

Discursive Construction of Gendered Nationalism in Armed Conflict of Pakistan and India: A Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

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Idealized masculine discourse is often used to define nationalism. ‘Rescue of women’ and the motherland by the state and military legitimize the gendered power within contemporary discourse. This study employed a feminist critical discourse analysis perspective to reveal gendered ideologies in the discourse surrounding the Pakistan-India armed conflict in May 2025. It examined four special briefing documents released on May 8-9, 2025, by the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan. Using the qualitative research method, the study applied Lazar’s Feminist CDA to analyse power, ideology, representation, and silence in these documents. Braun & Clark’s thematic analysis helped identify themes of militarized masculinity and silencing, reinforcing gendered nationalism exercised by both nations. The findings demonstrate that states strategically construct national identity through gendered discourse. This research is significant for highlighting the powerful feminist discourse embedded in the geopolitical context of South Asia, which often propagates military conflicts through nationalist, gendered, and strategic narratives. It adds to existing feminist scholarship by showing how representational strategies influence public perceptions of war. The study also offers new insight for rethinking national identity, especially in South Asia, amid social, political, and military tensions.

Keywords: militarised masculinity, silencing, gendered nationalism, FCDA

National narratives are often constructed not only as communicative acts but as ideological tools. These are disseminated through media briefings and press releases to shape national identity. Nationalist discourse revolves around a glorious past, patriotism, and protection within the South Asian patriarchy. Political discourse becomes effective when rhetoric is supported by historical evidence of masculine power (Rai, 2012). ‘Rescue of women’ and the motherland by the state and military legitimize the power of contemporary discourse. Idealized masculine discourse is often used to define nationalism. Gendered power structures are reinforced during times of political and military conflict. For feminist scholars, nationalism is not a gender-neutral term. Nations are described through ‘gendered metaphors—feminized land and the masculine warrior’ (McClintock, 1993). Men seek to control women’s mobility, sexuality, and political ‘agency,’ claiming these are to be protected. In patriarchal culture, women symbolize honour and continuity, and ‘women often serve as boundary markers of national identity’ (Yuval-Davis, 2004).

The recent Pakistan-India military conflict initiated intense discourses across the border. Military and political leadership discussed the geopolitical implications of war on the countries; however, each side feminised war and constructed the image of militarised masculinity to protect the motherland.

A body of feminist scholarship on militarized nationalism in South Asia is already established (e.g., Dahl & Manchanda, 2001; Enloe, 2000; Menon & Bhasin, 1998; Yuval-Davis, 1997). The scholarship focuses on how women’s bodies, honour, and roles are vital to nationalist projects, and such discourses make war and partition gendered

experiences. These significant studies have discussed women's experiences, activism, and representation in memory and partition studies in state-authored war narratives.

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) focuses on state institutions, i.e., foreign ministries, offering critical insight into how gendered power is determined through authoritative language. FCDA gives a gendered feminist lens to the discourse of the Pakistan–India war, i.e., Operation Bunyan ul Marsoos and Operation Sindoor, which was conventionally dominated by strategic or security-concerned analyses. Rather than treating war discourse as neutral statecraft, FCDA demonstrates how national ideology is pronounced through gendered language and silences.

Applying Lazar's FCDA framework systematically to official press briefings adds a linguistic-discursive perspective to the current feminist analyses. The concepts of interdiscursivity and silencing highlight how texts employ and reproduce larger cultural discourses, such as martyrdom, honour, and motherhood, while simultaneously silencing other alternatives. This discursive mechanism is less theorized in the previously established South Asian feminist discourse, which is more inclined towards social practices and impacts. FCDA emphasizes official war discourse as text and relates it to the linguistic reproduction of power, which complements and extends the contemporary feminist South Asian scholarship.

Therefore, the novelty of the present work lies in unravelling the supremacy exercised through gendered discourse, remembering, narrating, and justifying the Pakistan and India conflict—a topic largely invisible in the mainstream war and security discourse. Previous South Asian feminist discourse is rich in ethnography, oral history, and sociological analysis. The present study aims to synthesise political discourse and gendered power dynamics to expose how language, representation, and silencing operate in narratives to construct and promote gendered nationalism in South Asia.

Literature Review

Gender and Nationalism

Feminist scholarship has widely focused on the intersection of gender, power, discourse, and nationalism. The studies have particularly investigated the entanglement of national identity and militarisation. Nationalism has been defined within the parameters of gendered ideologies. It frames discourses to promote the development of an agenda favouring elites. In the entire process, women and 'subaltern' men of the weak economic class are marginalised (Gramsci, 1920). Although nationalist discourse promises to provide women 'new spaces' and mobilization (Guha, 1982), a large number of women are excluded from the mainstream discourse (Bereswill & Wagner, 1998). Enloe (1989) discussed the different roles of women, such as 'the participant in national economic, political, and military struggle' as the most 'crucial projects' in the contemporary world. Gender relation conformity is possible by foregrounding nationalist ideology. McClintock (1993) argued that all nationalist discourses were gendered (p.63). She further maintained that the possibility of discussing gender was disregarded in general discourse by referring to men and women as 'men'. Moghadam (1994) deemed nationalism as incompatible with feminism.

Yuval-Davis (2004) explored the concepts of gender and nationalism. The study illustrated how the sexual division in the military contributed to the formation of these notions. Feminists resisted their unequal representation in combat roles, thereby affecting the promotions on an equal basis with men. Chopra (2002) discussed the political crises and the illumination of the masculine gender role in South Asia. She refuted the concept of masculinity as 'a universal category'. Rather, it was a construct by the state and its institutional forces. She argued that masculinity as a significant part of nation-building was shaped by postcolonial states such as India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, where gender performance was equated with nationalism. Gender tropes are manipulated during war conflicts. Chopra's argument conforms to the stance of the present study, which aims to investigate how the language of state narratives embeds gendered ideology to maintain the status quo. Feminist scholars helped 'raise the status of women as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups' (Rai, 2012).

Thomson (2019) also viewed nationalism as a 'gendered phenomenon'. Idealised concepts of masculinity and femininity shaped national identity. The nation is represented by 'feminine body'; a motherland, whereas the state and military act as saviours and protectors. Building her argument on Yuval-Davis (2004) and Enloe (2004), Thomson argued that the feminine body was the core focus of all nationalist discourses. However, women's role in leadership and decision-making remained 'politically marginal' (Thomson, 2019). Moreover, the idea of hegemonic masculinity was glorified to justify wars. Women of the elite class found a representation in such contexts. However, the instrumentalization of women remains a tool to maintain national dignity.

The concept of 'women to be rescued' symbolises masculine pride in wartime. Masculine ideology promotes protecting the household's manager, and her struggle is valued. Nationalist discourse constructs gendered power

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relations of masculinity. Such discourse excludes women from conversations. Partiality and exclusions appear in war discussions, where masculinity is linked to battles (Rai, 2012). Although universalised discourses rendered women 'invisible' in nationalist discourse, feminists have managed to find spaces for themselves. Haycock (2004), Connell (2009), and Khalid (2015) discussed the use of masculine strategies to achieve a global geopolitical dominant position.

Feminist scholarship perceives state narratives building 'gendered identities' (Kaufman & Williams, 2017). 'Women do not figure in the analysis of nationalism and citizenship in the mainstream'; hence, excluded from public. The terms nationalism and feminism thus 'are historically and geographically contingent and diverse' (Knight, 2018).

The review of the above studies dismantles masculinity embedded in the nationalist discourse. The present study further contextualises the conflict between Pakistan and India through FCDA within the framework of gendered nationalist discourse.

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA)

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) is a synthesis of feminist theory and critical discourse analysis. Patriarchal ideologies are embedded in linguistic assumptions and practices (Cameron, 1992). Feminists in academia sought to establish a feminist perspective in language and discourse studies (Spender, 1981; Harding, 1986; Gordon, 1986; Cameron, 1992; Mills, 1995). It was required due to its explicit political stance of interpreting and evaluating various gender inequalities and injustices hidden in the state structures. Feminist CDA aimed 'to establish a feminist politics of articulation' (Wetherell, 1995). Secondly, it aimed to organise and name feminist scholarship on a common platform. 'Feminist CDA as a political perspective on gender' elucidates the power relations between gender, ideology, and discourse (Lazar, 2005). Lazar pointed out the 'multimodal view of discourse [having] great value for a holistic feminist critique of discursive constructions of gender (1999, 2000, 2005).

South Asian feminism has posed challenges to militarism and nationalism; however, FCDA situates its critique within the global feminist discourse (Riaz, 2025). It connects South Asian cases to international debates on performativity, intersectionality, and gendered security. Performativity, intersectionality, and gendered nationalism mainly expand Lazar's Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) and critique its limits. Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins & Bilge, 2016) broadens FCDA beyond its initial "gender-first" focus by arguing that inequalities are reinforced through class, race, nation, gender, and religious conflicts. It also challenges the mostly Eurocentric and reductionist scope of FCDA. Butler's concept of performativity (1990, 1993) improves FCDA by highlighting how gender is performed through discursive repetition, moving beyond simple representation to actual practice. At the same time, it critiques FCDA's tendency to see gendered positioning as more stable than Butler's theory suggests. Gendered nationalism (Yuval-Davis, 1997; Enloe, 2000) applies FCDA to examine the intersection of state, war, and nation, showing how political legitimacy is built through militarized masculinities and sacrificial femininities. This widens FCDA's scope to include geopolitical and war discourses, and also challenges its core institutional and textual biases by supporting a decolonial, transnational perspective. In sum, these approaches expand FCDA's analytical framework, identify its gaps, and direct it towards more reflexivity, intersectionality, and global relevance.

Noakes (2001) argued that political conflicts shape 'war memory'. War is constructed as a 'male domain' active for national defence. Contrarily, the role of women is reduced to passivity. A gendered memory of war silences the 'female agency' and confines it to the 'auxiliary roles' (Noakes, 2001). Noakes (2001) invoked the reclamation of silenced and forgotten voices, encouraging a pluralistic and inclusive approach to war memory. The study highlighted the gendered nationalism in war remembrance, arguing that memory was a political necessity to sustain gender power dynamics.

Shepherd (2010) explored 'gender violence and discourse', which aimed to guide the practitioners of policy making who used different forms of words 'unintentionally' in policy documents. The study found that practices, though unintentional, led to political crises. Shepherd evaluated a crucial policy document, i.e., the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, and focused on three critical strands significant during the writing process of a policy document: 1) language, its drafting and revision, 2) translation policy, and 3) temporal mapping. The study proposed the 'reconstruction' of gender issues in the policy documents.

Noor et al. (2022) examined ideology and power conveyed through language in Pakistani dramas. The study analysed dialogues to identify four gender tropes: patriarchy, chauvinism, self-reliance, and stereotyping of women. The discussion showed how male characters assert dominance over females through language. Khalid et al. (2024) conducted a study to explore feminine resilience, solidarity, and abuse in Moriarty's novel. FCDA challenged stereotypical ideas of gender dominance. The study implored for the 'voice' of women against discursive social practices that silenced them. Sanjarani et al. (2024) applied FCDA to investigate 'gendered spirituality and the

representation of women in Panjabi and Urdu Sufi poetry'. The research found that Sufi poets used feminine imagery and symbolism to depict the 'journey of the soul'. The female figure represented surrender, patience, and resistance. Reali (2023) studied 'war metaphors' in discourse to portray female activists as 'warriors'. The study found a 'subversion' of traditional norms. It analysed ideas of gender, sex, and 'sexuation' to highlight the roles of 'victim/warrior' signifiers. The study suggested 'de-victimisation of women' to align with the Lacanian idea of feminism, focusing on how gender is shaped through symbols.

Ali, Ali, and Usman (2024) conducted a study by applying FCDA to Kincaid's *Girl*. The study focused on masculine hegemony and the struggle of women. It found that patriarchal restrictions in African society threatened the exposure of women to social life. It also emphasised how language was instrumental in social control. Conventional patriarchy and discourse helped to maintain stereotypical gender roles. The study reflected that everyday language shaped the gendered ideology operated by power and control. The present study focuses on the role of gender in meaning-making during the process of building national ideology.

Gendered Narratives & South Asian Militarism

Militarism and state-building in postcolonial societies are intertwined notions with gender ideologies. Political trajectories are not the same in Pakistan and India; however, their use of political and military discourse shares similar patterns to elevate masculinity in public briefings and press releases. Female voices are often silenced in the state narratives during military conflicts. Women are framed as mourners. Manchanda (2017) applauded women's participation during peacebuilding in 04 South Asian post-conflict contexts: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. The process included contributions to the political process and the writing of the constitution. The Kathmandu Declaration, '*The Changing Dynamics of Peacebuilding*,' asserted women's participation in peacebuilding. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 also ensures their role as stakeholders, particularly their involvement in post-conflict governance. Joseph (2013) explored the construction of gendered identities between the relations of states. An intimidating 'other' is always constructed in the state discourse. Modern nation-state and masculinity-femininity are considered 'binary'. All activities involved in the making, such as taking over territories, war decisions, founding a state, building a nation, and establishing a government, are perceived as masculine. Women are there 'to eulogise' (Joseph, 2013). The state, a symbolic mother figure, needs protection from the outsiders. In the South Asian context, the state is recurrently viewed as 'a woman under threat', and her sons safeguarding her honour and dignity. Political discourse and media use 'gendered metaphors' as weapons in war situations (Joseph, 2013). Such conceptions lead to 'national mythologies' built on conventional gender roles. Critical historical events and political crises, such as civil wars, state formations, colonialism, and religious conflicts, have shaped the South Asian identity of men and the concept of masculinity (Chakraborty, 2017).

The literature review demonstrates that previous scholarship agrees on the idea of militarisation and its elevation as a form of gendered nationalism. However, the FCDA approach to analysing official documents of India and Pakistan intervenes by examining language constructs and the sustenance of gendered power relations within national narratives during conflicts. Existing scholarship highlights that national identity is often masculinized, linked to heroism, protection, and sacrifice. Women are symbolically positioned as mothers or passive bearers of cultural purity. The present study examines the reproduction and reinforcement of patriarchal structures in discourse through metaphors of honour, homeland, and purity using a feminist lens. It extends previous work by critically analysing gendered language in political and media texts that normalize exclusionary nationalisms, thereby contributing to a broader understanding of how the discursive reproduction of gendered power shapes nation-building processes.

Method

Theoretical Framework

A Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis model by Lazar (2005) provides a theoretical perspective for analysing and assessing the special briefings released on May 8-9, 2025, by the Foreign Ministries of India and Pakistan in the wake of armed conflict. FCDA, as a potential framework for interpretation, is compatible with the present study, as it dismantles the gendered ideologies hidden in discourse, thereby isolating female agency. It helped to recognise the discursive nature of reality during times of armed conflict.

Using FCDA to dismantle the complex gendered power dynamics, this study explores how official discourse shapes the ideology of gendered nationalism. It identifies 'the complex, subtle, sometimes not subtle ways', which 'produce, sustain, negotiate and challenge hegemonic power relations discursively in different contexts' (Lazar, 2005). It asserts that social practices are gendered. It questions the 'asymmetric meanings of male and female'. The approach

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helps highlight the role allocation to one or the other ‘within concrete practices’(Lazar,2005). It aims to achieve an effective social transformation by theorising ‘gendered discourse practices’, constituting ‘analytical activism’. It understands ‘gender as an ideological structure...based on hierarchical relations of domination and subordination’(Lazar,2005). A social gender dichotomy is constructed, varying as per time and situation. Conventional gender norms are disrupted in ‘masculinization of talk by women in power, and feminisation of forms of masculinity in the home’. FCDA examines the discourse production and resistance of power relations through texts or interactions. It considers discourse as ‘an element of social practices...discursive in character’. It both challenges and legitimises gender power hierarchies by focusing primarily on the intersection of gender with social and national identities within the political, historical, and social contexts.

This study selected four official documents to balance rich qualitative insights with contextualized interpretation, enabling cross-text comparison and ensuring consistency in FCDA’s critical-interpretive methodology. This approach enhances the credibility of the findings while reducing the risk of overgeneralization. The choice of official documents, such as government briefings, was primarily due to their authoritative nature, as they discursively construct and legitimize gendered power, nationalism, and ideology (Lazar, 2005, 2007). These four documents provided adequate material to identify common discursive patterns such as protective femininity, militarized masculinity, othering, and silencing. Documents from the same dates were useful for establishing intertextual connections. This sample also supported comparative analysis. Paired themes, context, and timeline facilitated the exploration of recurring gendered discourses. Methodologically, this selection allowed for a focused yet rigorous analysis, examining how state discourse constructs gendered power relations within specific political or military contexts. Analysing four documents also ensured that the findings were not limited to a single source and revealed patterns and variations across institutional discourse.

Official statements in the Asian socio-political context do more than just record events; these also project moral legitimacy, unity, and national honour (Acharya, 2011). The official documents serve as discursive spaces where gendered nationalism is expressed through metaphors of ‘sacrifice, mother love, martyrdom’. These symbols are deeply embedded in South Asian cultural codes of honour, safety, and traditional gender roles (Yuval-Davis, 1997; Enloe, 2000). Moreover, in Asian contexts where a few key speeches or press briefings shape the national image and collective memory, the discursive compression of state power and cultural meaning becomes apparent (Lazar, 2007).

Grounded in feminist discourse analysis, the study used the thematic analysis model by Braun and Clark (2005) to identify, analyse, and report themes. Four documents (two from each country’s foreign ministry official website) were selected for an in-depth micro-level analysis of recurring patterns of meaning. Meaningful patterns such as words, phrases, and ideas were identified and labelled as codes. Codes were further grouped into themes based on relevance, namely: 1) militarised masculinity, and 2) silencing and dissent for a more focused and nuanced analysis. The selection of these themes was due to their potential for internal consistency and recurrence in the selected data. FCDA helped in interpreting the themes in gendered and ideological contexts. The documents were chosen for their high official authority and significance in shaping public perspectives.

Discussion

Table 1
Discourse Strategies FCDA

Strategy	Textual Evidence From Indian official Discourse/ Words & phrases	Textual Evidence From Pakistani Official Discourse/Words & phrases	Implication
1. Elevated masculinity	Assassination, Control, precision, hierarchy, and aggression, terrorists, not surprised, terror attack in Pahalgam, only the terrorist infrastructure targeted.	Martyrdom, terrorism, responded, bringing down five Indian fighter aircraft, the right to respond, and the victims of the Samjhota Express tragedy,	Affirming valour, dominance, and discipline through the use of words, phrases, and remembrance of war history
2. Representation of Gender	Operation Sindoor, Use of pronoun I, WE	Martyrdom of women and children,	Feminising the state, and necessitating male defence.
3. Otherization of enemy	Construction of the enemy as the other Deranged fantasy of Pakistan, well-versed in such actions, imparting communal hue, terrorists, disinformation, epicentre of global terrorism, cross-border terrorism	Terrorists, misinformation, farcical, a deliberate strategy, manufacture a pretext for aggression, violation of Pakistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity, illegal acts, India's jingoism and war hysteria	Women are erased in these discourses. Construction of the enemy as uncivilised, barbaric, crafty, false and untrustworthy
4. Binary of Victim and Saviour	Pakistan/India, State and military as rescuers/Civilians & children as victims, sikh community,	Pakistan/India, State and military as rescuers/Civilians & children as victims	Justification of militarism as necessary.
5. Moral Framing	provocative and escalatory actions, targeted at Indian cities and civilian infrastructure, draped in Pakistani flags, targeted Sikh community, enter into negotiations, yet another blatant lie,	Endangering regional peace, martyr civilians, agrarian economy, weaponizing water, heinous and shameful crime, places of worship, endangering the lives of thousands of on-board passengers, mosques were destroyed, international community should ...	Construction of the state as upright Issuing measured responses following International law.
6. Silencing and Exclusion	feminising war labelled as Operation Sindoor.	absence of women's voice, bodies, and Pakistani political discourse. innocent women and children, 'martyr women'	A single mention of women as victims on both sides. No hint of their security role. Discourse symbolizes the state and the military as saviours. No mention of women leadership role.
7. Reinforcement	Repetition of words and phrases, e.g. "controlled, measured, precise, clear, terrorism, killing, attack, responded," etc. Use of adverbs, e.g. proportionately, adequately, and responsibly, blatantly.	Indeed, I may repeat, unprovoked and unjustified attacks,	Construction of the armies and states as masculine and brave. Discourse is far detached from emotions, embedded in rationality and logic to legitimise militarisation.

Militarised Masculinity

Table 1 summarises the discourse strategies of FCDA, aiming to expose and challenge gender hierarchies. Feminist CDA interpreted the official documents to expose militarised masculinity, exclusion, and erasure of female discourse. Normalisation of patriarchal nationalist ideology dominated by militarised masculinity is the undercurrent of the special briefings released by the foreign ministries of Pakistan and India. The State narratives reflect a reproduction of masculine ideology in the context of the May 2025 armed conflict. These narratives legitimised the

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gendered ideology under the pretext of morality and rationality. Indian discourse reframes the airstrikes and cross-border attacks as logical, morally sound, and calculated. The state of India claimed to be a masculine power ready to defend. It reflects the 'gendered discursive move' (Lazar, 2005), showing itself as a hegemonic entity to respond to and control a critical situation. It characterises itself with masculine features such as discipline, responsibility, rationality, and control in wartime. These features are associated with men in conventional patriarchal structures. Words such as 'precise', 'target', 'measures', and 'non-escalatory' equated the actions of the Indian State and army as morally superior and justified responses to the enemy's provocative initiation. Likewise, the Pakistani foreign ministry briefing implies similar notions. This is the strategy of moral framing to invoke public patronage. The firm and controlled tone of the official briefings displays hegemonic masculinity. Indian discourse uses words such as 'provocative and escalatory actions, targeted at Indian cities and civilian infrastructure, draped in Pakistani flags, targeted Sikh community, enter into negotiations, yet another blatant lie'. This is to mould the public perception of war by emphasising moral values. The interplay of political, military, and moral processes influences public opinion in South Asian societies (Appadurai, 1984), where gender discrimination and masculine power are pervasive. Pakistani documents also exhibit such vocabulary, 'Endangering regional peace, martyr civilians, agrarian economy, weaponizing water, heinous and shameful crime, places of worship, endangering the lives of thousands of on-board passengers, mosques were destroyed, international community should ...' It not only targets the public but also invokes the sympathy of the international community.

Moral framing in both cases explicitly displays value-laden and ethical language. Emotional responses of the public are invoked by emphasising and repeating that 'innocent civilians, women and children', 'minorities', and 'religious worship places' are targeted by the enemy.

Reinforcement strategy is recurrent in these official briefings by both ministries, constructing an image of the armies and states as masculine and brave. Discourses are far detached from emotions, embedded in rationality and logic to legitimise militarisation and assert hegemonic masculinity, and the nation is equated with a woman, silent and guarded.

Hegemonic masculinity refers to a pattern of behaviour and views within the society that normalises the dominance of men over women (Connell, 2005). The concept serves as a foundation for militarism. 'The production and maintenance of masculinities' was shaped by men since the international sphere was largely formed by men (Hooper, 1999). The Pakistani official documents reflect a highly charged language. Lexical choices such as 'martyrdom', 'respond', 'bringing down five fighter aircraft', 'the right to respond', replicate the supremacy and dominance. Feminised nations need protectors.

The Indian discourse portrays Pakistan as a deceitful and terrorist state. It invokes a gender binary of rational masculinity (India) and disordered anomaly (Pakistan). It imagines India in manifold meanings: 'powerful, controlling, and upright' (Sutherland, 2005). The stance of both governments is defensive, echoing 'masculinized values' (Haycook, 2024). The statesmen employ masculine strategies to achieve geopolitical domination (Haycook, 2025; Khalid, 2015; Connell, 2005). In Pakistani briefings, FCDA unravels heroic framing as a strategy of national survival. Reference to 'martyrs' rationalises their retaliation to Indian strikes. Pakistani discourse indicates a distinct tone enfolded in a gendered dichotomy, presenting an aggressor versus a protector. Referring to the 'victims of Samjhota Express', declaring it a 'tragedy' and rejection of the alleged Pahalgam attacks, Pakistan denies the role of an aggressor as depicted in the Indian discourse.

Wars cost human life, economy, and prosperity; however, masculinity imposes its understanding to view the armed conflicts. The documents show restraint through language, the 'right to respond', and the international community should... Words frame the armies as defenders, and in sacrificial roles. War is glorified to strengthen the image of armies on both sides, using 'otherization' as a strategy, framing the enemy as 'other' and constructing images of 'farcical', 'terrorist', 'disinform [ed]' enemy. Pakistani discourse exhibits its technological capacity and warfare claims, 'bringing down five aircrafts', constructing the enemy as uncivilised, barbaric, crafty, false, and untrustworthy, however, completely under control, pacified, and contained. Indian discourse represents Pakistan as 'the epicentre of global terrorism, framing it as a violent and terrorist state harming borders. Lexical choices create an evasive and volatile picture of Pakistan in contrast to a logical and responsible India.

The use of gendered metaphors is another strategy to assert superiority. Words, e.g., 'martyrdom, terrorism, victims', are implicatures that denote that the masculine body (army) provides a shield to the feminised nation. These words in the Pakistani document refer to India as a 'hypermasculinized' terrorist, irrational, and uncontrolled. The use of the first-person pronouns 'I & We' by the Pakistani spokesman establishes the military role as logical and responsible in controlling the situation. The success narrative of hitting Indian aircraft is also a metaphor that stands for masculine

potency. It conforms to the concept of masculinity as 'a universal category' (Yuval-Davis, 2004). Samjhota Express tragedy metaphorically elevates masculinity and demands for revenge to redeem honour. A patriarchal tone sustains throughout the discourse rather than challenging the norms. Power relations are focused more. Who is involved in the action? Who will respond? Who is silenced/harmed? Who are used as victims? South Asian historical context forms the entire discourse.

Silencing and Dissent

Situated in South Asia, India and Pakistan reproduce gendered ideologies that are politically strengthened in the backdrop of internal skirmishes and international armed conflicts. The projection of militarised masculinity undermines the role of females in the region. The feminisation of war indicates that state narratives illuminate masculine gender roles and exclude or erase women on political platforms, particularly in war contexts (Chopra, 2002).

India's naming the conflict as 'Operation Sindoor' is a significant step towards the construction of gendered nationalism. 'Sindoor' is a cultural term signifying a vermilion mark on the married woman's forehead, right between the two eyebrows. It indicates the marital status in South Asian societies, promising a woman's chastity, protection by the husband, and devotion to husband and family. This marks the woman's identity and her relationship to man. It symbolizes marital fidelity and the sanctity of the wife. This feminized metaphor combines nationalism with cultural-religious identity to produce a Hindu moral legitimacy for state action. The state of India strategically beseeched the image of the Indian nation as a married woman, whose dignity, honour, and respect were violated by an external enemy. The image invoked public emotions to rationalise the strikes against Pakistan. The image produced a binary of victim and saviour. The moral framing of 'Sindoor' is an effective signifier, arousing public sentiments to mobilise public support. Such discourse integrates the concepts of gender, religion, and nationhood, framing the state as patriarch and guardian of its "faithful" citizens, and it completely excludes the minorities from the symbolic national body.

In contrast, Pakistan's national discourse focuses on the safeguarding of faith and honour, illuminating martyrdom (*shahadat*), founding legitimacy on Islamic symbolism. The verbosity constructs the nation as a holy community under threat, where men's duty is to defend religion and women's honour. Through the mobilization of religious sentiment, the discourse of both states functions as an affective mechanism that moralizes militarization and establishes a sense of collective unity, while simultaneously overpowering dissenting voices and reinforcing patriarchal authority.

South Asian people conventionally respond immediately to such calls with zeal, and it is easier for the State to conflate the military actions with the moral obligation. Such a projection, however, does not empower women but further reduces their status to traditional roles, namely honour and submission. The situation leads to their exclusion or erasure in the national discourses. This discursive choice in the documents is intentional: an identity marker of womanhood, reinforcing gendered nationalism. The position of the State and military is elevated as protectors. Embedded in patriarchal assumptions, 'sindoor' reassures the binary of male/female and nation/other. Otherization discloses gender power relations in these discourses. The dominant group constructs the image of the opponent as 'other' (Lazar, 2005).

Indian discourse fuses gender with religious-cultural symbolism, and Pakistan connects it to faith, producing legitimacy and emotion through different semiotic routes—Hindu domestic piety versus Islamic sacrifice reveals that gendered nationalism is culturally specific yet functionally similar to sustain exclusionary power. The national discourses also represent a discursive silencing and erasure of women within these narratives of war. Women are absent as subjects of voice or agency. Not neutral, this omission reflects the gendered restructuring and production of patriarchal hierarchies in which the authority and legitimacy are coded as male, and the experiences of displacement, loss, or resistance of women remain invisible.

The special briefings indicate that both states maintain gender power hierarchies by attributing stereotypical feminine characteristics to their enemies, such as being provocative, deceptive, and irrational. These features are associated with females in South Asian society. The role of the military is rationalised by the state's briefing to defeat and subdue such an enemy. This is 'silencing and erasing women's role and a civilian perspective' (Lazar, 2005). The idea of the nation as a 'feminised space' is pervasive in these discourses. The feminisation of the enemy reinforces gendered nationalism (Yuval-Davis, 2004). Frequent reference to civilian women and children raises a question of whether the civilian martyrs are gendered.

The symbolic repertoires and discursive effects of Pakistani and Indian discourse differ significantly. The war briefings by both States employ the image of 'woman to be rescued' (Rai, 2012) with a strong partial exclusion of the feminine role. Ironically, situated in 'Operation Sindoor', the Indian discourse renders women 'invisible' (Rai, 2012). It reflects the 'discursive absence/erasure' of females in political discourses, and the concepts of morality and

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masculinity are reinforced (Lazar, 2005). It normalises masculine authority by use of universal 'I and We' for the Indian and Pakistani nations, excluding female presence. Partially referring to victims, including women and children, it positions the conflict in a man-only territory. The discursive effect of such discourse legitimises military control sponsored by the state.

Women conceived as 'dissents', opponents, merely passive recipients of terrorism and cross-border attacks, are not visible in these discourses as active subjects, even in the Indian ministry briefings where the operation was led by two women positioned in higher ranks in the Indian Army. This non-reference or omission may be (un)intentional outcome of the strong patriarchal system in the region, or it may be necessitated to win the war and assert dominance over the enemy. This silencing strategy is the dismissal of the female gender. Such discursive practices minimise the possibility of peace-building narratives.

Conclusion

FCDA exposes the discourse that sustains the gendered nationalist narratives of Pakistan and India, imposing an embargo on any non-military alternative or solution to the conflict. The state ministries otherize each other through rhetorical strategies. The documents assert the military attacks of India and Pakistan as masculine and morally justified by reinforcing their protective and defensive roles. Demonising and feminising the enemy to restore control and honour of the nation replicates the gendered nationalist ideologies of Pakistan and India. FCDA helped to conclude that the briefings illuminated masculine power and undermined the feminine presence. The discourses framed the armed conflict purely within strategic and nationalist terminologies. It was also concluded that gender and nationalism are constructed simultaneously by adopting the idealised notions of masculinity and femininity. A soldier's identity is valour and a protector. During crises, the State prefers to glorify the role for its benefit. Nationalism becomes more of a gendered performance connected to the integrity and honour of the nation. To maintain the status quo, female representation is limited to the affected civilian segment. Silencing of females perpetuates a strong image of the State as a dominant male. The assertive male-oriented language of the documents demonstrates reinforcement of myth-making. Metaphors aligned with a feminine vision reinforce the gendered concept of nations as women. The discussion agrees with Lazar's argument that institutional discourse reduced women's position to invisibility. The study concludes that both states have been successful in constructing a gendered discourse to enhance militarised masculinity for political aims across the borders.

The originality of this work lies in its use of a feminist critical discourse analysis lens, applied to the official statements celebrating 'bravery', 'martyrdom', and 'decisive retaliation' as a construct of militarized masculinity embodying national honour. FCDA exposes militarized masculinity and shows how the state frames itself as a protector-father and the nation as a vulnerable motherland. Foregrounding silences and exclusions of women and their roles reduced to victims or mothers of martyrs, FCDA illustrates that these silences are not accidental omissions but active strategies of discourse. It brings a gendered, feminist lens to a field traditionally dominated by strategic, realist, or security-focused analyses. Instead of treating war discourse as neutral statecraft, FCDA shows how national power is asserted through gendered language and silences.

Future Implications

This study opens new avenues for future researchers to rethink South Asian national security discourses, which are overtly gendered and exclusionary. It also implies a need to reimagine national identity, particularly in the South Asian region, through social, political, and military encounters. Feminist ideas should be welcomed in policymaking to give equal representation to women in all facets of public and political life.

The significant policy implications of studying gendered nationalism through FCDA in South Asia emphasize the need for gender-sensitive national and security policies surpassing militarized and patriarchal frameworks of defence. Governments should sponsor narratives of citizenship founded on equality. Secondly, education and media policies should be directed to reform the gender biases rooted in national textbooks, histories, and public discourse. Thirdly, reconciliation and peacebuilding measures should dynamically include women, involving them in decision-making rather than as symbols of peace. Ultimately, regional cooperation among South Asian states should adopt an inclusive approach to nationalism through regional collaboration, fostering more equitable, democratic, and peaceful societies.

In the particular context of India–Pakistan, both nations employ gendered metaphors to reinforce patriarchal norms and militarized masculinity. Policymakers must work to deconstruct such gendered national ideologies in education, media, and political rhetoric. Moving beyond an idealized image of Bharat Mata in national discourse, India should highlight women's actual political and social agency. In Pakistan, policies should focus on the connection

between national honour and female modesty. Furthermore, narratives of citizenship based on equality should be promoted. Both states must integrate women more substantively into peacebuilding and security frameworks, such as diplomacy and cross-border dialogues. Hypermasculine nationalism should be discouraged by forming mutual understanding through collaborative educational and cultural exchange programs. Gender-aware policymaking can best help shift national narratives of identity from protectionism to inclusivity and dignity.

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