



Joyland: A Cinematic Representation of Pakistani Patriarchal Joint Family

Rizwan Bashir Baloch, The University of Lahore, rizwan.bashir@soca.uol.edu.pk

Abul Hassan, The University of Lahore, abul.hassan@soca.uol.edu.pk

Syed Atef Amjad Ali, The University of Lahore, atef.amjad@soca.uol.edu.pk

Ali Ab Ul Hassan, The University of Lahore, ali.hassan@soca.uol.edu.pk

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Abstract

Joyland, a 2022 Pakistani film that gained popularity worldwide but got banned in Pakistan, depicted the problems of patriarchy, suppression of individuals' self-identity, intervention in sexual and reproduction liberty of married couples, taboos associated with women employment, household participation, and sexual pleasure. This study adopts multimodal discourse analysis which critically discusses the patriarchal influence of Pakistani men in a joint family system, by purposefully selected scenes of the film that showcase the characters' depiction of being dominated by the ideology of a patriarchal mindset. It further analyzes the role of a man, the eldest in the family, who decides everyone's fate, irrespective of gender, financial status, or sibling positions in the family. This study also sheds light on how the sexual lives of individuals get affected through joint family pressures, which results in disoriented sexual relationships and indecisive preferences between partners.

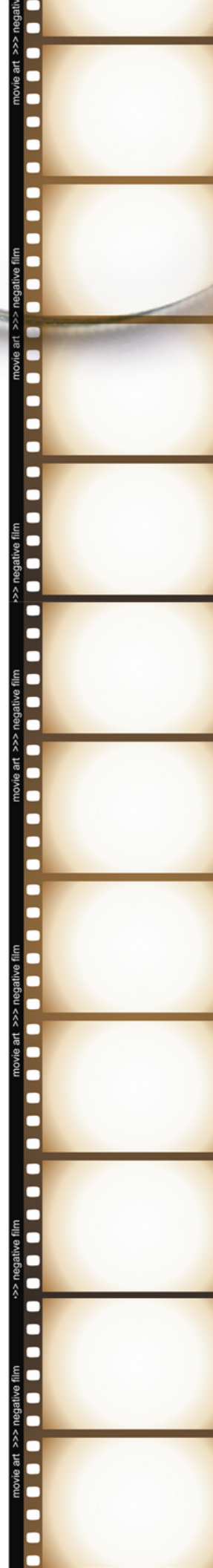
Keywords: Joyland; patriarchy; joint family; sexual relationship; banned film



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Introduction

Joint and nuclear family systems are the two categories that are most frequently employed in Pakistan. "A two-generation family consisting of a father and mother and children or a single, possibly widowed parent and his/her children" is the definition of a nuclear family system. Similarly, "three or more generations lived together" is the definition of a joint or extended family structure (Lodhi, et al., 2021). Families, in general, are one of the essential social groups that provide for a wide range of human needs, both physical and psychological. It is also a fundamental source of caring for its members. Because of this, elderly members of the household are treated with respect in Asian societies (O'Keefe & Yiengprugsawan, 2023).

Patriarchy is the term used to describe the dominance of men in both public and private domains (Ruggiu, 2024). Patriarchal societies grant men absolute precedence and, to some extent, restrict women's human rights (Kutub, 2023). The general principles—that is, men are in charge—remain the same regardless of variations in levels of dominance. Patriarchy can be

considered a barrier preventing women from progressing and developing (Altay, 2019). Multiple factors support patriarchal tendencies; economic conditions are one of them. According to multivariate analyses, patriarchal inclinations are likely to be strengthened by religiosity and a low socio-economic status (Ozdemir-Sarigil & Sarigil, 2021). Pakistan embraces joint families as a social norm, with grandparents playing a significant role in the family unit (Baig, Rehman, & Mobeen, 2014).

Saim Sadiq, in his feature directorial debut, wrote, directed, and co-edited the 2022 drama film *Joyland* from Pakistan. The story of the movie revolves around a middle-class joint family, led by an aging patriarch, who longs for the birth of a grandchild. The youngest and unemployed son of a family finds work at an exotic dance theatre, and he compels his wife to resign from her job. However, issues arise when he develops feelings for the transgender dancer, who is working in the same theatre group (Javed, 2023). The movie badges multiple awards and recognition, including the festival's Jury and Queer Palm prize, selection as the Pakistani entry for Best International Film at the 95th Academy Awards, in addition, the movie was also premiere at the Cannes Film Festival (2022).

This study aims to explain the role of patriarchy in the joint family system presented in *Joyland*, how the filmmaker demonstrates the strict mindset of the grandfather, the mindset that

makes the lives of family members miserable, making them helpless while limiting their choices in life. Along with psychological well-being, sexual freedom is also hindered. The joint family system has been celebrated in Pakistan since its birth; it is considered the strongest pillar and support system of a middle-class family. The joint or extended family system has its prospects and consequences. The study also identifies signifiers and their respective meanings via performing semiotic analysis.

Narrative Elements of Joyland

Plot

The plot centers on four female characters (*Mumtaz, Biba, Nucchi & Fayyaz*), including a transsexual woman, *Biba* and three male characters (*Haider, Saleem & Rana Aman Ullah*) from dysfunctional families, which is characterized by negative and unhealthy interactions that impair the well-being of its members (Ilyas et al., 2025). After, reluctantly, taking a job as a backup dancer in a theatre company, *Haider* the youngest son of a conservative extended Pakistani family, immediately develops feelings for the tenacious Trans *Biba* who manages the show.

Characters

Actor	Character Name	Character Playing	Character Type
Ali Junejo	Haider (Protagonist)	The youngest son of a family	Dynamic

Rasti Farooq	Mumtaz	The wife of Haider	Dynamic
Salmaan Peerzada	Rana Aman Ullah	The father of Haider	Flat
Alina Khan	Biba	The trans woman dancer	Dynamic
Sarwat Gilani	Nucchi	Wife of Haider's brother	Round

Table 1: Characters and their types

Point of View	First Person
Setting	Interior Lahore, 2022, Gloomy
Theme	Patriarchy, Extended Family, Feminism, Trans, Gender, Sex
Conflict	Characters are struggling in a patriarchal extended family

Table 2: Additional information about film

Literature Review

The reflective approach to representation theory posits that language serves as a mirror, reflecting the truth and meaning that already exist, and that meaning is innate in the things, people, ideas, and events that occur in the real world. Though meaning is not exclusively dependent on a direct one-to-one reflection of the world, representation is not a perfect reflection of reality because language and visual signals frequently contain fictitious or imagined aspects (Hall, 1997). Interestingly, in terms of cultural representation, the film industry consistently exploits stereotypes or concentrates on a few fundamental and striking traits, simplifying individuals and cultures since it makes media or film production easier and

provides familiar codes to a wider audience (Hassan et al., 2023; Glotov, 2023).

Cultural elements are crucial in establishing an individual's social standing. Due to cultural considerations, the elderly in a patriarchal society frequently enjoy power and control. However, patriarchal societies—like Pakistani society—are going through a demographic shift. The social lives of the elderly are also strongly impacted by the fast global change in traditional values and conventions (Meer, Saeed, & Shah, 2021). On the other hand, a social problem is an issue that affects a few or all of a society's members' well-being and is typically the subject of public debate. According to this definition, a "condition" is any circumstance that ignores the physical and psychological aspects, like being unemployed and being poor, that destroy people's dignity and make them inactive and without power (Macionis, 2019).

Joyland is a sophisticated, magnificent, and beautiful film that offers a flawlessly rendered glimpse into the lives of middle-class Pakistani families and the hidden desires of queer. It also sparks fascinating discussions on the direction that queer cinema will take in the future (Qureshi, 2023; Hamid, 2023). It depicts the general behavior of conservative Pakistani society where queer behavior is condemned due to religious and cultural reasons (Noor et al., 2024). Like the combined family system, children's growth will receive more attention the larger the family. Nuclear families are less able to meet the emotional needs of their members

than blended families, which uphold traditional norms (Saleem & Gul, 2018). The relationship between stress and deficiencies in executive functioning tolerance is non-significant for students from joint families and significant for students from nuclear families (Munir, Saleem, & Zahra, 2023). According to Durkheim, societal factors can contribute to suicide in addition to psychological or emotional ones. A person's likelihood of committing suicide decreases with social integration, which is defined as feeling more linked to society, having a sense of overall belonging, and believing that life makes sense in relation to society. Suicide rates rise with a decline in social integration (Durkheim, 1897).

Multimodal Discourse Analysis

"Multimodality" refers to the realm of semiotic inquiry, the space, and resources that somehow enter into meaning, as well as the field in which semiotic activity is conducted (Jewitt, 2009). The goal of a multimodal approach is to transcend methods in which a theory and a discipline are inextricably linked to mode, frequently in a way that defines both. In these methods, linguistics handled writing, art history handled images, and so on. A multimodal approach frames each mode as a single field or domain. When taken as a whole, they are regarded as a single, interconnected cultural resource for (representation as) meaning-making at a specific time by individuals within a social group. All are regarded as distinct in their material potential and social molding, and all are recognized as potentially equal in their ability

to add meaning to a complex semiotic entity, a text (Kress, Multimodal discourse analysis, 2011). Multimodality emphasizes that 'language' is merely one among the numerous resources for producing meaning (Kress, & Bezemer, 2023). The textual "threads" in Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MMDA) are numerous and materially varied, including writing, music, gesture, conversation, and images, both still and moving, together with three-dimensional components that can be combined to form a single textual or semiotic unit.

Semiotics

The study of signs, symbols, and signification is known as semiotics. The term semiotic comes from the Greek word *semainon*, which means signifier, and *semainomenon*, which means signified (Rizma, Zein, & Perangin-angin, 2021). The definition of semiotics is widely agreed upon by numerous eminent scholars and philosophers, including Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Sanders Peirce, and Roland Barthes (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1993; Sudjiman & Zoest, 1996; Chandler, 2002).

As stated in Eco's book "A Theory of Semiotics," which makes it apparent that everything that can be interpreted as a sign is the subject of semiotics, a semiotic account is for everything that can be seen and understood as a symbol. Anything that appears to be a significant replacement for anything else is a signal. According to Umberto Eco, "something else" does not always exist at the precise moment the sign that indicates or takes the place of its location

exists. Umberto Eco often refers to it as the "theory of lie" or "deception" since it may be used to trick or mislead others (Eco, 1979). Signifiers are any material objects, and signified meanings are understood through semiotic analysis and the signifiers present in the mise-en-scène (Baloch et al., 2024). Through semiotic analysis, and with the support of the signifiers available in the film *Joyland*, meanings are interpreted.

Signifier: Any material thing that signifies, e.g., words on a page, a facial expression, or an image.

Signified: The concept that a signifier refers to.

Social Semiotic Theory

Three communicative meanings of images are proposed by social semiotic theory, as developed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996). These meanings are representational, compositional, and interactive. The narrative of an image conveys its representational meaning, the image's compositional meaning is revealed by its arrangement, and an image's interactive meaning is determined by how it strikes a chord with the observer.

There are four underlying assumptions to the theory:

1. Meaning-making is multimodal, meaning it happens simultaneously through various elements like writing, images, action, etc...
2. Semiotic resources are shaped by the social context, meaning the meaning attributed to a semiotic resource is informed by the culture of the place where the actions are taking place;
3. Signs are motivated by individual motives, meaning people intentionally portray a targeted meaning in a social context, which is not accidental; and

4. The interest of the originators of a sign guides their semiotic choices, meaning the underlying intention (Wong, 2019).

Method

Studying *Joyland*'s multimodal features—images along with intertextuality and semiotic analysis—is worthwhile because it enables researchers to produce a more in-depth understanding of Pakistani cinema. Building on the social semiotics of Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) and to reveal how patriarchy and extended family systems are portrayed in the film, this paper performed a qualitative multimodal analysis emphasizing the representational interpretations in the visual and textual components of relevant scenes. After carefully watching *Joyland*'s film, the most appropriate scenes were extracted for study. Scenes were selected based on their representation of patriarchy and extended family structure. Screenshots of selected scenes were taken, and then thumbnails of different frames were made for better multimodal analysis.

As per the Social Semiotic Theory of Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), the analysis of *Joyland* film and their respective meaning consists based on three components:

1. Representational (Story of the image)
2. Compositional (Layout of the image)
3. Interactive (interaction of image)

The languages, notions, classifications, mental imagery, and representational systems that filmmakers use to construct the specific meaning. The semiotics, metaphors, and color schemes

cinematographers apply to achieve a particular objective. To understand the intertextuality, an excerpt of selected scenes was also analyzed. A text's relationships to other texts within the broader cultural practices and their manifestation are referred to as “intertextuality” (Orr, 2010).

RQ1: How does patriarchy shape the representation and drive the main narrative in the film *Joyland*?

RQ2: To what extent, a joint family structure reshapes the lifestyle of *Joyland*'s main characters?

Findings & Analysis



Figure 1: The opening scene of Joyland film

Representational: In the opening scene of *Joyland*, Haider is playing with kids of his brother, three kids and all are females. Characters are happy, excited, and making joyful noises. Suddenly, Nucchi (Wife of Haider's brother) calls Haider in a shouts voice, Haider runs towards

the kitchen where Nucchi is standing with an anxious face. Nucchi wipes the floor, takes off her jewelry, hands it over to the kids then instructs Haider to bring the motorbike (see figure 1).

Compositional: The aspect ratio is 1.33, an unusual frame, considered claustrophobic (framing techniques that create a sense of confinement and unease). The camera is panning with a deep depth of field, showing everything sharply, including background objects.

Interactive: The overall feel of the scene is happy, clearly showcasing a joint family structure with multiple kids. Registering the protagonist (Haider) as a kind and loving human being, who loves to play with children. Kids are excited and enjoying the company of Haider, it shows mutual affection. Deep depth of field disclosing background objects, demonstrating the lifestyle of a lower-middle-class family in interior Lahore.

Semiotics: Haider's body is fully covered with a white veil; he is moving theatrically, like he is doing a performance. The metaphoric appearance of Haider demonstrates his concealed personality, unexplored identity, and struggle with the gender crises.

Excerpt: “*Mama, our brother is coming*” ماما، ہمارا بھائی آ رہا

One of the kids asks from *Nucchi* about the projected arrival of her newborn brother. This one dialogue encompasses the very mindset of patriarchy. In a socio-cultural context, in a patriarchal system of Pakistan's middle-class families, the male kid is considered a sign of

prosperity, who will become an earning hand in the future. The female who gives birth to a male child is appreciated more in the extended patriarchal society, the phenomenon of having a male kid is so deeply rooted in Pakistani society that a female child is also anticipating the same and hoping for it. To show the intensity of male-child syndrome in Pakistani middle-class families, the makers of *Joyland's* film chose a small girl to deliver the dialogue, moreover, the whole narrative of the joint family is built professionally via composition and Mise-en-scene. One aspect which is important to ponder, the desire to have a male child gets stronger when someone has three female kids, if we switch the scenario, what will happen when someone has three male kids? The parents have a stronger desire to have a female kid, this very fact is associated with basic human psychology and not connected with any respective culture.



Figure 2: The scene of goat sacrifice

Representational: Haider is chasing the black goat; he is trying to capture it. Mumtaz (Haider's wife) enters in the frame with a bag on shoulder, Rana Aman Ullah (Haider's father) who is on wheelchair, trying to phone to butcher but get no success. Aman Ullah asks Haider to slaughter the goat as butcher is not responding. Haider reluctantly agrees, while having knife on his hand, he starts trembling. Mumtaz snatches the knife from Haider's hand and slaughters the goat; female kids are watching the whole progress (see figure 2).

Compositional: The perspective angle of veranda, aspect ratio is 1.33, a box vision with a combination of mid, long and close-up shots. Showcasing facial expressions with emotions.

Interactive: Rana Aman Ullah is the head of a family, he is portrayed as a patriarch in the *Joyland* film who controls every family member. This scene establishes Aman Ullah as a powerful character; he is the person looking for a butcher and orders Haider to slaughter the goat. All the characters present in the scene seem inferior and weak in front of Aman Ullah, no one dares to oppose his authority.

Semiotics: Mumtaz is wearing red color and she slaughters the goat.

Red is a representation of passion, violence, danger, and a color of blood. The goat is slaughtered by Mumtaz, that signifies a stronger personality with a tendency to take extreme measures.

Excerpt:

“From where are you coming?” تم کہاں سے آ رہی ہو؟

“Mumtaz, you will bring water” ممتاز، تم پانی لے کر آؤ

As Mumtaz enters the house, Aman Ullah asks her where she has been. This inquiry symbolizes the patriarchal surveillance and the check and balance system that prevails in the household. When Haider tries to get water, Aman Ullah stops him and orders Mumtaz to bring water instead. In a traditional Pakistani middle-class family, most of the household chores are done by females. Tasks such as cleaning, washing, and cooking are associated with women. The entire scene demonstrates the patriarch's rule in the family. He is the one giving instructions to everyone, and nobody dares to object to his authority. The director chooses Mumtaz to slaughter the goat, which is unusual and defies orthodox Muslim practice. This particular act shows Mumtaz's daring personality.



Figure 3: The message of Amanullah, discussion between Haider and Mumtaz

Representational: Haider is having a conversation with his father Amanullah while giving him a massage. The next shot is a chat between Haider and Mumtaz while standing in the room (see figure 3).

Compositional: Close-up shot of Amanullah's naked back and showing his side face, moving oily hands of Haider on his father's back. The next shot is a mid-frame of Haider and Mumtaz.

Interactive: The massage scene of Amanullah is another example of his patriarchal rule in the house, as a head of the family he received special treatment from other members. Amanullah is belittling Haider for being unable to reproduce. In the next shot where Mumtaz

and Haider having a light happy discussion, the kid's voice interrupts them while asking for food.

Semiotics: The close-up shot of Amanullah's back registering skin tags and moles, gray hair, and mustaches. Frame within frame in the scene of Haider and Mumtaz.

Grey hair demonstrates maturity and big moustaches signify rigid masculinity. The frame within the frame shot represents inner confusion between Haider and Mumtaz, an ongoing tussle between the conscious and subconscious.

Excerpt: Mumtaz does not want or you are unable to do? **ممتاز نہی چاہتی یا تم سے کچھ ہوتا؟**
نہی

When Amanullah asks Haider why he is not having a baby, Haider replies Mumtaz does not want right now. Amanullah taunts him while saying Mumtaz does not want or you are unable to reproduce, Haider stops for a while and does not answer. The tone of Amanullah is low but reflects a critical comment on his son, which shows his sheer observational skills as the head and supervisor of the whole house, he knows there is no special intimacy that prevails between his son and daughter-in-law. The decision to have a baby is solely associated with the parents, but in the joint family system of Pakistan, the head of the house also interferes in that

matter and creates pressure to reproduce as soon as possible, interference in private matters is a negative side of joint family structure.



Figure 4: The scene of dinner and discussion about Mumtaz job

Representational: The whole family is having dinner and discussing who will handle house chores in the absence of Haider. Amanullah, the father suggests Mumtaz leave her job and participate in the matters of the house (see figure 4).

Compositional: Over-the-shoulder (OTS) shot of Mumtaz, close-ups of Amanullah.

Interactive: The scene demonstrates the dominance of Amanullah as a decision-maker, he forces Mumtaz to leave the job and when Mumtaz refuses, Haider asks her to do the same as his father demands. The difference between Haider's and Mumtaz's personality is evident.

Semiotics: The kid with the white mask

The mask symbolizes dual personality and hidden intentions, as house members are looking for their benefit and not considering the opinion of Mumtaz about her career.

Excerpt:

"Mumtaz must stay at home and look after household chores."

ممتاز کو گھر پر رہنا پڑے گا اور گھر کے کام کاج پر توجہ دینا پڑے گی

This dialogue of Amanullah, delivered by patronizing tone and a feel of commandment showcases his supreme power and makes other subordinates, his facial expressions demonstrate anger and irritation he is intolerant towards differences of opinion. That particular scene registered Amanullah as a tyrant, who wanted to suppress people while dictating them. The Over-the-shoulder (OTS) shot of Mumtaz visually symbolizes every house member against her, as she is the one who rebels against the societal norms which are prevailing in the joint family structure and does not allow a woman to behave independently.



Figure 5: The intimacy of Mumtaz and Haider

Representational: Haider is washing dishes in the kitchen when Mumtaz enters and starts working, Haider ties Mumtaz's hair while talking romantically, at that moment Nuchhi enters and hands over her kid to them. In the next shot, Haider and Mumtaz lying on the bed and the kid is lying between them (see figure 5).

Compositional: Mid shot in the kitchen, High angle in the bedroom.

Interactive: This particular scene of *Joyland's* film encapsulates the essence of the main narrative, highlighting the obstacles of a joint family in which a wed couple struggles.

Semiotics: Kid lying between Husband and Wife on the bed.

The sex life of Mumtaz and Haider is already struggling, and when they try to be intimate, the kids interfere, they have no privacy, not even in their bedroom. There is a difference between

reel life and real life. Privacy is always given to the newlywed couple in the joint family system; personal space can be compromised in the daytime, but at night, couples have their own room with no intervention. moreover, in a joint family, elders prevent kids from disturbing newlywed couples.

Discussion and Conclusion

Films depict cultural formats (Mishra, 2018) of social institutions and imprint a glimpse of the respective norms and values of the indigenous society in which the film is produced. *Joyland* is the type of film that represents a sheer Lahori family who lives in the walled city with strongholds of cultural roots, including family traditions. While this film does not shy to share facts of Pakistani society which are considered taboo and intolerable as in the film, the elder brother's wife is seen smoking cigarettes and hiding from the family, while only the younger brother's wife knows about it. As if a man of the family would not bear the sight of it and only, he can do it. The slaughtering of a goat by a woman character, Mumtaz, is a women empowering symbol which most Pakistani men, predominantly religious, are unsure of its legitimacy and acceptance in the overall society. Mumtaz is also seen masturbating while watching a guy in the street doing the same, is a scenario no Pakistani cultural man in a family can apprehend as the sexual pleasure of women is not given much attention in Pakistani society and it is only confined to a 'stigma' only associated with boys and men. As if only men are

liable to do (culturally) prohibited acts of smoking, masturbating, having sex with a transgender, dancing for theatre, and being abusive. The film's plot exposes the widespread patriarchal structure that gives rise to the subordination and oppression of women (Riaz & Chan, 2024).

Joyland, depicts a joint family scenario where every other elder is curious to ask a newly married couple about their sexual life and the expected dates of their babies to be born. It not only brings in social pressure to produce children but also intervenes in a couple's private decision-making ability to when to have babies. Resultantly, it not only undermines the couple's financial planning but also deteriorates their psychological well-being, which is depicted in this film through protagonist characters Mumtaz and Haider, who are struggling to fix their mutual relationship as husband and wife -- their family status as a younger couple under a supervising father, their financial conditions as Haider is jobless and forced to ask Mumtaz to leave her job and create a strong bond due to Haider's affair with a transgender and leaving her wife unattended.

Due to the fact that Pakistani men and women are not legally and socially bound to do jobs when they can, they become dependent on their parents, primarily the father and grandfather of the family (Tabassum, 2016). Consequently, the order of the house is composed as the powerful men of the family say. In this film, Rana Aman Ullah, the father of Haider,

though quite old and sits in a wheelchair still sways the house with his orders as final discretion. His command to his son to order her wife to leave the job and do household chores is driven by the fact that husbands in Pakistani families decide the fate of their wives whether they (wives) will do jobs or not. While the father-in-law, Rana Aman Ullah did not directly order his daughter-in-law to leave the job but asked his son to stop her from going to the job and stay at home for household work. The hierarchy of men's dominance over women is superimposed through a cultural context when the husband is financially weak and the younger sibling in the family, is not able to denounce his elders' verdict about their very personal choices of doing or leaving the job and reproducing children or holding on for right time.

Moreover, a couple in a joint family, while financially dependent and younger, is socially and culturally bound in a Pakistani setup, which is depicted in the film '*Joyland*', that they are considered less credible and insignificant in expressing their personal feelings and preferences. This results in shaping deprived personalities, easily persuaded and influenced mindsets, sexually dissatisfied and disoriented psychologies, indecisive and self-pity social members who cannot create healthy relationships with people and specifically with their partners and eventually end up a continuity of stereotypical mindset in the long run.

The film, *Joyland*, stirs the very sociocultural grounds on which subcontinental family

standards are stranded for centuries while the modern viewer of films living in the subcontinent and outside, will be reluctant to imagine in reality (Malik & Fatima, 2025). But this is the reality of Pakistani society which, majorly the new generation, has moved along with the speed of technology without realizing the courtyards issues of their houses which are still old fashioned, orthodox and presumably will open new debates for researchers to divulge into sociocultural enigmas with regards to modern world orders.

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