banking canals and water courses and fighting against disaster on a collective basis.

[Fig. 8](#) reveals the men building a temporary barrier of heavy stones in order to divert or stop the advancing water flow. Generally, women are not assigned to work collectively with men, on the pretext that they should take care of the children and the belongings. This invisible work done by them is not recognised as being their contribution to averting or recovering from disaster. It also acts as a symbol of men's love towards their

female family member/members and children. This token of love is not free of cost; it snatches women's empowerment by portraying them as being incapable of playing a constructive community-based role in situations of disaster.

6.5. Men in a leading role

It is a stereotype that man is a born leader and woman is destined to follow the path defined by the men. The traditional roles in rural society determine men as being active and as the leading members of the family – the smallest unit of the society – as well as in society as a whole. The visual representation ([Fig. 9](#)) of the floods discloses that even this huge catastrophe could not break this stereotype of desperate and helpless women looking for their children and family members and helpful men carrying out heroic deeds, rescuing the women, children and the elderly ([Ross-Sheriff, 2007](#)).

[Fig. 10](#) shows that it only takes two men to lead a group of women and that the women are happy to follow them. The body language of the men also reveals that they are self-consciously assuming this role of leading and showing women the way. Though the flash floods caused distress in an area of immense size, still the gender stereotypes of men in the leading role and women as submissive followers have not altered, even slightly, in these visual accounts.

6.6. Man as savior

Women perform as nurturers and men as protectors become even more evident in times of disaster. Women are invisible in the planning of disaster response activities and their significant efforts in natural disasters are veiled by the female victim/male rescuer paradigm ([Enarson and Morrow, 1998](#)). The stereotype of men-in-active-and-leading-role is further strengthened by the visuals showing rescuers engaged in relief activities. The visual accounts show that all of the rescuers, working either on behalf of the government or as private volunteers, are men; there is not a single exception in this regard.

In the framing of all these visuals ([Figs. 11–14](#)), men's role in saving life is emphasised. [Fig. 11](#) shows Pakistani male volunteers busy rescuing children with other victims being already on board a vehicle after they have been evacuated from the flood-hit area. In [Figs. 12 and 13](#), the men in uniform are saving children and handing them over to other men. Similarly, in [Fig. 14](#), a male member of the armed forces is taking flood victims for evacuation



Fig. 8. Pakistani workers pile rocks along the embankment surrounded by heavy floodwater in Shadadkot, southern Pakistan – photo by AP published in *Dawn*, August 26, 2010.



Fig. 9. AFP published in *Dawn*, July 24, 2010.



Fig. 10. Locals walk on a flooded road – photo by Reuters published in *Dawn*, August 24, 2010.



Fig. 11. A Pakistani volunteer rescue a child as they travel on a vehicle provided by United Arab Emirates (UAE) as they evacuate the flood-hit Sujwal in southern Sindh province – photo by AFP published in *Dawn*, August 31, 2010.

by boat. It is also interesting to note that in all the visuals men were carrying the children, rather than caring or looking after children. The visuals depict men both wearing uniform and without uniform. This also shows a policy lag on the part of the government, which claims gender equality despite the fact that no female government official or member of staff was depicted working as a rescuer, even for female victims.

Furthermore, in the print media visuals, women are not shown offering any contribution to relief activities, which is not a good framing strategy for print media. By contrast, the broadcast media, during the live coverage of the flood, showed that female workers, as well as courageous women from the general public participated in flood relief activities, which means that women were not actually absent from the scene of flood relief activities. Being a



Fig. 12. (AP) Published in *The News*, August 5, 2010.



Fig. 13. Army soldiers evacuate a child from flooded areas – photo by AP published in *Dawn*, August 17, 2010.



Fig. 14. Men assist flood victims evacuate into a boat in Sukkur, located in Sindh province – photo by Reuters published in *Dawn* August 8, 2010.

member of Pakistani community, this researcher watched many clips from the live coverage of television showing women who were busy in community work. It is not only the case of these two

papers that we studied; rather, it was the agenda of most of the Pakistani print media which failed to give proper coverage to the participation of women in the rescue and rehabilitation process.



Fig. 15. People use a make-shift bridge to flee their homes hit by heavy flooding on Tuesday, August 3, 2010 – photo by AP.



Fig. 16. By AFP published in *Dawn*, August 12, 2010.

6.7. Women are traditionally bound to observe purdah

As an Islamic society, women are traditionally bound to observe purdah⁵ especially in rural areas. This means wearing large 'chaddars'⁶ or 'dupattas'⁷ or 'burqas'⁸ to cover the head and the major part of the body; this observation of purdah is considered to be an integral part of their routine dress code. The print media's coverage of the flood reveals that the women shown in visuals are observing purdah even in such a situation of distress; culture overwhelms the sentiments of the flood victims. The cultural shackles are too strong to be broken even in such a catastrophic situation such as sweeping flood. Visual coverage shows that though life is at stake, purdah cannot be spared.

Figs. 15 and 16 are from the flood affectees of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, one of the provinces of Pakistan on the Afghanistan border that show women covering their faces and observing strict purdah by wearing 'Burqas'. In Pakistan, there are some rural areas where women observe strict Purdah. In some of the previous visuals, it can be observed that the faces of some of the women are not covered and that only their head is covered by a chaddar. These visuals also throw light on the various traditions of wearing purdah in different provinces of Pakistan. The 2010 flood hit most

of the rural areas and less-urban areas. So, there is not a single visual where rural women and girls are not covering their heads. However, the urban culture of Pakistan regarding purdah is much different.

6.8. Gender segregation

Gender mixing is considered to be against the cultural norms of segregation in most of the rural areas of Pakistan. Women are allowed to attend and stay in women's gatherings under strict control and their mixing with male gatherings is considered to be a social taboo and not appreciated in any way. Even on ritualised occasions of happiness and sorrow, gender segregation is strictly observed in rural areas. In natural calamities such as flood, people fail to maintain this cultural norm of segregation. In most of the earlier shown visuals, men are seen performing active roles whereas women appear as passive victims. The exception is in getting the relief food for flood-affected people, where we see women along with men fighting for food, although the number of women is not in equal proportion to the men obtaining food for their children and dependents.

Figs. 17 and 18 show that hunger broke these chains of segregation; women were shown fighting and striving along with men, forgetting their cultural restrictions while capturing items of food. The visuals show that the patriarchal bonds weakened as men were no longer in a position to force women to keep themselves within the limits that have been developed as part of

⁵ Islamic rules regarding female body covering.

⁶ A piece of cloth covering the head and other parts of the female body.

⁷ A piece of cloth covering the head and other parts of the female body.

⁸ A long piece of cloth covering the face and all the parts of the female body.



Fig. 17. Flood-affected people struggle for relief goods in a camp in Nowshera – photo by AP published in *Dawn*, August 12, 2010.



Fig. 18. Flood victims getting cooked food distributed by the workers of a local NGO – online photo published in *Dawn*, August 15, 2010.

the culture of a male-dominated society. When it is a matter of life or death, women can be seen breaking the shackles of cultural norms, such as in Fig. 19 showing a woman, clad in the traditional 'Burqa', carrying a sack of food grain as she walks past men gathered around a truck to receive food supplies for flood victims. Due to scarcity and delay in the delivery of food supplies, women had to become a part of the receiving of food for survival; this would not be expected of them in the normal course of life.

Similarly, Fig. 20 shows that men and women were forced to stay in a mixed gathering in order to take refuge in safe places such as school buildings. In the visual women are shown eating comfortably together with men, it seems that the men are their family members. This visual account also reflects that there are two or three groups or families living together. While being forced to stay together, as soon as they find opportunity, people try to maintain gender separation or to avoid the free mixing of gender and instead of all dining together, they stay within their own family group where possible. It can even be observed that a man from one group is maintaining his distance from the women of another group.

6.9. Women seen as being physically and emotionally weak

Men are considered to be muscular and strong, both physically and emotionally. By contrast, women are considered to be physically and emotionally weak, with both stereotypes being reinforced by the print media (Fig. 21).

Though loss of life, missing loved ones and loss of assets cause all human beings, whether male or female, to be sad and grief-stricken, yet visual coverage hastens to use women to portray grief, thus supporting the stereotype that women are emotionally weak (Fig. 22).

The woman in Fig. 23 is clutching her chaddar and holding it up to cover her face, presumably to hide her sadness and conceal the agony and pain of the loss of her loved ones and valuables. She appears to be in a state of utter distress and possibly facing psychological trauma. There has been a clear division of policy between the print and electronic media in Pakistan; this occurred during the media's live coverage of the 2010 flood incidents watched by the researcher herself. On various occasions, the electronic media showed men crying in agony over the loss of their kith and kin, whereas the print media appeared to maintain the stereotypical role of the male as being emotionally strong and as busily occupied in the rescue efforts and rehabilitation tasks whilst the women were portrayed as being emotionally weak; the women were shown crying or to be in a state of deep grief for the loss of their beloved fellow human beings or their valuables.

6.10. Women not physically weak

The media coverage of disaster persistently portrays women as beseeching help and thus reinforcing the victim paradigm; this discredits their resilience in states of emergency (Enarson, 2000). In the wake of a disaster, women are the active participants in



Fig. 19. A woman carries a hand out of food as she walks past men gathered around a truck to receive food supplies for flood victims in Nowshera Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province – photo by Reuters published in *Dawn*, August 13, 2010.



Fig. 20. Residents of Kot Addu, Mahmood Ko, Sanawan and Gurmani in Sindh province – photo by AP published in *Dawn*, August 11, 2010.



Fig. 21. Flood-affected victims wade through water in Tando Hafiz Shah village about 60 km from Thatta in Sindh province – photo by AFP published in *Dawn* on August 23, 2010.

evacuation, relocation and resettlement, including the physical reconstruction of their homes (Delica, 1998; Enarson and Morrow, 1998; Enarson and Scanlon, 1999; Krishnaraj, 1997).

Fig. 24 shows flood victims evacuating their villages; women are seen crossing the deep water, carrying children safely above

the flood line or carrying valuables in heavy metal trunks, which threaten to outweigh their physical strength. In such a situation of disaster, in the absence of her menfolk, a woman's primary task is to save her own life as well as the lives of her dependants at any cost, taking what few valuables, if any, she is able to save from her



Fig. 22. Flood-affected victims travel on rescue vehicles provided by United Arab Emirates as they evacuate the flood-hit Sujawal in southern Sindh province – photo by AFP published in *Dawn*, August 31, 2010.



Fig. 23. The number of people killed in floods in the Jaffarabad in Baluchistan during the last week jumped to 47, official sources said – photo by AP published in *Dawn*, August 23, 2010.



Fig. 24. Flood victims evacuate their villages in Sukkur, located in Sindh province August 8, 2010 – photo by Reuter.

settlement on hearing the sudden noise of an approaching flood. Secondly, on finding and reaching some safe place to stay, the next concern has to be to settle everyday life.

In Fig. 25, the woman is shown in an active role, collecting reconstruction material such as bamboo canes from the destroyed debris of houses; the collection of this kind of material still has not



Fig. 25. An affectee removes debris from her flood-destroyed house in Nowshera –photo by AFP published in *Dawn*, August 12, 2010.

broken the female stereotype because, in the normal course of their lives, women help their men in the reconstruction and renovation of their houses whether annually, or biannually, and in this visual image the woman is shown in the same role, although working under the stress caused by floods. Women survivors are the vital first responders and rebuilders and not just passive victims. In all the gendered visuals in both newspapers, the researcher found only this single visual account where a woman is shown to be busy in the rehabilitation process.

7. Conclusion

It can be concluded that the preservation of culture has been the overwhelming sentiment in the gender-based coverage of flood in Pakistani print media. From a cultural perspective, the print media flood coverage shows gender stereotypes such as men as leaders with women being dependent, men as active and women as passive, and women as weak and emotional while men are strong, both physically and emotionally. The idea of women being in traditional 'purdah' has been maintained; however, just one stereotype, that of women generally avoiding mixing with men, has been shown to be broken, with the depiction of women mixing with the men whilst they all collect food and relief goods and whilst staying in safety refuges alongside men with whom they are not familiar. All the visuals of the floods depict male rescuers busy in relief activities; there is an absence in the photographs of female rescuers. Most of the visuals depicting flood victims, rescue workers, or the rehabilitation process showed women in positions of subordination and insignificance, seemingly incapable of encroaching on the areas of male dominance. However, in reality, women are frequently the driving force and the unsung heroes behind the rescue and rehabilitation in situations of disaster, rather than the passive victims (Ross-Sheriff, 2006).

In disaster scenarios, media coverage plays an important role in expediting rescue and relief activities. Media coverage rouses humanitarian passion among its mass audience; this can stimulate the swift response of a nation in providing relief activities to disaster victims. Media are the most important and significant actors in dealing with all the stages of natural disaster. Media coverage can support rescue and recovery efforts by imploring charitable action from the members of its audience. It is possible that the media might have consciously tried to highlight the agony of the helplessness of women with a particular focus on visuals of helpless flood-affected women in order to gain sympathy and thus enhance support for the victims. This particular agenda might

have been set by the media in order to exploit the politics of sympathy. However, it also has the effect of endorsing sexist stereotypes. Whilst the commodification of the visuals of the pain and agony of the female victims and survivors of the flood may build compassion for the victims, it also extends the economic interest of the media. This commodification is likely to increase the circulation of the newspapers and thus the pictures of flood-affected women may be used as a marketing strategy by Pakistani newspapers. Unless media has no gender-sensitive coverage, producing a politically correct image becomes a fraught endeavour; this is only reductive and it needs to be replaced with more positive, or more accurate, images.

The print media in Pakistan need to improve the framing of gender coverage during crises through constructive representation that will motivate other women to act courageously in the face of other such crises. The media coverage concerning women's role in combating climatic crises such as flooding is believed to encourage other women to take similar action in moments of human crisis, provided that the media concerned are looking at situations from the viewpoint of building human resources with general awareness and training of behaviour under stress and endeavouring to highlight the role of women involved in the combating of natural hazards, calamities and crises which continue to endanger an ever greater number of human beings. Although the media have given increased coverage to situations of flood, in order to educate both the public and the policy makers in the formation of gender-sensitive policies to meet the challenges of disaster management, the media still needs to pay greater attention to gender-sensitive reporting and their coverage of any such incidents. The media can also educate women to play better and more active roles at times of climatic crisis. The media are inclined to represent women only as victims of natural disaster; however, women can be effective leaders within their community when it comes to addressing calamities such as floods, earthquakes, cyclones and other natural disasters.

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