



Ideological Construction of Gender Representation in One Half From the East: A Critical Discourse Analysis

Dr. Muhammad Imran^{a*}, Dr. Afia Tasneem Wasti^b, Dr. Syed Sabih Ul Hassan^c

^aLecturer, Department of English, FATA University, Darra Adam Khel FR Kohat, Pakistan. ^bAssistant Professor, Department of English, Kohat University of Science & Technology (KUST) Kohat, KP, Pakistan. ^cAssistant Professor, Department of English, Kohat University of Science & Technology (KUST) Kohat, KP, Pakistan

*Email: syed.hassan@kust.edu.pk

Abstract: This study aims to investigate the ideological construction of gender representation in Nadia Hashmi's Nove, One Half From the East. The study analysed the excerpts from the novel and analysed them from the perspective of critical discourse analysis which functions both as theory and practice. The researcher has used Michael Lazar's Feminist critical discourse analysis as an approach to analyse the selected excerpts from the novel. Lazar offers five praxes in her approach to analyse any kind of text. The selected syntactic structures were analysed with the theoretical consideration of Lazar (2007). She discussed five principles(praxis) to analyse discourse from the perspective of FCDA. The five principles of her theory and practice include feminist analytical resistance, *Gender as an ideological structure*, *The Complexity of gender and power relations*, *Discourse in the (de) construction of gender*, and *Critical reflexivity as proxies*. Lazar's second and fourth principles, *gender as an ideological structure* and *Discourse in the (de) construction of gender* were applied as a theory and method to analyse the selected texts. Nadia Hashmi's novels are rich sources of ideologically moulded gender discourses. The current study unveiled ideological gender representation in the discourse structures. One Half From the East. Furthermore, the ideological assumptions that worked behind the gender representations were also explored.

Key Words: FCDA, Gender Representation, Praxis, Gender Construction

1. Introduction

This research paper aims to critically analyse the discourse structures of One Half From The East by Nadia Hashmi to examine gender-related issues. Critical discourse analysis is used as a research tool to probe implicit ideological propositions in gender construction, representation, and discrimination.

The novel *One Half From the East* is set in the city of Kabul and a small village far away from Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan. The current study explores the ideologically constructed gender in the context of the *Bacha Posh* tradition in Afghan society. The *Bacha Posh* is an old custom in Afghanistan that has prevailed for many centuries. According to this custom, girls are dressed as boys. It happens when a girl is born, and their parents decide that their daughter will change first their appearance, then her name, and finally identity. Untimely, she becomes a son in the eyes of every member of the family (Manoori, 2013). According to the custom, a family without a son can make one of the girls a boy, a *Bacha Posh*. After she grows older, the family makes another *Bacha Posh*, and then finally, the family will have good luck, and the next baby that comes into the family will be a son (Hashmi, 2016).

Critical Discourse analysis is used widely by scholars to reveal social issues that are manifested in language use. The current study aims to explore the ideological construction of gender representation in *One Half From the East*.

Therefore, the researcher uses critical discourse analysis as a research tool to dig out unequal gender representation. The study aims to explore unequal gender representation to explore and analyse the lexical, phraseological, and syntactical items in the discourses to reveal the ideologically and socially constructed gender representation. The current research follows Lazar's feminist critical discourse analysis to unpack gender-related issues in the selected passages from the novel.

2. Review of Related Literature

According to Fairclough (1989), CDA as a research tool has emerged to help increase people's consciousness regarding how language is used to dominate one group of people by other groups. He thinks consciousness is fundamental to emancipation. Similarly, Fairclough and Wodak (1997) assert that CDA takes the side of a dominant and oppressed group and will go against a dominant and powerful group. It means CDA attempts to probe the powerful group's dominance and provide a sense of awareness to less powerful groups or those who are being dominated by powerful individuals or groups.

The concept of gender and language can be tracked to linguistics, political practice, and feminist theory. Gender has been referred to as the elucidation of all linguistic variations, involving innovation of vocabulary, pronunciation, communication style, and grammar (Weatherall, 2002). She states that the relationship between language and women's social status can be traced back to 19th-century works of "the women's movement" (Weatherall, 2002:2). According to Beauvoir (2010: 707), "one is not born, but rather, becomes, woman". She asserts that no biological, economic, or psychic destiny defines the figure that the human female adopts in society. Beauvoir very beautifully expands on how society and civilisation as a whole define and create a new creature that we refer to as feminine.

Wodak (2002) argues that the main program of CDA is to explore power and mainly institutional power. She believes that CDA aims to investigate covertly, and overtly structural relationships of discrimination, control, and dominance exercised in language and especially institutionally used language. Similarly, Van Dijk (2001, p.352) validates this by saying "CDA may be seen as a reaction against the dominant formal (often "asocial" or "uncritical") paradigms of the 1960s and 1970s." in a similar opinion, Van Dijk (1993) mentions the aims of CDA "CDA should deal primarily with the discourse dimensions of power abuse and the injustice and inequality that result from it" (p. 252). We assume from his opinion that CDA is to address social issues or problems and uncover the social injustices and discrimination, gender inequality, and power abuse in discourse. Pinpointing these aspects of discourse has given CDA a prominent pinpoint, contemporary social research. According to Bloor & Bloor (2007:2), critical discourse analysts are interested in the way in which language and discourse are used to achieve social goals in part this use plays in social maintenance and change".

Moglen (2001) claims that the psychological and social meaning of gender can be vividly and most often identified in novels rather than any other expressive forms. She thinks these gender-biased expressions are highly negotiated and exposed in the written text of novels. Sex refers to the biological difference between males and females, while gender is the social, cultural, and psychological construction of these biological differences (Mcelhinny, 2003). Similarly, Coates (2013) states that sex is biological, while gender is a social construction based on biological sex. According to Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2003), "gender is not something we are born with and not something we have, but something we do, something we perform" (10). They further explain how we do things and how we get gender identity. What we perform as boys and girls at an early age in life will be a part of our lives when we grow. They claim that it is a society that fixes certain attributes on males and females. What they can do and what they cannot do according to their sex. "Society tries to match up ways of behaving with biological sex assignments" (ibid).

According to Hashmi (2018), *One Half From the East* sheds light on a distinctive cultural perspective on the roles which have been assigned to boys and girls, which cause gender identity, particularly in Afghan society. In her other review (2016), she says that we learn in school in early childhood that girls are made of beautiful things like sugar and spices while puppy dogs' tails and snips and snails constitute little boys. Her focus is that gender differences are supported and can be noted in almost every society. It is these cultural differences which addressed and portrayed so poignantly by Hashmi in her novel, *One Half From the East*. "Hashmi's tale is a heartbreaking treatment of the impact of powerlessness as experienced by those who do not have the freedom to control their own fate". This trauma has been depicted very vividly by Hashmi." Hashmi has written a pitch-perfect character in Obayda as she accepts the limitations of her life as a girl...then is awakened to what might have been when she experiences life as a boy. "

3. Research Method

The current study follows a qualitative research paradigm to analyse the selected extracts from the novel *One Half From the East*. According to Wodak & Meyer (2009), Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a qualitative analytical approach for critically describing, interpreting and explaining the ways in which discourses construct, maintain, and legitimize social inequalities. This research descriptively analyses the implicit ideological assumption that works behind gender representation, identity, and gender roles. The analysis has been carried out under the framework of Lazar's Feminist (2005). The sources of collection for the current study are primary in nature; the research collected words, phrases, and sentences from the selected novels.

Lazar's feminist CDA consists of five interrelated principles which are used as a theory and practice in the analysis of any discourse structure. The first principle she outlines is *feminist analytical resistance*. This principle attempts to identify how the discourse structure is used to sustain patriarchy and power relations systematically to privilege men as a powerful social class and exclude women from achieving such status. The second principle of the theory and practice of FCDA is *gender as an ideological structure*. This means that people are divided into two blocs, women and men, based on sexual differences. The ideological structure of gender can be found in the discourse structure where men are demonstrated as dominant and women as subordinate. The FCDA aims to deconstruct such ideological structures. The third principle that Lazar refers to is *the Complexity of gender and power relations*. This principle of FCDA stands for the oppression of women in general. Power relations are exercised, enacted, and resisted through discourse structures in a workplace to sustain male dominance. The fourth principle of FCDA is *Discourse in the (de) construction of gender*. FCDA considers discourse as an element of social practice. The fifth and last principle of this theory and practice is *Critical reflexivity as proxies*. Critical awareness is one of the features of late modernity, and feminist CDA takes a special interest in it.

4. Results and Discussion

- i. *"That's exactly what I'm saying! You know what a difference it would make for him. You've seen my husband talk about our three sons, haven't you? Oh, his face just glows when he gets started on them. A son can do for your husband what no doctor can." (Chapter 2)*

The interaction between Khala Aziza and her sister shows the value of having sons over daughters. Khala Aziza convinces her sister to change one of her daughters into a son. She also justifies her suggestion by giving an example of her husband. She views having a son as God's blessing and will make happiness on your husband's face. She argues within the framework of existing social realities regarding women's and men's statuses. The sentence *You know what a difference it would make for him* shows the status of boys and girls. Having a boy at home is presumed a source of joy for the husband while having a daughter makes the husband gloomy and sorrowful. The significance of boys can be realised even with having a *Bacha Posh* at home. Khala Aziza, who has given birth to three boys, is proud of them. She says to her sister that her husband feels proud of her whenever he talks about his sons. The utterance *Oh, his face just glows when he gets started on them* reveals how much sons are valued in Afghan society. The significance of boys in a social structure is evident from the discourse structure used by Khala Aziza. The lexical item *glow* signifies the importance of having sons in a family. Sons are regarded as a source of light that brings brightness to parents while having girls in a family is considered a burden and a bad omen. Khala Aziza describes the value of sons and states, *"A son can do for your husband what no doctor can"*. It is presupposed from the discourse structure that having a son at home can redeem one from illness while having a daughter intensifies the sickness of a father.

- ii. *"It's very simple, dear. Make Obayda into a boy. With her as a son, she will bring good luck to your home. You'll see your husband cheer up. Then you plan for another baby in the family. Having a Bacha Posh at home brings boy energy into your household. The next baby that comes will be a boy. And once you have a real son, watch what happens. Your husband will come back to life. I've seen this work in the families around us. It's not magic—it's just how it is. And that's when Obayda can go back to being a girl. Everyone wins." (Chapter 2)*

In the above extract 2, the discourse producer Khala Aziza has discursively constructed girls as an omen of bad luck while boys as good luck. She convinces her sister to make one of her daughters a boy (a *Bacha Posh*). This

will bring good luck to her home, and the next baby she will produce will be a son. She says that giving birth to a baby son will change your life. It is implied from her discourse that in Afghan's social structures giving birth to a baby girl is a curse and burden on their parents while giving birth to a baby son makes a mother worthy in the entire family. Being part of the social setup, the discourse producer, Khala Aziza, is convinced about the importance of giving birth to a bay son. She sees the differences between boys and girls as a natural phenomenon. Obayda, whose original social identity is a girl, is transformed into a boy till the birth of the next baby son in the family. It means girls are used as a tool for producing a baby son. Khala Aziza being a part of the Afghan social structure brings upon her background knowledge of the society that she has acquired in Afghan society. Her assumptions regarding gender construction seem socially manufactured realities. Being part of the Afghan social process, she views the importance of boys in a family. The notion that making a girl into a boy will bring good luck to the family is an ideological assumption that is taken for granted due to the existing social conventions in a normative system and the prevailing gender ideologies.

Khala Aziza suggests that her sister make one of her daughters into a son and fulfil all her needs outside the home entirely. The advice made by Khala Aziza proposes that girls are useless creatures because they cannot handle what boys can. Boys are socially privileged creatures. That is why they are certified to do what you need while, on the other hand, girls can do nothing except give birth to babies, and the one who bears more boys will be honoured the most. It is also presumed from the above syntactically motivated structures that boys bring good luck to a home. It is noticed from the utterance of Khala Aziza that having a Bach posh at home will bring the next baby as a boy. Furthermore, your husband will pride you when you bore a boy at home for him. The under-study discourse structures are socially and culturally bound and deep-rooted in Afghan people's social practices in their daily routines. Therefore, Khala Aziza feels no hesitation in convincing her sister to turn one of her daughters into a son and motivates her that the next baby that comes will be a boy. What lets Khala Aziza own such views is the knowledge of the world she possesses as a woman, which is expected from her due to the socialisation process.

- iii. *“What is it? I haven’t asked much of you, Obayd. I am only asking you not to do things that a boy shouldn’t be doing. Do you know any boy who would dance around like that?” (Chapter 4).*

In extract 3 above, Obayd's mother forbids him from doing what girls do. The discourse producer trains her daughter on what to do and what not to do. The dos and don'ts should and should not seem ideologically structured activities because there seem no changes in the body of Obayda after her transformation. The noticeable changes are in the name and the boy's hair. The utterance of the discourse producer shows the institutionalised dichotomy between boys and girls. She takes the notion of different activities by males and females as something natural. She is not aware of the fact that these differences are institutionalised and justified to maintain power relations between males and females. Girls are supposed to do all chores and domestic activities while boys are supposed to do errands. If the mother notices that one of her sons is helping her with her chores, she forbids him because it is supposed to be done by one of her daughters. When Obeyed mother finds him dancing, she abruptly interferes and stops him from dancing. She thinks dancing is good with girls, not with boys. This shows that gender is the manufacture of social practices and social conditions. The different world for both genders has been created and legitimised by society's social power class (males).

- iv. *My mother piles hot mounds of rice on plates for each of us. Then she stirs the pot of stew with a metal ladle. She pours the saucy mix of chicken and vegetables onto my plate first and then onto my sisters’ plates. Obayd is a boy. He needs the meat if he’s going to get stronger. I don’t want to hear any more about it.” (Chapter 4)*

The unequal status of gender representation is not only limited to their lifestyle and activities but this discrimination can be seen at the dining level too. It is evident from the utterances of Obayd's mother when she discriminates to feed her children. The one who was transformed into a boy was served a chicken vegetable while the rest of the daughters were assured that he was a boy. Therefore, he needs to get stronger. The sentence, he is a boy, differentiates him socially from girls. She uses assertive sentences to announce that her daughters may not ask for the same food in front of her daughter. Furthermore, it is observed from her utterances that first she serves obeyed and then her sisters, which shows the son should eat better food first, and what is left will be served to the daughters. She warns her daughters that Obeyed is a boy, and he needs to eat meat because he needs to get stronger

and winds up the conversation by saying that she wants nothing to hear anymore. The behaviour of their mother is the reflection of social conventions and social order in which males are supposed to eat good food to remain healthy while girls stay at home so they can eat what is left for them. This behaviour shows how girls are perceived in Afghan society and how they are treated. The idea that males should eat good food such as meat seems ideologically motivated assumptions, but this notion is taken for granted as common sense and is not perceived as an ideology to maintain existing social realities. The discourse divides human beings into two distinct classes where one is privileged over others, even in eating habits.

5. Conclusion

The study revealed that women are represented as socially and culturally weak and solely dependable on men. They have no say in their own lives and cannot decide their life pattern. The unequal status of women is also revealed in the language used by men and women. Rahima, who is originally a girl, has been transformed into a boy. The journey from girlhood to boyhood has been shown through an Afghan tradition known as *Bacha Posh*. This transformation of Rahima shows the importance of boys in the Afghan social structure. Similarly, the discourse structures of the central characters Rahima and Obayda in *One Half From the East* demonstrate the unequal social status of girls. They have been shown ideologically weak and unfit for many activities in society. Strength and power have been attributed to males alone. Women are shown as weak, feeble, and helpless creatures of society. The pervasive ideologies in different social structures shaped women's minds. Therefore, they take these ideologies for granted and do not see them anymore. They consider such social norms as natural and permanent dispositions of their genders. Women are perceived as weak; if they are strong, they are unacceptable to men. Women have been represented with some fixed features. They are discouraged and unacceptable if they are found doing male activities, such as farming. The dichotomy between boys and girls is based on sexual differences. Due to biological differences, both genders have been represented distinctly.

References

- Bloor, & Bloor. (2007). *The Practice of Critical Discourse Analysis. An Introduction*. London: Routledge.
- Coates, J. (2013). *Women, Men and Language: A Sociolinguistic Account of Gender Differences in Language*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Eckert, P, & McConnell-Ginet. (2003). *Language and Gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge.
- Fairclough, N., & Wodak, R. (1997). *Critical Discourse Analysis*. In T. A. Van Dijk (Ed.), *Discourse as Social Interaction: Discourse Studies 2 (A Multidisciplinary Introduction)* (pp. 258-284). London: Sage.
- Hashmi, N. (2016). *One Half From the East*: New York: Harper Collins. <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/nadia-hashimi/one-half-from-the-east/>
- Lazar, M. M. (2005). Politicizing gender in discourse: Feminist critical discourse analysis as political perspective and praxis. In *Feminist critical discourse analysis: Gender, power and ideology in discourse* (pp. 1-28). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- McElhinny, B. (2003). Three approaches to the study of language and gender.
- Moglen, H. (2001). *The Trauma of gender: A Feminist Theory of the Novel*. London: University of California Press.
- Nadia, H. (2018). *One Half From the East* (Review) retrieved from: <https://www.kidsreads.com/reviews/one-half-from-the-east>
- Van Dijk, T. A. (1993). Principles of critical discourse analysis. *Discourse & society*, 4(2), 249-283.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2001). Critical discourse analysis. *The handbook of discourse analysis*, 352-372.
- Weatherall, A. (2002) *Gender, Language and Discourse*: Routledge: Hove, East Sussex
- Weatherall, A. (2002) *Gender, Language and Discourse*: Routledge: New York, NY
- Wodak, R. (2002). Aspects of critical discourse analysis. *Zeitschrift für angewandte Linguistik*, 36(10), 5-31.