



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Gendered Power Dynamics: A Comparative Analysis of Women's Status in 'Agora' and Contemporary Pakistani Society**

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**ABSTRACT**

This research paper delves into the intricate power dynamics that shape and constrain women's status in society, drawing parallels between the historical portrayal in the film "Agora" and the contemporary scenario in Pakistani society. "Agora," set in ancient Alexandria, depicts the life and struggles of Hypatia, a brilliant mathematician, philosopher, and astronomer, who defied societal norms and faced tragic consequences in a male-dominated world. The paper applies the theoretical framework of Antonio Gramsci to analyze the power relationships depicted in the film. Gramsci's concept of the ruling block and the manufacture of consent is used to examine how Hypatia's intellectual influence challenged the religious and political establishment, particularly Cyril, the Bishop of Christianity. Hypatia's status as an organic intellectual, who did not conform to the ruling class, highlights her commitment to truth, logic, and education. The analysis also reflects on Karl Marx's view of religion as an opiate of the masses and its potential to distract people from their real problems. In "Agora," the influence of Christianity and its impact on the masses' priorities is evident, as religious fervor overshadows pressing issues such as poverty and education. The paper further explores the gendered status of women in "Agora" and compares it to contemporary Pakistani society. It examines how women in both contexts are marginalized, oppressed, and subjected to patriarchal norms. The film portrays how Hypatia's gender posed a threat to male authority, leading to her brutal murder. Examples such as the case of Qandeel Baloch, a social media celebrity who was murdered in the name of honor, and the portrayal of women in Pakistani media are used to illustrate the challenges women face.

**KEYWORDS** Gender Equality, Gender-Based Violence, Patriarchy, Religion, Women's Status

**Introduction**

"Agora" is a film released in 2009, directed by Alejandro Amenábar. It is a Telecinco Cinema production. The ancient Agora of Athens and the word "AGORA" signify a meeting and gathering place where people used to convene to listen to public discourse and engage in discussions on the issues of the day. Excavations at this site began in the 19th century. Set in the final days of the Roman Empire, "Agora" tells the remarkable story of a woman named Hypatia, who existed in a world dominated by men. As a mathematician, philosopher, and astronomer, her life's work was dedicated to the pursuit of wisdom. She lived during a pivotal moment in history, as the ancient world crumbled around her, making way for a new era. The film explores themes such as religion, knowledge, superstition, faith, hope, and love. It centers around a woman who exemplifies courage and plays various roles: a teacher, philosopher, scientist, daughter, lover, and a symbol of humanity's potential.

In the film, Hypatia, portrayed as a mathematician and philosopher, is based on a real-life person who lived in 4th century Alexandria. She was the daughter of Theon of

Alexandria (c. 335-c. 405 AD), who managed the library, known as the world research center, in the city of Alexandria. Hypatia herself was a teacher and lived during a period when Alexandria was a hub of intellectual learning, attracting scholars from all corners of the world to engage in discussions on theater, philosophy, mathematics, and astronomy. It was a time of incredible intellectual fervor. In the waning days of the Roman Empire, as civilization crumbled, Hypatia, a legend and ahead of her time, sought to unite humanity. She received her education in Athens and was known for her exceptional beauty, which captivated those who attended her lectures. The city held her in high esteem, and even rulers of the city would attend her lectures. Her self-assured and cultivated demeanor allowed her to frequently appear in public in the presence of magistrates, and she even participated in assemblies.

Students from far and wide, including many Christians, flocked to her lectures. Some of her students went on to become bishops, government officials, and estate owners. Hypatia's international influence made her a threat to Cyril, and she eventually became the head of the Neoplatonist school in Alexandria. Here, she imparted the knowledge of Plato and Aristotle to her students, which included both Pagans and Christians. While contemporary sources from the 5th century identify Hypatia of Alexandria as a practitioner and teacher of Plato's philosophy, a 7th-century Egyptian bishop portrayed her as a Hellenistic pagan who dabbled in magic and astrolabes. Tragically, she met a brutal end around 415 AD, when she was murdered by a group of zealous monks. Remarkably, Hypatia achieved greater fame and honor than her persecutors.

Gender, a fundamental aspect of human identity, has been deeply intertwined with power dynamics throughout history. This research paper delves into the complex interplay of gender and power, drawing parallels between the portrayal of these dynamics in the historical context of the film "Agora" and their manifestation in contemporary Pakistani society. "Agora," directed by Alejandro Amenábar, provides a window into the life of Hypatia, a brilliant philosopher and mathematician living in 4th-century Alexandria. Her story, set against the backdrop of religious and societal upheaval, sheds light on the challenges women face when navigating male-dominated spaces. The film "Agora" explores themes of religion, knowledge, superstition, faith, hope, and love through the lens of a remarkable woman, Hypatia. In an era when male dominance was the norm, Hypatia stood as an exception—an intellectual, teacher, scientist, and philosopher. Her life's work was dedicated to the pursuit of wisdom, yet she found herself in a pivotal moment of history, as the ancient world crumbled around her, giving way to a new era.

This research paper transcends time and place, drawing a parallel to contemporary Pakistani society. In both contexts, gendered power dynamics are evident, with women often finding themselves marginalized and oppressed by patriarchal norms. We will analyze the film's narrative and characters, applying relevant concepts from scholars such as Antonio Gramsci and Karl Marx to uncover the layers of power at play. Gramsci's theory of the ruling bloc and the manufacture of consent will guide our examination of how Hypatia's intellect and influence posed a threat to those in power. We will explore how religious authority, wielded by figures like Bishop Cyril in "Agora," was used to subdue and control women, and how this parallels the influence of religious figures in contemporary Pakistan.

Karl Marx's insights on religion as "the opium of the masses" will be used to analyze how religion in both contexts has been used to distract people from pressing societal issues and maintain the status quo. We will examine how religious discourse has been employed to reinforce gendered roles and expectations, perpetuating the subjugation of women. This paper also delves into the concept of the "organic

intellectual" as discussed by Gramsci, emphasizing how figures like Hypatia and contemporary women who challenge established norms often find themselves at odds with the intellectual elite, religious authorities, and even their own communities. Furthermore, we will discuss how the media, in both the ancient context of Alexandria and contemporary Pakistan, plays a role in perpetuating gendered stereotypes and power imbalances. The tragic story of Qandeel Baloch, a Pakistani social media celebrity who faced a similar fate to Hypatia, highlights how women challenging societal norms are portrayed in the media and targeted for their audacity. This research paper aims to shed light on the enduring struggle of women against gendered power dynamics in different historical and cultural contexts. By drawing connections between "Agora" and contemporary Pakistani society, we seek to unravel the complex web of factors contributing to the marginalization and oppression of women. Through this comparative analysis, we hope to contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges women face in their quest for equality, justice, and empowerment.

### **Literature Review**

Gendered power dynamics have long been a subject of scholarly inquiry, with researchers exploring the ways in which societal structures, cultural norms, and institutions influence and perpetuate gender-based disparities in power. This review of the literature synthesizes key insights from previous research in relevant areas, including the portrayal of gender and power in films, historical gender dynamics, and the contemporary gender landscape in Pakistan.

### **Gender and Power in Film**

Scholars have examined the representation of gender and power in cinematic narratives, shedding light on how films construct and reflect societal attitudes toward gender roles. Mulvey (1975) introduced the concept of the "male gaze" in film, highlighting how the camera often objectifies female characters, reinforcing traditional power dynamics. Beasley (2005) expanded on this notion, emphasizing that film narratives can either challenge or reinforce gender stereotypes and hierarchies. In the context of "Agora," this literature provides a framework for analyzing the film's portrayal of Hypatia's agency and the power dynamics at play.

### **Historical Gender Dynamics**

To understand the historical backdrop of "Agora," research on gender dynamics in antiquity is pertinent. Lefkowitz (1986) explored the role of women in ancient Greece and Rome, challenging stereotypes of passive and subservient women. In the context of the film's setting in 4th-century Alexandria, this literature offers insights into the challenges Hypatia might have faced as a prominent female figure in a male-dominated intellectual milieu.

### **Contemporary Gender Landscape in Pakistan**

Turning to the contemporary context, studies on gender dynamics in Pakistan reveal complex power structures influenced by culture, religion, and social norms. Kabir (2005) investigated the impact of Islamic feminism on gender relations in Pakistan, highlighting the tension between women's empowerment movements and conservative interpretations of Islam. Qasim (2018) explored the gendered implications of honor killings, emphasizing the role of patriarchal power in perpetuating violence against women. In the case of Qandeel Baloch, research by Khan (2017) underscores how social media platforms and celebrity culture intersect with gender dynamics in Pakistan, illustrating the challenges faced by outspoken women.

## **Intersection of Gender and Religion**

The intersection of gender and religion is a central theme in both the film "Agora" and contemporary Pakistani society. In the context of religion, research by Mahmood (2005) on the piety movement in Egypt offers insights into the ways religious discourse can influence and sometimes restrict women's agency. This literature provides a lens through which to analyze the role of religion as a source of power and constraint in both historical and contemporary settings. This review of the literature encompasses key dimensions of gendered power dynamics, spanning the portrayal of gender in film, historical gender dynamics, and the contemporary gender landscape in Pakistan. These insights inform the analytical framework for examining how gender, power, and religion intersect in the film "Agora" and resonate with contemporary gender dynamics in Pakistani society. By drawing on this multidisciplinary literature, this research aims to contribute to a nuanced understanding of gendered power dynamics in diverse contexts.

## **Gender and Intersectionality in Film**

In the study of gender and power dynamics in films, recent scholarship has emphasized the importance of intersectionality. Crenshaw (1989) introduced the concept of intersectionality, highlighting how multiple dimensions of identity, such as gender, race, class, and sexuality, intersect to shape individuals' experiences of power and discrimination. Applying this framework to film analysis, Collins (2000) argued that it is essential to consider how the intersection of gender and other identities influences the representation of power dynamics. In the context of "Agora," intersectional analysis can shed light on how Hypatia's gender interacts with other aspects of her identity to shape her experiences and challenges.

## **Gender and Political Power**

Examining gendered power dynamics requires an exploration of political power structures. In contemporary Pakistani society, research by Shah (2016) on women's political participation is particularly relevant. Shah's work underscores the challenges and opportunities faced by women in Pakistani politics, highlighting the importance of political empowerment for addressing gender disparities. The examination of Hypatia's intellectual and political influence in "Agora" offers a unique opportunity to juxtapose historical and contemporary perspectives on women's engagement with political power.

## **Gender and Education**

Education is a critical factor in understanding gendered power dynamics. In the context of "Agora," where Hypatia's role as a teacher and scholar is central, research by Chafetz (2006) on women's access to education in historical contexts provides valuable insights. Chafetz's work examines the limitations and possibilities of women's education in ancient Greece and Rome, shedding light on the societal constraints faced by women like Hypatia. This literature informs discussions of the barriers and opportunities for women's education in contemporary Pakistan.

## **Media and Gender Representation**

Media plays a pivotal role in shaping perceptions of gender roles and power. In the Pakistani context, research by Hussain (2019) on the portrayal of women in Pakistani television dramas is pertinent. Hussain's study reveals how media narratives both reflect and influence societal attitudes towards gender, offering a contemporary parallel to the influence of Roman media on Hypatia's reputation in "Agora." Analyzing media representations and their impact on gendered power dynamics can provide valuable insights into the complexities of contemporary Pakistani society.

## Gender-Based Violence

A critical aspect of gendered power dynamics is the prevalence of gender-based violence. In the Pakistani context, research by Zia (2017) on domestic violence and legal reforms is highly relevant. Zia's work explores the legal and cultural factors contributing to gender-based violence and highlights the ongoing struggle for women's rights in Pakistan. This literature can be used to contextualize the challenges faced by women in "Agora" and their counterparts in contemporary Pakistani society. The literature reviewed here underscores the multifaceted nature of gendered power dynamics, drawing on intersectionality, political power, education, media representation, and gender-based violence. By incorporating these diverse perspectives, this research aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the portrayal of gender and power in "Agora" and its resonance with contemporary Pakistani society. This multidisciplinary approach enables a richer understanding of the complexities surrounding gendered power dynamics across different contexts and time periods.

## Material and Methods

To conduct a comprehensive analysis of gendered power dynamics in "Agora" and contemporary Pakistani society, this research employs a multidisciplinary and comparative approach. The methodology integrates qualitative research methods, content analysis, and critical theory frameworks to examine the selected data sources effectively.

## Data Sources

**Film Analysis:** The primary source for the analysis of gendered power dynamics in the historical context is the film "Agora" (2009). A thorough examination of the film's narrative, characters, dialogues, and visual elements forms the foundation of this research. Key scenes and dialogues involving Hypatia, Bishop Cyril, and other relevant characters are scrutinized for their representation of gender and power dynamics.

**Secondary Sources:** Complementing the film analysis, a wide range of secondary sources including scholarly articles, books, and critical essays are consulted. These sources provide historical context, theoretical frameworks, and comparative data related to gender dynamics, power structures, and the role of religion in both historical and contemporary settings.

## Analytical Frameworks

The research employs the following analytical frameworks:

**Content Analysis:** A systematic examination of the film "Agora" is conducted, focusing on themes related to gender, power, religion, and societal norms. Specific scenes and dialogues are transcribed and analyzed to identify patterns and recurring motifs that illuminate the gendered power dynamics in the film. **Theoretical Frameworks:** Concepts from critical theorists such as Antonio Gramsci and Karl Marx are applied to interpret the power structures depicted in the film and contemporary Pakistani society. Gramsci's notions of the ruling bloc, organic intellectuals, and the manufacture of consent offer insights into how power is consolidated and maintained. Karl Marx's ideas about religion as a tool of distraction and oppression are used to analyze the role of religious discourse in both contexts.

## **Comparative Analysis**

The research follows a comparative analysis approach, drawing parallels and distinctions between the historical narrative in "Agora" and the contemporary socio-cultural landscape of Pakistan. This involves identifying analogous themes, power dynamics, and gender-related issues in both contexts.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations are paramount in conducting this research. Respect for cultural sensitivity, gender equality, and the dignity of individuals, both historical and contemporary, is maintained throughout the analysis. In the case of contemporary Pakistani society, privacy and sensitivity regarding real-life events, such as the case of Qandeel Baloch, are ensured.

## **Limitations**

It's important to acknowledge certain limitations in this research. First, while "Agora" provides a historical perspective, it is a work of fiction and may not fully represent the historical accuracy of events. Second, the analysis of contemporary Pakistani society is based on publicly available information, which may not capture the full complexity of social dynamics. Additionally, the scope of this research is limited to gendered power dynamics and does not encompass all aspects of gender studies or social analysis. By employing a combination of film analysis, theoretical frameworks, and a comparative approach, this research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of gendered power dynamics in both historical and contemporary contexts. Through this methodology, it can seek to unearth insights that contribute to ongoing discussions on gender equality, the role of religion, and the challenges faced by women in their pursuit of empowerment and justice.

## **To Analyze Gender Power Dynamics in the Film "Agora," Various Theories of Power**

As Hypatia wisely noted, "You don't question what you believe... You cannot... I must..."

**Transcript/Context:** Synesius: Years ago, you taught us something. If two are equal to a third, they are all equal to each other. Do you remember? Agora: Yes. Synesius: The three of us, we are all good people, and you, you are as Christian as we are... Agora: Synesius, you don't question what you believe... You cannot... I must... Synesius: Well... that's a pity, Lady. A great pity.

## **Antonio Gramsci's theory of power**

In this analysis, we will apply Antonio Gramsci's theory of power to examine the gender power dynamics depicted in the film. Gramsci posits that the ruling block is an alliance composed of individuals from various classes, with some powerful groups holding significant influence. These groups, which are part of the ruling class, dominate within the ruling block and establish the alliance. Gramsci introduces the concept of "consent of manufacture," wherein consent is manufactured through hegemonic discourse, shaped by intellectuals hired by the ruling class.

Hypatia, a philosopher and intellectual, espoused ideas of equality, human unity, and logic. She did not adhere strictly to Christianity nor necessarily to paganism. Instead, she aligned more closely with Platonic philosophy, believing that the path to divine union with the universe required a focus on meditation, study, and virtuous living, rather than worldly distractions. Hypatia was not motivated by power or authority; her passion lay in disseminating education in science and philosophy. She serves as both a

historical figure and a representation of real humanity. Cyril, the Christian bishop, labeled Hypatia a witch, exploiting the soft power of religion to manipulate public opinion. Another influential figure, Prefect Orestes, attempted to persuade her to convert her beliefs using the same religious appeal. Interestingly, both rulers had been students of Hypatia. Her response, "You don't question what you believe... You cannot... I must..." succinctly encapsulated the conflict between rationalism and faith, leaving them without a satisfactory response.

It's worth noting that Hypatia can be regarded as an "organic intellectual," a term used to describe individuals who are not part of the establishment, fearlessly speak the truth, and plan for the future. She resisted becoming a pawn of the ruling and religious elite, remaining steadfast in her commitment to truth and logic. Her refusal to bow down to illiterate fundamentalist religious leaders led to her brutal murder, where she was stripped naked, skinned alive, dismembered, and her remains were burned. Gramsci's theory operates on the premise that ideas are primarily generated by intellectuals and then disseminated to the masses. However, it is essential to recognize that each social group has its own intellectuals. In the case of Hypatia, she stood virtually alone against religious fundamentalists and an illiterate populace in Alexandria. Her students did not rally to her side; instead, they joined the establishment and accepted Cyril's reconciliation to protect themselves.

Both her students, Prefect Orestes and others, attempted to coerce her into converting to Christianity. Hypatia, however, steadfastly refused to abandon her faith, remaining resolute in her beliefs. This unwavering commitment exemplifies the essence of an organic intellectual, as described by Gramsci, who does not compromise, fear, or waver from their goals while advocating for the welfare of the poor masses and the pursuit of justice and truth. Hypatia, a trusted organic intellectual, made the ultimate sacrifice for truth, bravely opposing the tyranny of the ruling class and religious fundamentalists. Her unrelenting determination and dedication to spreading education throughout the world serve as a testament to women's equality as human beings, equal to men. Mary Wollstonecraft's perspective regards women as human beings placed on Earth to develop their abilities, just like men. Next, we will delve into the implications of the more specific label, "women" (Mary Wollstonecraft).

### **Karl Marx Theory**

Karl Marx's viewpoint posits that religion functions as an "opium" for the people, diverting their attention from real societal issues and focusing them on an idealized life. Marx contends that religion sustains the power of the rich while keeping the poor submissive by diverting their attention away from pressing problems. Consequently, individuals are less inclined to stage political revolts, as their focus is directed away from genuine societal concerns. Furthermore, Marx argues that religion oppresses the lower classes and impedes progress toward equality.

In the film "Agora," we witness a conflict between two dominant religions, Paganism and Christianity, as Jews constitute a smaller portion of the population. Applying Marx's theory, which views religion as an opiate distracting the masses from their actual problems, proves apt. Throughout the movie, we observe extreme destitution, hunger, and a lack of basic sustenance among the people of Alexandria. Their preoccupation with religious beliefs and practices, facilitated by Christian bishops, further diverts their attention from real issues. In contrast, the Pagans are focused on disseminating educational knowledge worldwide, establishing the World Research Central Library in Alexandria, attracting international scholars and researchers to conduct their studies. The library boasts an extensive collection of books covering

literature, medicine, philosophy, science, mathematics, physics, biology, astronomy, geography, and medicine. However, the growing influence of Christianity impedes people from addressing their actual development and education needs, as their minds are consumed by religious beliefs and faith.

Hypatia, a philosopher who educates students at the library from around the world, emphasizes the importance of scientific education for improving lives and solving numerous problems. On the opposing side, religious fundamentalists oppose Hypatia's teachings, wielding the power of religious ideology and male dominance to dehumanize women and promote their religious beliefs. The illiterate masses are controlled by religious fundamentalism, turning against Hypatia for her opposition to forced religious conversions. Hypatia's stance against forced religious conversions, in a city where many have converted to Christianity due to its immense influence, reflects her commitment to philosophy, truth, and rationality. Tragically, she was murdered by a religious bishop.

Marx's theory about religion being akin to opium, diverting people from real problems, finds resonance in the film's portrayal of Alexandria. The populace is engrossed in fanatic religious beliefs, veering away from their genuine concerns. Marx's perspective on religion stands validated upon watching "Agora." Marx also introduced the concept of "false consciousness," asserting that our thinking is shaped by the vocabulary provided by our culture, leading to a distorted sense of reality. The people of Alexandria succumbed to this false consciousness, failing to stand by Hypatia, who advocated for educational revolution, peace, harmony, tolerance, non-violence, and mutual respect for differing beliefs, practices, faiths, and religions.

An emotional scene in the movie "Agora" between Roman Prefect Orestes and Bishop Synesius exemplifies the conflict between moral and religious dogma. Orestes, stoned by an angry Christian mob for not yielding to Bishop Cyril and refusing to accept the words of the Bible, realizes that Cyril seeks control over Alexandria and poses a threat to Hypatia. Orestes implores Synesius for help, as he contemplates fighting against Cyril. This scene vividly illustrates how individuals can be compelled by religious beliefs, even when they are right, under the influence of religion. It underscores the potentially destructive and malevolent power of faith, contrary to its intended purpose. Marx's arguments regarding religion's capacity to divert people from reality and truth appear validated in this context.

### **Power Dynamics against Women in the Film - An Analysis**

Cyril, the Bishop representing Christianity, felt immensely threatened by the philosopher Hypatia. He was apprehensive about the influence of women, particularly Hypatia's role as a counselor in Prefect Orestes' assembly. A power struggle for authority and control unfolded in the city of Alexandria, largely driven by the growing influence of Christianity and Cyril's quest for more power and authority. Cyril confronted Prefect Orestes in the temple, urging him to publicly submit and embrace the Holy Bible's teachings. During his sermon, Cyril condemned women, citing biblical passages that prescribed modest dress, forbade braided hair, discouraged the wearing of gold, pearls, and expensive clothing, and declared that women should neither teach nor have authority over men. He asserted that these were God's words and pointed out that even Jesus entrusted his legacy to twelve men, without a single woman among them.

Cyril acknowledged that some people believed in Hypatia's words, as she held a position in the government. However, he declared Hypatia a witch and demanded that everyone reconcile before Christ, emphasizing the importance of kneeling down before the Bible and publicly embracing it. Prefect Orestes, refusing to yield, rejected Cyril's beliefs. Had Orestes knelt, he would have accepted Cyril's declaration of Hypatia as a witch. In the film "Agora," Hypatia, as a woman, posed a significant threat to Bishop



Cyril's pursuit of power and authority, which aimed to unify all religions under Christianity in Alexandria. Cyril was aware that Hypatia would not convert to Christianity due to her eloquence, intelligence, philosophical wisdom, and education. People listened to Hypatia, including students from around the world who sought her guidance.

Cyril decided to eliminate her, believing that as long as Hypatia lived, it would be impossible for him to attain power. He considered Hypatia a formidable woman with knowledge that posed a constant threat. To weaken the opposing Prefect Orestes' government and seize power, Cyril branded Hypatia a witch and incited a mob. In a heart-wrenching scene, Hypatia's daily routine was disrupted as an angry mob searched for her, dragged her through the streets, and eventually stoned her to death. Her fictional student, Davis, was smothered, and her limbs were severed and burned. The scene depicted a sorrowful and horrific death that left a profound impact, moving many to tears. It showcased the tragic fate of a woman - a philosopher, intellectual, courageous teacher, scientist, daughter, lover, and heroine - who perished while teaching the values of peace, love, harmony, tolerance, and truth.

In another scene from the film "Agora," members of Prefect Orestes' government assembly vehemently opposed Hypatia's role as a councilor. They questioned the inclusion of a woman, using the term "woman" in a way that underscored the prevailing male-dominated and patriarchal society. This opposition reflected the resistance of male rulers within Orestes' government to working alongside women, as they voiced their concerns to Prefect Orestes about Hypatia's involvement in the affairs of Alexandria.

The feminist theory posits that institutionalized modern religions are inherently patriarchal, with God always portrayed as male, and wisdom conveyed predominantly by men. Religion often reduces women to male possessions. In the film "Agora," we witness Bishop Cyril dehumanizing women while citing biblical texts, reinforcing the notion that women hold no superior status to men in patriarchal societies. Feminism argues that gendered religions perpetuate the oppression of women, as vividly depicted in the film set in c. 355-415 AD, showcasing the effects of Christianity on women. Religion has historically been used as a tool for oppressing women socially, culturally, and politically in male-dominated and patriarchal societies, as exemplified in Bishop Cyril's temple sermon where he recites biblical texts.

### **Comparison of the Gendered Status in the Film to Contemporary Pakistani Society**

In the film "Agora," we witness a harrowing tale of gendered status, where a remarkable woman, Hypatia, who embodied qualities of a philosopher, teacher, intellectual, lover, peacemaker, and astrologist, met a tragic end. She was tormented, mutilated, dehumanized, and brutally murdered within the temple solely because of her gender. It's evident that had she been a man, her fate might have been different. Members of Prefect Orestes' government assembly raised objections to her participation, citing her gender as a reason why she should not speak in the government assembly. Hypatia's intellectual prowess posed a threat to the established male order, making her a target in the eyes of both government members and religious figures.

On the other hand, Bishop Cyril also feared Hypatia's influence within Prefect Orestes' government due to her intelligence and the respect her voice and arguments garnered. This intelligent woman posed a threat to the members of the Orestes assembly and religious clergy alike. Cyril saw Prefect Orestes as a potential rival whose government was growing stronger with Hypatia's influence. Consequently, Cyril sought to eliminate Hypatia, viewing her as both a threat and a source of shame. To achieve this,

he exploited Christian religion, declaring Hypatia a witch and citing religious scripture to justify his stance that women were inferior to men and unfit to teach. In the film "Agora," Hypatia's murder serves as a stark example of how gendered status played a significant role in a male-dominated society, ultimately leading to her tragic end in the city of Alexandria.

In contemporary Pakistan, we can draw parallels to this gendered status struggle. When Benazir Bhutto became the first female Prime Minister of Pakistan, she faced immense opposition from the establishment, religious parties, and male politicians. Her gender became a focal point of criticism during gatherings and speeches. Religious leaders argued that Islam prohibited women from ruling, asserting that women were weaker than men as Allah had created men to be stronger. According to their perspective, men were fit to rule, but women were not.

Shaikh Rasheed, in particular, used derogatory language in multiple speeches against Benazir Bhutto, resorting to insults and demeaning comments. Such behavior further demonstrated the gendered status struggles within Pakistani society. Even Nawaz Sharif, in one of his speeches, made derogatory remarks about Benazir Bhutto, questioning her origins and casting aspersions on her loyalty to Pakistan. Ex-Chief Minister of Sindh, Arbab Ghulam Raheem, also expressed sexist views, claiming that women's leadership was not permissible in Islam.

When we compare the gendered status depicted in the film with contemporary Pakistani society, we find striking similarities. Pakistan continues to grapple with patriarchal and male-dominated societal norms, leading to limited opportunities for women. Women are often perceived as delicate and sensitive, which further reinforces their subjugation. Their representation in government, bureaucracy, the military, air force, and intelligence agencies remains significantly low, highlighting the persistence of gendered status struggles in Pakistan.

### **A Comparative Analysis of Gendered Status**

In the urban areas of Pakistan, education and job opportunities for women are limited, with the majority of them assuming the role of housewives. Men continue to enjoy preferential treatment within the family, often acting as decision-makers and holding control over household affairs. The influence of Islamic religion in Pakistan has further perpetuated gender inequality, as depicted in the film "Agora," where religious fundamentalism led to the unjust murder of Hypatia. This film mirrors the reality in Pakistan, where women are sometimes targeted by religious leaders through fatwas, resulting in tragic consequences.

Consider the case of Qandeel Baloch, whose story shares similarities with that of Hypatia. Qandeel hailed from a humble background in a village near Multan. She resisted pressure from her family to marry a man of their choosing, instead opting for a love marriage, which caused a rift within her family. Unfortunately, her husband subjected her to abuse and infidelity, eventually leading to their divorce. Qandeel's parents were left concerned about her future as she became a burden to them. She ventured to Rawalpindi in search of work to support her family. Despite her aspirations of becoming a celebrity through legitimate means, Qandeel struggled to find opportunities due to her reluctance to engage in questionable activities. Nevertheless, she eventually found her niche in the modeling industry, amassing a considerable social media following. Qandeel's controversial posts and videos propelled her to become a social media sensation.

Her life took a tragic turn when she became involved with Maulvi Qavi, a prominent religious figure in Multan. After their meetings, Qandeel shared selfies and

videos of the Maulvi on social media, which led to public outrage. Maulvi Qavi faced significant backlash and was even removed from the Ruet-e-Hilal Committee due to the scandal. In response, he threatened Qandeel and warned her to cease her actions, asserting his position as a respected religious leader. Using religion as a tool, Maulvi Qavi reached out to Qandeel's brother in their village, showing him modeling pictures and clips of Qandeel and convincing him that her actions were contrary to Islam. He manipulated Qandeel's brother, suggesting that she had dishonored Islam and their city. In a cruel twist, he labeled her a witch deserving of death, and Qandeel's brother ultimately murdered her.

Qandeel's mother revealed that, in her final days, Qandeel expressed fear for her life, believing that Maulvi Qavi would have her killed. Her tragic story highlights how religion was weaponized to justify her murder, much like what happened to Hypatia in the film "Agora." While Qandeel's case is pending in court, it's worth noting that media outlets in Pakistan often exploit women for their program ratings. Prior to her death, Qandeel was prominently featured on various talk shows, with religious figures condemning her actions. This media frenzy ultimately contributed to Qandeel's tragic fate. Despite her emotional and sometimes controversial behavior, she was a vulnerable and innocent individual.

The situation in Pakistan reflects a patriarchal society where women have limited agency. Forced marriages are common, and women are often subjected to violence if they marry against their family's wishes. Access to education in rural areas remains scarce, with women predominantly engaged in agricultural labor. Family planning decisions are typically made by husbands, leaving women with little say in the matter. Moreover, the birth of a male child is considered auspicious, while the birth of a female child is often viewed as unfortunate. The parallels between the film "Agora" and contemporary Pakistani society are striking. Both narratives illustrate how religion can be manipulated to maintain gender inequality and perpetuate violence against women. It is a reminder of the ongoing struggle for gender equality and the need for societal change to protect the rights and lives of women.

## **Discussion**

The film "Agora" and the contemporary Pakistani society may seem worlds apart in terms of time, place, and culture. However, upon closer examination, there are striking similarities in the portrayal of gendered status and the challenges faced by women. This article delves into the comparison between the two, shedding light on the enduring struggle for gender equality.

The Gendered Status in "Agora": "Agora," set in ancient Alexandria, depicts the life and tragic fate of Hypatia, a philosopher, teacher, and intellectual. Despite her remarkable intellect and contributions to knowledge, Hypatia faced gender-based discrimination and ultimately met a gruesome end. The film illustrates how patriarchal power structures and religious fundamentalism combined to suppress women like Hypatia, leading to their persecution and silencing. Gendered Status in Contemporary Pakistani Society: Drawing parallels between the film and modern-day Pakistan, we find a society grappling with similar issues of gender inequality. Women in Pakistan, especially in rural areas, often face limited access to education and job opportunities. The prevailing patriarchal norms relegate them to the roles of housewives, with men assuming positions of power and authority within families.

Religious Influence and Gender Equality: Both the film and contemporary Pakistan showcase how religious influence can be a double-edged sword for women. In

"Agora," the misuse of religion leads to Hypatia's tragic end, while in Pakistan, religious figures have been known to issue fatwas against women, further perpetuating discrimination. Case Study: Qandeel Baloch: The case of Qandeel Baloch, a Pakistani social media sensation, serves as a poignant example. Her story closely resembles that of Hypatia, as both women dared to challenge societal norms and faced the consequences. Qandeel's life and death highlight how religion can be used to justify violence against women, echoing the themes of "Agora."

**Media Exploitation of Women:** In both contexts, media outlets have played a significant role in perpetuating gendered stereotypes and sensationalizing women's stories for ratings. Qandeel Baloch's experience demonstrates how media attention can expose vulnerable individuals to greater danger. **The Need for Change:** This comparative analysis emphasizes the need for societal change and the ongoing struggle for gender equality. While the contexts may differ, the underlying issues of discrimination, violence, and the misuse of religion against women persist across time and place. The comparative analysis of "Agora" and contemporary Pakistani society underscores the enduring challenges faced by women in their quest for equality. It serves as a reminder that, despite the passage of centuries and geographical distances, the struggle against gender-based discrimination remains an urgent global concern. Initiatives for gender equality, education, and empowerment are vital steps toward creating a more equitable society for women worldwide.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this research paper has delved into a comparative analysis of gendered statuses as portrayed in the film "Agora" and the contemporary society of Pakistan. Through this exploration, several key findings have emerged as historical Parallels that the film "Agora" provides a historical perspective on the challenges women faced in ancient Alexandria, highlighting the struggles of figures like Hypatia. These challenges find echoes in the contemporary gender dynamics of Pakistani society. **Religious Influence:** Both contexts reveal the pervasive influence of religion in perpetuating gender inequalities. Religious interpretations have been wielded to justify discrimination against women, as evidenced by the fate of Hypatia and cases like Qandeel Baloch. **Media's Role:** Media, whether in the form of ancient scrolls or modern-day television, plays a crucial role in shaping societal attitudes toward women. The sensationalization of individuals like Hypatia and Qandeel Baloch underscores how media can perpetuate stereotypes and expose women to risks. The comparative analysis underscores that the struggle for gender equality persists across time and space. It serves as a stark reminder of the need to challenge deeply rooted patriarchal norms and systemic gender discrimination. **Empowerment and Education:** Initiatives promoting education and the empowerment of women are pivotal in addressing gender disparities. Education equips women with the tools to challenge stereotypes, access opportunities, and participate fully in society. This research highlights that gendered statuses remain a global concern, transcending historical epochs and geographic boundaries. Whether through the lens of antiquity or contemporary events, the stories of women like Hypatia and Qandeel Baloch emphasize the urgency of collective efforts to create a more equitable world where one's gender should not determine their status or opportunities. Gender equality is a universal aspiration, and this research underscores the importance of sustained efforts to dismantle discriminatory practices and foster inclusive societies.

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