

A Study of the Representation of Female Image in the Textbooks of English and Urdu at Secondary School Level

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Abstract

In developing countries like Pakistan, women are treating as inferior being as compared to men. They are given no more importance throughout all walks of life. No doubt books play an important role in developing images. It is observed that in Pakistani books the female images are not positively portrayed. If the present situation continues it will create negative effects on the new generation. So by keeping in view the above discussed points, the present study was designed. This article is based on a study conducted in continuation of a study carried out by Shah and Khurshid (2004). The study of Shah and Khurshid dealt with the females' representation in textbooks of Urdu and English at Middle level while the purpose of the present study was to analyze Urdu and English books at Secondary level including class 9th and 10th. The content analysis was used as the method for the study to reach on some conclusion. For this purpose two books of Urdu and two books of English were used. Poems were excluded from the study. For each book, each page was taken as a unit and counted only once. The percentages were calculated for statistical analysis. The study suggested that the female images have been under-represented or discriminatory represented and at some places it was observed that the females were involved in the religious activities, as a working women and women as a writer in both the textbooks.

Keywords: Female images; Textbooks; Urdu; English; Secondary school

I. Introduction

The issue of inequality of men and women has always been widely discussed in human society. Generally, women have been seen as inferior to men in terms of their qualities, capacities and their roles in society. According to Tilak (2007), women earn less than what they should, get hired or promoted less often than they should. According to the Human Development Report (1994), women perform approximately two-third of the total world's total work but only ten percent of the world's income and one percent of world's lands. With the passage of time, however, women's role is increasing in different fields of life and women proved themselves compatible with men. Even in some cases

females perform better than male. Therefore, there should be equality in gender. According to Council of Europe, (2008)

“Gender equality means an equal visibility, empowerment and participation of both sexes in all spheres of public and private life”.

For instance, if the results of various examinations in Pakistan are observed, females have been performing a better than male students. According to (Dawn, 2003)

“The female students shattered the supremacy of male students, which they had achieved last year in HSS Commerce (Part-II) annual examination by securing top three positions in 2003 examinations”.

According to (Meighan and Harber, 2007), in Britain until the 1980s, females have smaller proportion of Achieving success at all levels than males. However, since the beginning of 1990s the situation has changed significantly and we can now see that: in Britain for pupils aged 7 and 14 teacher assessment and test indicates that girls outperform boys in English and Mathematics and girls have also overtaken boys in terms of GCE A-level success. It indicates that women cannot be seen as inferior to men. However, the general discriminatory thinking regarding women results in just reflection of women. In fact, both males and females have the equal status According to (UNICEF, 2008) that gender roles, inequalities and power imbalances are not a ‘natural’ result of biological differences, but are set by the systems and cultures in which we live. We know that the roles and responsibilities are different; however, Islam has given both males and females equal right. Quranic verses also emphasize the importance of women in Islam. Prophet (Peace Be upon Him) says that there is no discrimination between female and male seeks knowledge. Islam assigns a high and same status to both. For instance (among many similar instances) The Holy Quran says

“He created you (both men and women) one and the same soul”

The founder of Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, takes men and women equal in terms of providing them opportunities for acquisition of knowledge and education. He stressed upon the importance of gender-equality on education during his speech on the occasion of first education conference, 1947 (Jafri, 1997). There are many other evidences have been found for the status of female, according to Tilak (2007), quoted the words of then president of Moscow Mikhail Gorbachev during his address to world congress of women in June 1987 that, “The status of women is a barometer of democratism of any state and indicator of how human rights are respected in it”.

It is evident from the above discussion that there should not be any gender-based discrimination in any department of life. A Moroccan researcher Sabir, (2008), has explained the importance of gender equality through family law was passed in 2004 in Morocco. After the passing of the new family code, Human Rights Education Association (HREA) decided to undertake on 18-month legal reform project to help solidify these changes to training of judges and through review of school textbooks. But, the real life situation presents a difference scenario. It is assumed that women have very limited role in life and resultantly, are inferior to men. For instance, if we take the example of our textbooks, women have been projected as inferior to men. Males are presented as a

superior and have leading roles and characters. By portraying such roles, the idea of inferiority of women is being inculcated in the children's minds. In this regard, Nisa (1989) says,

“Female images found in school textbooks as portrayal of women, their attributes and their functions are as received by male dominated society”

It means that since the role and attributes assigned to women and reflected into textbooks are determined by generally men or by a male dominated society, the presentation becomes discriminatory.

Sabir (2008), textbooks are one of the first places-and one of most formal artifacts-that demonstrate what educational “norms” are intended to be transmitted in the classroom. The textbook clearly can be a powerful tool for influencing ways in which both children and adult think about core human rights concepts and values, the image of women/girls, and the concept of gender equality.

According to Otlowski (2003),

“A current English language textbook used throughout Japan, Express Way A, was examined for gender bias-the depiction of women in stereotypical roles of women as mothers and homemakers is still being perpetual in many current language textbooks”

Further (Otlowski, 2003) quoted a study carried out by Ansary and Babii (2003) concluded that ‘women often appeared less visible than men’ and women ‘were more visible in indoor passive activities and were placed in traditional roles.’ Even in television, the women are under represent, Low and Sherrard (1999) has quoted Durkin (1985) found the ratio of male to females in television fiction is around 7:3 which is strikingly at odds with real world distribution. Not only are women under represented on television but advertisement; they are more often associated with domesticity and inexpensive products associated with appearance. Suderland (2000), the language teacher has observed the gender disparity in the classrooms, according to her that male dominance in the classroom; ‘differential teacher treatment by gender; by which males get more, and arguably better, teacher attention than females; and representation in textbooks in which female characters are variously stereotyped, trivialized, or rendered relatively invisible. Gender discriminations badly affect the children leanings about the role of women. According to Evans and Davies (2000), in 1975, Macmillan a major textbook publisher, stated that “children are not simply being taught mathematics and reading; they are also learning sometimes subliminally, how society regards certain groups of people” (quoted in Britton and Lumpkin, 1977).

Textbooks are staples of teaching and learning in schools, and a student reads more than 32,000 textbooks pages as he or she move from elementary through secondary school. What images of women are presented on these pages? <http://www.sahomeschool.com/Articles/Remember%20the%20Ladies.asp>

Several textbook studies of the 1970s revealed slight coverage of women in history textbook convey one sided to images of dependency, domesticity, and passivity – negative stereotypes rather than balanced and realistic portrayals of changing roles in modern society (Wirtenberg et al. 1980).

As per to this particular reference, if our textbooks are examined, a wide spread discriminatory representation of females is seen. As mentioned earlier, girls and women are almost invisible in the illustration as well as in content (Jafri, 1993), and discriminatory representation of females is because mostly the female concepts found in school textbooks are generally determined by male dominated society. So the study has been conducted to know the representation of female images in the textbooks of Urdu and English.

II. Present Study

The present study aimed at determining the representation of female image in the area of education. More especially, the study investigated the representation of females in the textbooks of Urdu and English for secondary school classes.

III. Objectives

1. To count the number of male and female characters.
2. To locate the status and roles assigned to male and female human characters in the textbooks.
3. To indicate occupations, activities and human attributes assigned to males and females in the textbooks.

IV. Significance of the Study

The study will be significant for

- (i) Authors of the textbooks.
- (ii) Thinkers and writers to reflect female image positively.
- (iii) NGOs, which are working on female status and role in the society.

V. Procedure of the Study

The document analysis was used as the method for the study. For this purpose, two Urdu and two English textbooks of classes 9th and 10th were used. Poems were excluded from the study. Both quantitative and qualitative techniques were used and each book was read page by page and each essay/play/story was treated as a unit for indication of character. For each book, each page was taken as a unit and was counted only once. The percentages were calculated for statistical analysis.

For the purpose of analysis, the lessons were divided into four categories, i.e. story, play, essay and bibliography. The themes of the lessons were also categorized into four categories, i.e. general, religious, historical and fictional.

The analysis was carried out according to the following criteria:

1. Invisibility and Non-recognition
 - a) Sex ratio of human characters
 - b) Themes of the lesson
 - c) Frequency of female/males as a subject of bibliography
2. Gender discrimination of Labour
 - a) Occupations assigned to genders
 - b) Occurrence of gender associated activities

3. Stereotypes of Femininity/Masculinity Attributes assigned to males and female characters under broad categories of intellect, character and feelings.

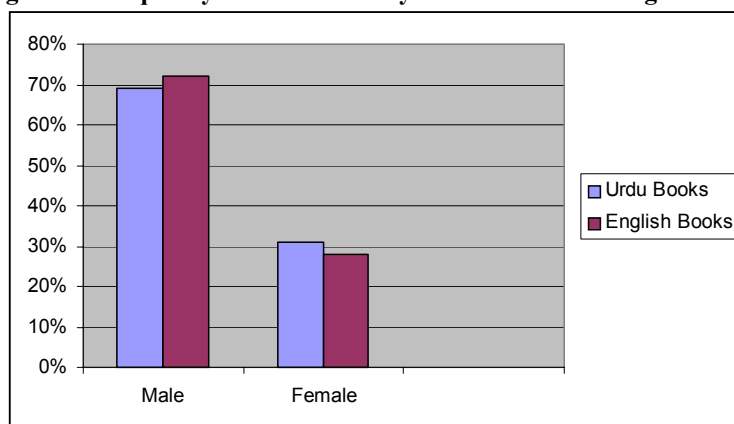
VI. Results of the Study

Summary of the findings emerged from the data is as under followed by the tables and their interpretation.

Table 1: Frequency of Characters by Sex in Urdu and English Books

Nature of Characters	Urdu Books	English Books
Male	69 %	72%
Female	31%	28%
Total	100%	100%

Figure 1: Frequency of Characters by Sex in Urdu and English Books

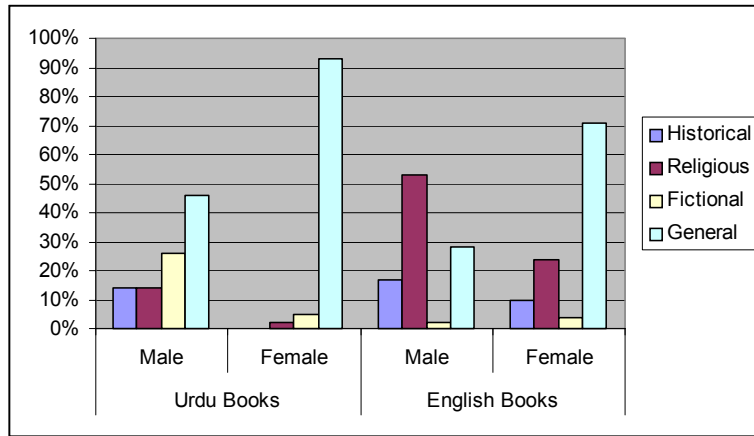


This table shows that out of 727 human characters, 69 percent are male and 31 percent female in Urdu books and among the 245 human characters in English books, 72 percent are male and 28 percent female.

Table 2: Sex Ratio of Characters in Themes in Urdu and English Books

	Urdu Books		English Books	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Historical	14%	0%	17%	10%
Religious	14%	2%	53%	24%
Fictional	26%	5%	2%	4%
General	46%	93%	28%	71%

Figure 2: Sex Ratio of Characters in Themes in Urdu and English Books

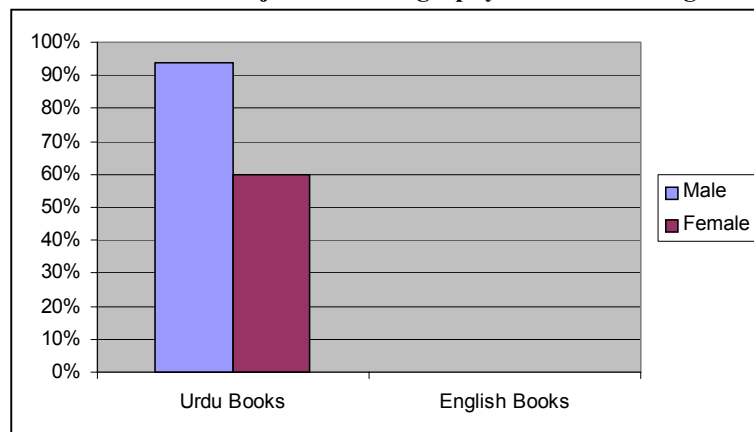


This table shows that the themes of lessons are concerned, in lessons with historical theme, only 0 percent female images have been found in Urdu books and 10 percent female image is seen in English books. Among the religious, only 2 percent female images are in Urdu books and 24 percent images in English books. In lessons with fictional images, there are only 5 percent female images in Urdu books and there are 4 percent female images in English books. In lessons with general themes, 60 percent female images are seen in Urdu books and 71 percent in English books.

Table 3: Sex Ratio of Subjects of Bibliography in Urdu and English Books

Sex	Urdu Books	English Books
Male	94%	Nil
Female	60%	Nil

Figure 3: Sex Ratio of Subjects of Bibliography in Urdu and English Books

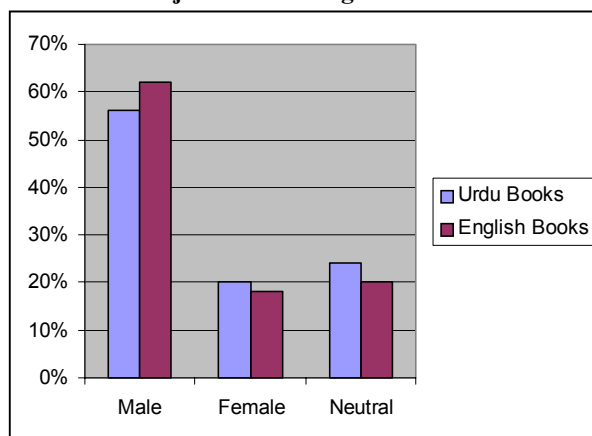


This table shows that 94 percent bibliography of male and 60 percent female bibliographies subject has been found in Urdu books but there is no bibliography has been found in English books for the both genders.

Table 4: Sex Ratio of Subjects of Leading Roles in Urdu and English Books

Nature of Characters	Urdu Books	English Books
Male	56%	62%
Female	20%	18%
Neutral	24%	20%

Figure 4: Sex Ratio of Subjects of Leading Roles in Urdu and English Books



This table shows that 56 percent male, only 20 percent females and 24 percent as neutral leading roles have been shown in Urdu books, whereas, 62 percent male, only 18 percent females and 20 percent as neutral leading roles have been shown in English books.

Table 5: Occupations Assigned to Male in Urdu Books

Occupation	Frequency	Occupation	Frequency
Poet	76	Labour	6
Spiritual Leader	73	Hotel Manager	6
Writer	49	Butcher	5
Ruler/Chief	40	Commander	5
Professor	40	Kind	4
Student	39	Publisher	4
Land Lord	28	Bagger	3
Servant	25	Sweeper	3
Doctor	20	Businessman	3
Prince	11	Teacher	2
National Leader	10	Hakeem	2
Neighbour	09	Buss Driver	2
Gardner	8	Accountant	2
Tehsildar	7	Milkman	2
Radio Producer	7	Hunter	2
Policeman	7	Sailor	1
Judge	1	Murder	1
Secretary	1		
Salesman	1		

Figure 5: Occupations Assigned to Male in Urdu Books

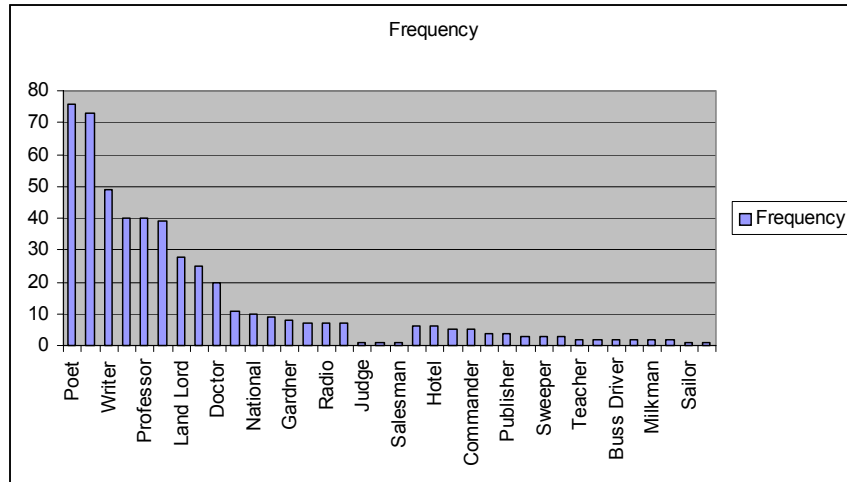


Table 6: Occupations Assigned to Male in Urdu Books

Occupation	Frequency	Occupation	Frequency
Housewife	74	Student	13
Daughter	60	Writer	11
Advisor	40	Spiritual Leader	05
Servant	17	Neighbour	02

Figure 6: Occupations Assigned to Male in Urdu Books

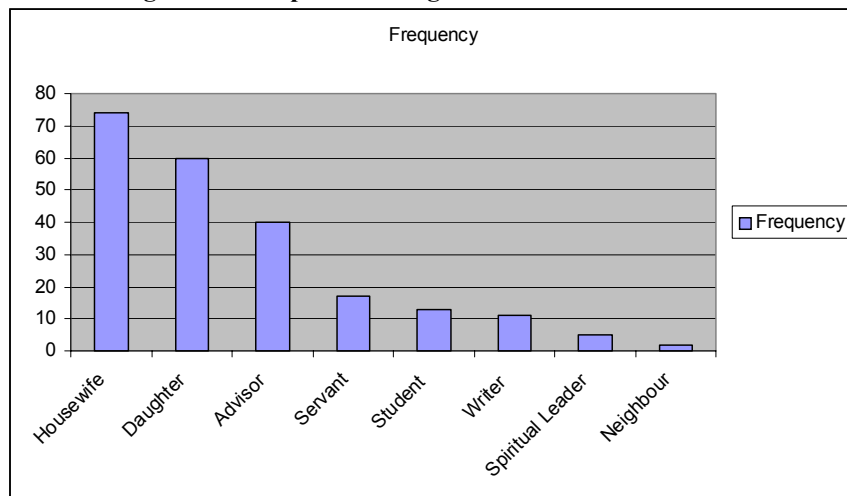


Table 7: Occupation Assigned to Males in English Books

Occupation	Frequency	Occupation	Frequency
Spiritual Leader	83	Slave	03
National Leader	20	Uncle	03
Khalifah	11	Driver	03
Student	10	Groom	02
Prince	10	Saint	01
Teacher	08	Scholar	01
Sports Boy	08	Writer	01
Advisor	07	Cyclist	01
Doctor	04	Poet	01

Figure 7: Occupation Assigned to Males in English Books

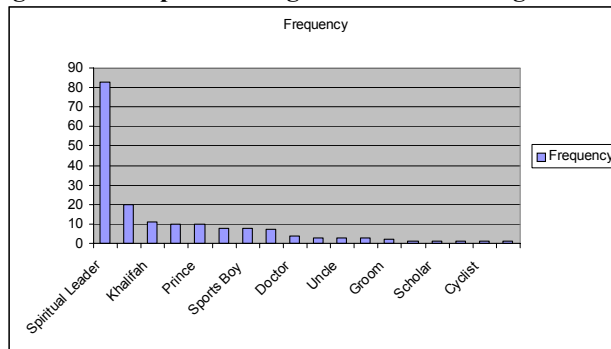
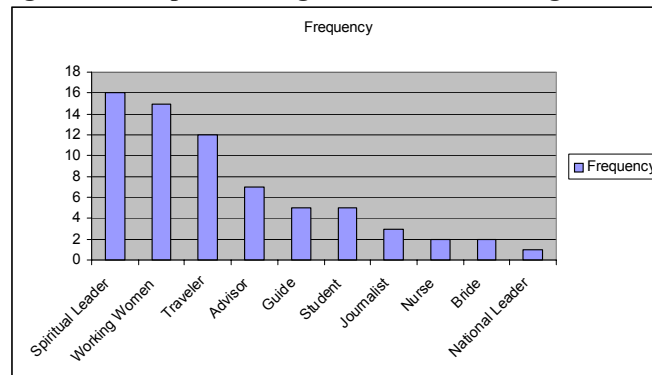


Table 8: Occupation Assigned to Females in English Books

Occupation	Frequency	Occupation	Frequency
Spiritual Leader	16	Student	05
Working Women	15	Journalist	03
Traveler	12	Nurse	02
Advisor	07	Bride	02
Guide	05	National Leader	01

Figure 8: Occupation Assigned to Females in English Books



The above tables (5-8) indicate the demarcation and division of occupations based on gender. Men are in public domain as breadwinners, Spiritual leaders, political leaders and women within the family as home-matter or housewife. At some places, women also appeared as spiritual leader as well as involved religious activities and as a traveler.

Table 9: Activities Assigned to Males in English Books

Activities	Frequency	Activities	Frequency
Religious Activities	95	Driving	03
Political Activities	23	Extra Curricular Activities	02
Seeking Knowledge	19	Cyclist	01
Advising	18	Writing	01
Commanding	10	Poetry	01
Serving	04		

Figure 9: Activities Assigned to Males in English Books

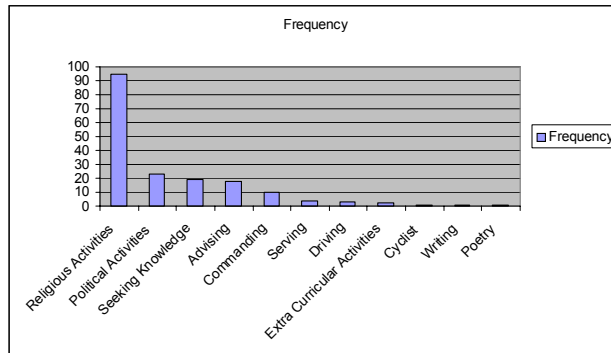


Table 10: Activities Assigned to Females in English Books

Activities	Frequency	Activities	Frequency
Religious Activities	16	Guiding	05
Serving	15	Seeking Knowledge	05
Traveling	12	Political activities	04
Domestic Help	09	Nursing	02

Figure 10: Activities Assigned to Females in English Books

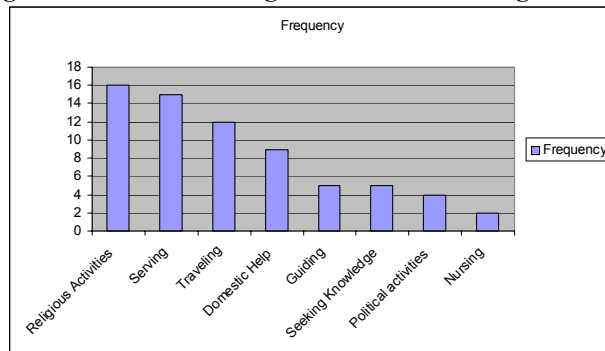


Table 11: Activities Assigned to Male in Urdu Books

Activities	Frequency	Activities	Frequency
Poetry	76	Producing	07
Religion Activities	73	Labouring	06
Teaching	42	Managing	06
Writing	49	Slaughtering	05
Ruling/Chief	40	Publishing	04
Seeking Knowledge	39	Business	03
Servicing	37	Begging	03
Cleaning	28	Selling/Buying	03
Farming	28	Hunting	02
Commanding	19	Accountancy	02
National Leadership	10	Driving	02
Helping Others	09	Killing	01
Gardening	08	Sailor/Boat	01

Figure 11: Activities Assigned to Male in Urdu Books

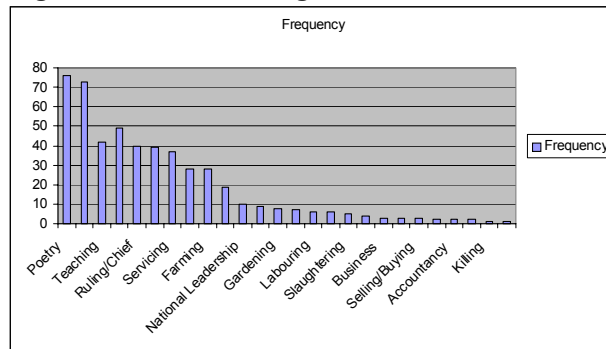
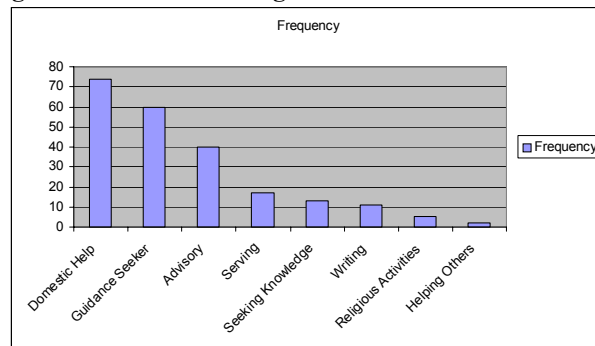


Table 12: Activities Assigned to Females in Urdu Books

Activities	Frequency	Activities	Frequency
Domestic Help	74	Seeking Knowledge	13
Guidance Seeker	60	Writing	11
Advisory	40	Religious Activities	05
Serving	17	Helping Others	02

Figure 12: Activities Assigned to Females in Urdu Books



The tables (9 to 12) show that men have been assigned a wide range of activities. The work associated with male images involves intellect, seeking knowledge, political activities, and religious activities and servicing others. On other side, female images are found to be associated with service-oriented work e.g., housewife, seeking knowledge, religious activities and very small proportion as a working women etc.

VII. Conclusion

The female images are mostly invisible in the illustrations as well as in the content. The proportion of male human character is greater than females. The implied devolution of the female and non-recognition of their contribution produces a low self-esteem and less respect in females.

As far as the characters are concerned, discriminatory representation of females (in terms of their proportionate representation) has been observed in both textbooks at secondary school level. Lessons with historical themes have more male images than the female ones. It indicates that history taught to the students is mostly male oriented and females' contribution is shown very less. And only in English textbook, in some places, the females are shown in various religious activities, where the ratio of the female workers is less than males.

The gender-wise proportion of characters is frequent occurrence of activities is highly in favour of males. The activities, which are related to women, have been shown in a way that those have a low and inferior status in society. On the other hand, the activities assigned to males have been shown with a high and prestigious status in society. Similarly, very few images of female involved in productive and practical work, have been given in both the textbooks at secondary school level in Pakistan.

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