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### A Critical Discourse Analysis of Representation of Women in Selected South Asian Songs

Author(s):

Sabiha Tariq<sup>1</sup>, Badriah Khaleel<sup>2</sup>, Farwa Qazalbash<sup>3</sup>

Affiliation:

<sup>1</sup>University of Sindh, Jamshoro, Sindh, Pakistan

<sup>2</sup>University of Malaya, Malaysia

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Sabiha Tariq



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## A Critical Discourse Analysis of Representation of Women in Selected South Asian Punjabi Songs

Sabiha Tariq<sup>1</sup>, Badriah Khaleel<sup>2</sup> and Farwa Qazalbash<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Engineering and Technology, Pakistan

<sup>1</sup>Kinnaird College for Women

### Abstract

This paper aims to analyze women's representation in South Asian Punjabi songs. This research is qualitative in its nature, and different approaches of Critical Discourse Analysis have been used to analyze the data. For a comprehensive analysis, triangulated approach, referential strategies, and schema of discursive reproduction of power along with seven building tasks of language have been applied to the selected songs critically. The findings reveal that through different Punjabi songs, women are being portrayed as rapacious creatures, materialists, disloyal and liars, valueless compared to men and as an object for sexual comfort for men. This study focused only on the negative representation of women through Punjabi songs in South Asia; it can be analyzed how such representation of women in pieces affects the thoughts of our young generation. Also, a study can be conducted on how women are picturized through Urdu songs.

**Keywords:** punjabi songs, lyrics, CDA, gender stereotypes, women's representation

### Introduction

This research aims to analyze how women are represented through the usage of language in the lyrics of the songs by men through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis. Women are being portrayed as rapacious creatures, as they tend to knee on just wealth and wealthiest, trouble makers, disloyal creatures, valueless compared to men and as an object for sexual comfort for men, through different songs. In South Asian countries, diversity in gender, colour, language, race and even age differences suggest numerous narratives of various political risks. Sharma (1987) states that most females in South Asian media are generally portrayed negatively, i.e. in pursuit of

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\*Corresponding Author: [farwa.qazalbash@gmail.com](mailto:farwa.qazalbash@gmail.com)

glamour and luxurious lifestyle, they are usually only used in cosmetics, clothes, and food advertisements.

This study aims to address how women are being represented negatively in South Asian countries (Pakistan and India) through language in songs and the reason behind deliberately painting a destructive picture of women by the opposite gender via the medium of songs.

Many kinds of research have been done on language and gender that address how women are being sexually objectified, stereotypical thinking regarding women, and inequality based on gender through media, advertisements, proverbs and songs. Still, the present research paper aims to analyze how men try to represent women negatively, undesirably and destructively to degrade them, to devalue them through the language usage in songs.

### **Literature Review**

Critical discourse analysis refers to analyze any piece of discourse critically and discourse can be anything that is meaningful, conveying some kind of sense, relatable to the meanings. According to Iedema and Wodak (1995) the basic aim of critical discourse analysis is to dig out the connection between language and power, language and dominance, language and discrimination, and the association between language and control. Critical discourse analysis describes that discourse has the power to construct a society according to its will and discourse is habituated socially, as stated by Blommaert et al. (2000), moreover they asserted that discourse is vague in its nature in the new age of the world and the main purpose of critical discourse analysis is to make the vague discourse transparent. Critical discourse analysis analyzes the facts of discrimination, dominance and power relations that are there in the language usage. Critical Discourse Analysis and Critical Discourse Studies both are interrelated. Critical discourse studies do not see only the meaning of language at surface level but it investigates the usage of language beyond the sentence level, the visuals and sounds are considered most important in meaning making in Critical discourse studies, (Wodak, 2001). There are different frameworks to make critical discourse analysis happen: Triangulated approach to analyze the manipulation of language by Dijk (2006), building tasks of

language and different tools to analyze the discourse by Gee, 2010, Tools of inquiry and discourses, Gee (2004), Discourse historical approach by Wodak (2001), theoretical framework of schema of discursive reproduction of power by Dijk (2015), and referential strategies by (Wodak, 2001). There are different concepts in Critical Discourse Analysis, among these different notions manipulation of people is one of them but there is no methodical theory of the formation and processes that is involved in the manipulation of people.

### **Methodology**

The research approach of this paper is qualitative in its nature, and the research paradigm is a social constructivist paradigm as it analyzes the written material of different South Asian songs and sees their implications on South Asian society. Other methods of Critical Discourse Analysis, as research tools, have been used for this paper to analyze the data. For a comprehensive analysis, triangulated approach by Dijk (2006), Referential strategies by Reisigl and Wodak (2017), and schema of discursive reproduction of power by Dijk (2015), along with seven building tasks of language (Gee, 2004) have been used. Eight songs were shortlisted and deeply analyzed in this paper to determine the results. Purposive sampling was used to collect the data. Twenty Punjabi songs were composed and translated into English. Themes were generated based on the songs' analysis, and each songs' lyrics were interpreted accordingly.

### **Findings and Discussion**

It is a reality that most societies follow the patriarchal system. Women are dependent upon men to get the facilities of life. Only men are allowed to hold high social and economic positions, and where men have more political power than women. What's the reason for this phenomenon? The answer is, maybe, the stereotypical thinking that men are more strong both emotionally and physically than women. Ananthaswamy and Douglas (2018) argue that females usually care for the domestic environment. They almost leave external affairs at the age of adolescence, but men tend to see and manage the external affairs primarily, and they live in different social groups; therefore, they are more close to the other members of the society which help each other in problem-solving; problem-solving is associated

with authority. Maheshwari, 2017 describes that although women are working as equal to men in the present societies, the stereotypical views make females stranded. These conventional views are women are weaker than men, they are dependent upon men, and men are the caretakers of women. After doing a deep analysis, it was revealed that the language used by men in songs, all the selected themes had male singers, is highly manipulative to degrade the opposite gender. If we talk about how women are being portrayed; these are the manipulative ideas that men want to prevail in South Asian society to devalue women by using such manipulative language in selected songs:

### **Women are Materialists**

Awanis (2018) articulates that materialism is ruthless in its nature. The people who follow the materialistic view are considered too self-centred intrinsically. In South Asian Punjabi songs, the idea is being prevailed by male singers through using such language in the lyrics of the songs that women are materialists as compared to men; women value the materials like cars, wealth, money, luxuries, bank balance, affluence, prosperity while choosing a boy to live with instead of giving importance to the psychic beliefs like love, affection, care, and warmth. Siddiqui (2014) states that men in mostly South Asian societies control language; they can represent women in a good way or a bad manner, through the usage of language, strong or weak, ordinary or extraordinary as language is possessed by men, which is the governing and independent group of the society over women. The sayings and jokes which have a gender-related basis define women negatively. Similarly, there is a long list of South Asian Punjabi songs that negatively represent women. In most songs, women are portrayed as materialists, as they want to enjoy their lives in luxuries; therefore, they demand to their boyfriends of different expensive things like cars, expensive clothes, jewellery and so on. “Yaar battery” is a song by Honey Singh released in 2011 that negatively defined women. According to the schema of discursive reproduction of power, the influential groups control the communicative events. In South Asian society, as stated above, men hegemonies women, also the language; by using this power, the male singer tries to prevail the idea that women want material things instead of true love, as Honey Singh says in the song (2011):

“First you asked for a car, not a small but a big one  
 First you asked for a car, not a small but a big one  
 Made me sell whatever farmland I had left  
 Made me sell whatever farmland I had left”

The ideology that is being prevailed in the above-mentioned song is being controlled by a man because men cover the discourse situations in a society due to its authority, and it is obvious that if a powerful group provide an idea, it affects the most on the cognitive abilities of the listeners, (Dijk, [2015](#)).

“Martin Ride by Kuwar Virk” that was released in 2016:

I have an Aston Martin car,  
 Have a seat in it, I want to drive with you. 2  
 Day and night people talk about me,  
 If you want the same, you will have to be with me. 2  
 I have an Aston Martin car,  
 Have a seat in it, I want to drive with you. 2  
 My nature is jolly like,  
 Your demands are expensive but worthy.  
 I have an Aston Martin car,  
 Have a seat in it, I want to drive with you. 2  
 My shining Audi goes on road,  
 Its keep on going, don't breaks,  
 People admire my car; I know it's great.  
 Let's go with me, your hands in mine,  
 Let's go on date.  
 I want to do special for you,  
 But what can I do your birthday is late.  
 Swiss bank has my account,  
 You can check if any doubt,  
 I will afford you, don't take tension and chill out. 2  
 I do not do a black business,  
 With the grace of God,  
 My pockets remain full of pounds.  
 I have an Aston Martin car,  
 Have a seat in it, I want to drive with you. 2

I have an Aston Martin car,  
Have a seat in it, I want to drive with you. 2

A sense of possessiveness is prevailed throughout the song by a male singer, which represents the male authority over things. The primary purpose is to woo women by showing them their control and prosperity as women are much attracted towards money, cars, Audis, wealth, and wealthiest. "I have an Aston Martin car; I want to drive with you, have a seat in it (two times repeat)", represents that men are more powerful than women as they show off their material to women for convincing them and order a woman, instead of making the request, to be with them like he Kuwar Virk says: "I want to drive with you, have a seat in it", by applying triangulated approach Dijk (2006) and schema of discursive reproduction of power, (Dijk, 2015). The song tries to portray the image that women do not need love; they need money and luxuries as he says: "People admire my car; I know it's great, Let's go with me, your mine hands, let's go on a date", by showing females the materials, men try to provoke women for the physical comfort. Songs have more effect on listeners as compared to a simple speech due to the melody of music; men use this thing to create negative ideas about women. 14 times in the song, there is a repetition of "I have an Aston Martin car, have a seat in it, I want to drive with you", to reinforce the idea women are more attracted towards materials that are why the male singer is using such language to appease her. The language is in the control of men in South Asian society; men describe women as they want; here in the song, there is an idea that is being prevailed that show wealth and materials to women and get them to the bedrooms. Kuwar Virk says: "Swiss bank has my account, you can check if any doubt, I will afford you, don't take tension and chill out (two times repeated)", where he tries to show that women are just like objects to buy, give money or show superfluties and get them because they are materialists. When a thing is said so many times, it affects the thinking Dijk, 2006; powerful groups handle the language usage give ideas to prevail, which affects the people's thinking. In South Asian society, men control the language. "I do not do a black business, with the grace of God, my pockets remain full of pounds" this line again reinforces the idea that women are materialists, show them money to woo them and get them. "my car", "my shinning Audi", "my Swiss bank account", "my pockets remain full of money", all the words are

used to show off their status and to convince the opposite gender which strengthens the idea that women are materialists, they do value the material things in lieu to the spirituality. There is another example, song by Sukhi Sidhu, his song "Ferrari":

O girl I have listen somewhere about your demands,  
 You are looking for a guy who has a Ferrari.2  
 O girl I have listen somewhere about your demands,  
 You are looking for a guy who has a Ferrari. 2  
 I will pay for you for your beauty,  
 I will give everything to you.  
 I need only your “Yes”,  
 O girl I have listen somewhere about your demands,  
 You are looking for a guy who has a Ferrari. 2  
 Don’t be so arrogant for your beauty,  
 I will buy you my pretty woman.  
 O girl I have listen somewhere about your demands,  
 You are looking for a guy who has a Ferrari. 2

People with authority have control over communication events, teachers have control over students, parents have control over kids, bosses have control over employees and similarly in everyday conversation and discourse of any kind men have control over women, especially in South Asia men are dominant over women, so the words that are spoken by a male have different worth as compared to the words that are spoken by women. There are so many South Asian songs in which it is being displayed that women are much attracted towards physical things, which shows that men are allowed to prevail different ideas about women whether negative or positive through the usage of language. In south Asia people are found of listening music and things are conveyed more easily through music as compared to the simple speech, so men use this thing to prevail negative ideas about women. In the above-mentioned song by Sukhi Sidhu, by analyzing it through schema of discursive reproduction of power, Dijk (2015), it is obvious that men are so powerful to say anything about women: positive or negative, but mostly they prevail negativity about female image, they destroy female image like females are replaceable with money, they are buyable like any other object in the world.



“O girl I have listen somewhere about your demands; you are looking for a guy who has a Ferrari”, this line exaggerates the idea that to persuade a woman it is mandatory to have enough money to fulfill her demands, and the line gives the idea that women always looking for a boy who is wealthy, not a boy who is poor, and this idea have been prevailed in the society, though such songs, that it has become a general idea and stereotypical thinking that women only value wealthy boys. “I will give everything to you, I need only your “Yes”, shows that he is trying to have a control over woman by saying that he will give her all the things to convince her to say “yes” to fulfill his physical desires and in return he will pay her by giving her materials, which prevails the negative idea that women are materialists. “Juli”, a song by Ali Zafar, that was released in 2017, is another big example in this regard, its translation was done by Zahra Sabri, 2017:

“Julie wants money, Julie wants fame  
She knows the tricks, she knows the game  
Julie wants money, Julie wants fame  
She knows the tricks; she knows the game”

Here the male singer again representing women as rapacious creature and greedy ones by saying that “Julie wants money”, here by using perspectivization/framing technique by Reisigl and Wodak (2017), stated in Wodak (2001), representing women as greedy ones for fame and money and the word “Julie” is used here for women, indirectly, and by using argumentation technique to influence more, he argues that “she knows the tricks, she knows the game”, here the intended meaning is girls know how to get money from boys, simply women’s image is being destroyed as they are being represented too much negatively by the male singers in South Asia.

### **Women are Disloyal and Liars**

The traits of disloyalty and telling lies are being associated with females through the usage of language by men in South Asian songs which indicates that in South Asia men have the power to have control over women and to control the usage of language. Bilal Saeed is a Pakistani singer, in his Punjabi song “choothi” that was released in 2014 articulates:

“This is the first time I've looked into someone's eyes

poured my heart out to you  
 This is the first time I've looked into someone's eyes  
 poured my heart out to you  
 but you, the traitor, don't understand my heart's pain  
 stared into each other's eyes, and laughed, you fed me lies,  
 my heart tolerated all the pain you gave  
 your love was fake but this heart doesn't understand. What can I do?  
 I didn't understand your misguiding  
 kept spending on you  
 what did you get by betraying me?  
 your love was fake but this heart doesn't understand. What can I do?  
 your love was fake but this heart doesn't understand. What can I do?"

Continuously, there is a negative representation of females throughout the song that women are disloyal and liars. At the very beginning of the song, the male singer articulates by using the nomination strategy by Wodak (2001), stated in Reisigl and Wodak (2017), that at the very first time when he loved someone, "This is the first time I've looked into someone's eyes, poured my heart out to you but you, the traitor, don't understand my heart's pain", here "someone" is representing a girl, she betrayed him badly. Here he is describing his process of falling in love and being betrayed by the girl. He used the word "the traitor" to refer a girl which indicates that women are the traitors and liars. These lines indicate that men are loyal and sincere to the women but not women, as he says that "you do not understand my heart's pain", here he is using the predication technique assign a negative attribute to the women to make sure that they are feeling less and do not understand the men's pain, on the other hand men are loyal and sincere to the women. "your love was fake but this heart doesn't understand. What can I do?", these words have been repeated several times in the song to put more focus on the idea that women's love is fake but men's love is pure, by using the argumentative strategy as this strategy is related to making arguments and claims regarding someone and here he is making a claim that her love was fake, directly, and the claim is repeated several times in the song to indicate that women's love is fake. "stared into each other's eyes, and laughed, you fed me lies, my heart tolerated all the pain you gave", by using intensification strategy the male singer intensifies the claim that women are liars, they do not care about the feelings of men and telling lies

but still men tolerate all this, here the male singer is using the technique of building “identities”, one of the Gee’s building tasks (2004), as he is representing men positively as a tolerated ones, tolerates the pain that is due to the women, and negatively defining the women as pain givers, liars and disloyal. There is another example “Juli” by Ali Zafar, that was released in 2017, the translation was done by Zahra Sabri, 2017:

“I used to love you, I used to believe you  
Yes, my love for you was true  
You were the fairy princess of my starry nights  
You were forever in my thoughts  
I don’t know why you broke my heart like this!  
Yes, you had promised me  
That you would never belong to anyone but me  
That you would always stand by my side and support me  
And be there to catch me if I fall  
Oh fair deceiver, why did you tell me such a lie?  
Lies... your deceitful lies  
I fell for your deceitful lies”

Language is the way of transforming ideas, thoughts, believes and concepts to the others, and there are different ways of expressing these ideas, believes and concepts, music is one of them. In the above displayed song, there is a negative idea is being prevailed about women that females are deceivers and unfaithful to men usually. In this song the male singer used Gee’s building task “identities” which is related to the positive oneself representation and negative other’s representation as here men are being represented loyal, sincere and true but women have been represented as deceitful, treacherous and disloyal as he says: “I used to love you, I used to believe you, yes, my love for you was true, oh fair deceiver, why did you tell me such a lie? Lies... your deceitful lies, I fell for your deceitful lies”. There is the repetition of ideas to put more focus on the idea that women are clever, deceitful and liars like again and again the words “deceitful lies”, deceiver”, have been used in the song. The thing that the male singers say everything about women whether it is positive or negative, mostly negative, represents that men are hegemonic in South Asian society over women as they openly claim that women are deceitful, disloyal and liars through the

language that is being used in songs by them. There is another example by Sheera Jasvir, his song that was released in 2014, gives the theme more forte:

You have become the pound of UK,  
 So go and make well-known friends,  
 You did not like even my Ford,  
 I choose you but you used me.  
 You did not fulfill even a single promise of yours',  
 But still I did everything for you,  
 I knew you do not love me,  
 But still I took your words of "I love you" seriously, 2  
 I was thinking you will be changed,  
 That is why I did this for you,  
 Keep on admiring London..."

The reality of the society is manipulated by the entity which has the power to change the social truth. Manipulation is done on different levels as socially, cognitively and discursively, as described in Dijk (2006). In the song mentioned above again, the idea that women lust for wealth and are faithless is being strengthened socially as songs have been listened to throughout society. It's the best way to convey meaning with the touch of music and discursively as the meanings are conveyed with the usage of language no matter what the method you choose, whether it's through songs or a simple speech, and it is also mandatory to mention here that if a person who has the authority, utters something, it has its value and significance plus cognitive effect. In South Asian society, men are authoritative, as South Asian culture is male-dominated. "You have become the pound of UK, so go and make well-known friends, you did not like even my Ford, I choose you, but you used me" these lines refer to the idea that for money, the girl left her lover and went to the UK to make capital she went with her wealthy boyfriend and deceived the poor one. In songs, the idea it contains is considered for all collectively. "I choose you, but you used me" this line reinforces the idea, to degrade women, that women play with men just like puppets and they deceive men when they want to leave; they need wealth and fame. "You did not fulfil even a single promise of yours', but still I did everything for you, I knew you do not love me, but still I took your words

of “I love you” seriously” the first line shows that females do not take their promises seriously as they tend to speak lie continuously which is the most prevailed idea through such songs in South Asia. These lines have been used to degrade the image of females as, again and again, the negativity is being triumphed rapidly in such songs and its reality that if one thing is repeated again and again,, it looks like the truth. The male singer positively defined himself as sincere and represented women as insincere. “Keep on admiring London, now you talk in English, though you used to speak Punjabi”, here the sense is being conveyed that the females are attracted towards the men who live abroad and speak the English language, that the reason females deceive such men who do not have an international identity.

### **Patriarchy**

Patriarchy is related to the theme of hierarchy as it defines the order of men, women and children: men are considered hegemonic, independent and authoritative, on the other hand women are less powerful as compared to men, women are dependent upon men and they are not authoritative. This idea had been prevailed through the usage of language, otherwise women can do anything as men do but it’s the language that has made the concept that women are weak and less powerful as compared to men, and this negative idea through that usage of language by men have been stacked in the minds of the people. The male singers in South Asia are reinforcing this thing through songs, they are enhancing more the system of patriarchy to devalue women, to make them realize that they can do whatever they want to do but they cannot be more powerful as compared to men, no matter whatever females have but they are nothing in front of men. There is song by Sheera Jasvir, 2017:

“You have become the pound of UK,  
So go and make well-known friends,  
.....  
Jatt is the coin of one rupee,  
But still I have the authority”

This song proliferating the idea that it does not matter whether men have material things or not but they have the authority over women. According to schema of discursive reproduction of power, Dijk ([2015](#)), it is obvious

here that men control over text to produce and reproduce to make it stick and to make more effective, they can communicate whatever they want to deliver easily as compared to women. The negative description of women that the male singer tries to convey in this song so openly, shows that in South Asia men are more powerful as compared to women as they are free to say anything about the opposite gender. Men can control the production of text and discourse in South Asian society as they have power over communicative events and any kind of discourse. In the song the male singer tries to convey the notion that it does not matter whether men have money, wealth and prosperity or not but always have the authority over women as the male singer says: “Jatt is the coin of one rupee, but still I have the authority”, which indicates that even if the man does not have anything, even if it’s like a coin of one rupee but still is powerful. These lines repeat ten times in the whole song to create the mental effect over the listeners and to reinforce the patriarchal image as by repeating things again and again, you control the desired results by controlling the minds of the others. In the very first line the male language user says ironically tries to represent that no matter how much money a woman has in her account but she is nothing in front of man, again and again he is repeating the lines to gain the desired effect. “Splendor Vs. Audi” is a song by Meet Dhindsa, it was released in 2014, in this song the male singer affords the best example of showing the patriarchy system through the songs, he says that “My splendor is better than your Audi”, splendor is the brand for bikes in India and here he is trying to strengthen the idea that even the bike is worthy than the Audi that women possess, which elucidate that men are more powerful than women that is why the things they own are worthiest even if they are having low prices. On the other hand, the things that the women own are less important even if they are of highest prices.

“Hookah Hookah”, is another song by Bilal Saeed that was released in 2018, again representing and reinforcing the currently discussed theme that women are less privileged and worthless as compared to men. The currently discussed song elucidates that men have the power to control over text, any kind of discourse in South Asian society as in the song the male singer liberally declares the opposite gender “mad” as he says in the songs “When I asked which flavor of wine do you like, she, the mad girl, said sex on the beach”, these lines of the songs represent women too much negatively, here

the male singer is dealing with displaying the undesirable appearance of women by using one of the building task of language that is of creating and building identities of people through language usage. The word “sex” is considered the taboo in South Asian society and drinking wine is not allowed for both men and women as Pakistan is an Islamic country and this song originated from Pakistan, but here it is displayed that women drink as he shows in the song of asking the wine flavor to the girl. Drinking is somehow bearable but the next line gives a shocking effect as he is openly associating the physical sexual activities with women by uttering “she, the mad girl said, sex on the beach”. The words here “she, the mad girl” are screening the power of masculinity as men can say anything to the women without any kind of hesitation as by using nomination strategy the male singer is referring the opposite gender as “mad”. Such songs by male singers are buttressing patriarchal set up in South Asia, just to maintain the masculine effect on women and to devalue them so that women would not speak up freely and they remain dependent upon men always.

## **Conclusion**

The study results indicate that women are being represented too much negatively in South Asian countries, Pakistan and India, through the language used in songs, Punjabi songs. Punjabi is considered the most influential language in both of the nations, so it’s effortless for the males to use manipulative language to degrade women, and music is considered the most effective way to convey ideas due to its melody, that is the reason they use songs to increase the negative thoughts about the opposite gender. In South Asian Punjabi songs, Pakistani and Indian, the idea is being tried to prevail by male singers through using such language in the lyrics of the songs that women are materialists as compared to men; women value the materials like cars, wealth, money, luxuries, bank balance, affluence, prosperity while choosing a boy to live with instead of giving importance to the psychic beliefs like love, affection, care, and warmth. Moreover, in South Asian Punjabi songs, male singers are prevailing the negative ideas about women to degrade the image of women through the lyrics of the songs. The idea that girls choose a wealthy, affluent boy with luxury cars prevails chiefly throughout the South Asian songs. The male singers manipulate the language to devalue the women. In South Asia, the opposing

idea is being prevailed by men through language usage in different songs that women are liars and disloyal. The traits of disloyalty and telling lies are being associated with females through the usage of language by men in South Asian songs, which indicates that in South Asia, men have the power to have control over women and control the usage of language. These songs are causing to increase the impression of hierarchy and patriarchy, too, through the language used in them. The result also shows that they are enhancing the system of patriarchy to devalue women, to make them realize that they can do whatever they want to do. Still, they cannot be more potent than men, no matter what females have, but they are nothing in front of men.

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