

## **A Critical Discourse Analysis of Powerlessness in Mohsin Hamid's Novel "Moth Smoke"**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper is an attempt to explore powerlessness in the discourses of Mohsin Hamid's novel *Moth Smoke* (2000) from the perspective of Fairclough's Three Dimension Model (TDM). The main issue of the paper is to examine the communicative process as to how and why the powerless are made to feel inferior. It is a common practice in today's society that in social gatherings a man always wants to show higher which in most of the cases is exercised through language. As analyzing texts through CDA carries objectivity, so the text under study yielded the theme of powerlessness projected through the word choice of the writer. Through the analysis of the selected discourse, two-class have been found i.e. the upper class and the lower class. They are represented as powerful and powerless respectively. The elites enjoy a luxurious life but the poor often turn to be criminals. Because of this scenario, Fairclough's approach to CDA is quite an appropriate perspective to explore such social issues enacted in the society.*

**Keywords:** CDA, Fairclough's TDM, Mohsin Hamid, *Moth Smoke*, Power

### **Introduction**

This study investigates as to what extent powerlessness is discursively constructed in different discourses and situations in the text (discourse). This is a critical examination of the discursive representation of powerlessness in the novel under study. Critical Discourse Analysis aims to unfold all the evils in a society, because according to Fairclough (1989) bringing forth the evils in a society is the first step towards emancipation. Fairclough's approach to CDA is very important because it advocates taking sides with the oppressed to get a society out of numerous issues such as dominance, discrimination, abuse of power, injustice, and powerlessness.

The researchers chose Fairclough's (1989) Three Dimensional model for the analysis of the selected data from the novel. Critical Discourse Analysis deals with social issues and problems as it co-relates to the Marxism theory which aims to bring forth positivism. The word 'Critical' means here, to draw the hidden meanings out of a text in one's way for the better understanding of a reader or interpreter. This depends on a researcher's way of critical scrutiny and observation about the selected text. In this connection, the analyst aims to consider CDA as a self-oriented method of analysis. This paper is mainly concerned with investigating power abuse and dominance of the upper strata of the society over the less privileged. It also investigates the powerlessness of the lower class in different discourses. As the creator of the text discursively constructed the powerlessness of the lower class, so it is important to use CDA as the method of analysis for the text under study.

Hamid is a Pakistani novelist who was born on July 23, 1970, in Lahore (Pakistan). He got his higher education at Princeton University and Harvard Law College. He has been to the United States and the UK. His father was a professor at Stanford University. He is the world-known English writing novelist and a columnist. His columns are publishing in the Pakistani English daily Newspaper *Dawn*, the *New York Times*, and *The Guardian*. He has so far written four novels that are *Moth Smoke*, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, and *Exit West*.

Hamid's first novel *Moth Smoke* (2000) is the mirror to the Socio-political problems and the abuse of power in every institution of life. It represents the evils that prevailed in the society and male treatment towards the poor of the society. As power abuse and powerlessness are the principal focuses of CDA so one can see that the novel under study has produced and depicted the exercise of power in an abusive way by the elites. Power is exercised among the participants of a society where equal power between the lower and upper classes is not maintained and the powerful strata of a society exercise all their influences to make them less powerful strata inferior to them.

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### **Literature Review**

The novelist has presented the main themes such as Socio-political situations, financial and cultural crises, and powerlessness, which are the driving forces for the construction of the novel. This part of the paper contains a short review of the literature present on *Moth Smoke*. The novelist has presented two social groups in the novel i.e. the elites and the poor. The protagonist of the novel, Daru belongs to the poor class of the society while his friend Aurangzeb (Ozi) belongs to the upper class. Daru is presented as powerless and deprived of his job as a cashier in a bank while Ozi is depicted as the representative of the elite class who enjoy all the privileges of society. Daru has no placement and status instead of having good qualifications and academics because of having no connections and influence. Azad (2016) puts about the low economic conditions of Daru which is the main cause to decide the social placement, personality, and his separation from the society.

Similarly, M.Dagamsheh and Downing (2016) assert about the economic downfall of Daru that the impediments in his way of achieving a better job and his ambitions are his lack of influential relations and wealth as it is these two things which define one's personality and ascertain one's connections with others. The novel shows the powerlessness and inequality of the deprived in Pakistan where the wealthy people enjoy all privileges and do not care about laws. The elites have dominance and control over all the resources of the state, exploit, abuse power, and treat the less privileged badly in the society. The rich hold supremacy and authority to run the state following their desires (Perveen & Awan, 2017).

Fairclough (1989) describes the power that it is not just a matter of the use of language but it exists in different modalities such as the unmistakable as well as concrete modality of bodily strength. He further elaborates that power is often exercised through removing people from their jobs, homes and taking their lives. Van Dijk (2008) calls his approach as Critical Discourse Study (CDS). He asserts that CDS not only deals with power but it aims to focus on the abuse of power. He further asserts that one of the main concerns of CDA is to “account for the relationship between discourse and social power” (p.65). He means that the task of CDA is to describe and elaborate as to how power is exercised, reproduced as well as legitimized discursively by the powerful groups or/and institutions.

Power is abused through different ways e.g. at the level of institutions or subject and masses level, and/or through the absence of equal power distribution and encounters (discourse). Foucault (1980) asserts that power is not something like a commodity possessed or transferred by someone to others but it is exercised through the use of language among people in their mutual asymmetrical discussions. Thus, keeping in view the objectivity, the selected text, from *Moth Smoke*, is analyzed through the lens of Fairclough's model.

### **Methodology**

As language is the collection of numerous words which according to their particular situations and conditions have their specific meaning. The individual approach and abilities of listeners as well as readers, and their abilities to know the meaning of the words are concerns of CDA.

Critical Discourse Analysis mainly concerns with the critical examination of language and conversation. Power, social relationships, and knowledge which is created through spoken/written text are the basics of CDA. Van Dijk puts that CDA is a field concerned with critical examination of spoken as well as composed texts to represent the discursive ways of power, inequality, and dominance (1993). In his book *Language and Power* (1989), Fairclough named his approach to discourse and language as Critical Language Study (CLS). He (1989) discussed the objective of his approach as to contribute to the public awareness of the exploitative attitudes of the powerful strata of a society through focusing on language use.

CDA is a research tool through which the way of power abuse and dominance of participants can be examined. The word 'Critical' in Critical Discourse Analysis refers to focusing critically on the unseen power and ideology in a text and discourse. The discourses are laden with power abuse where the lower strata are often targeted and are made feel inferior. This view has been viewed from the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

### **Fairclough's Model**

Fairclough's (1989) Three Dimensional Model for CDA concerns three processes of critical analysis which deals with three interrelated dimensions of text (discourse). He puts that these three dimensions of analysis need three different kinds of critical analysis which are;

**Description:** This level of analysis is mainly concerned with formal properties of the text (discourse) such as vocabulary, different kinds of speech practices, punctuation as well as grammar.

**Interpretation:** This stage mainly focuses on the processes through which the object is produced i.e. writing, speaking, designing, reading, and listening by humans.

**Explanation:** The stage of explanation deals with the Social and Historical conditions which direct these processes.

Fairclough's (1989) framework provides ten basic questions and some sub-questions (see pages 110-112) for the analysis of a text. These ten questions are divided into three groups e.g. Vocabulary, Grammar, and Textual Structures. The study has adopted the above method dividing the analysis into three stages i.e. Description, Interpretation, and Explanation. Every stage has been analyzed by using the ten questions mentioned before.

#### **Data Analysis**

The present study is delimited to the exploration of powerlessness, power abuse, and discrimination, therefore those extracts which are concerning to my research are chosen for the analysis. The analytical process of the novels *Moth Smoke* is carried out in sequences. Every passage is thought of as discourse. The paragraphs/passages are given numbers sequentially. Every paragraph has been given its thematic title following my research topic.

The process of analysis is conducted with the perspectives of CDA because it does not only offer interpretation and description of different discourses in social context but also provides an explanation as to how the different discourses operate (Rogers et al. 2005). Moreover, each passage is analyzed, explained, and interpreted through Fairclough's (1989) TDM. His (1989) analytical procedure is applied in the act of meaning-making. The researcher has analyzed and interpreted the main social issues in the society and abuse of power in the text (discourse) under study.

#### **Discourse on Authoritative Power**

The extract below depicts a situation in court proceedings as there appear three players in the trail who are witnesses, intimates, and liars. These three are Murad Badsha, Aurangzeb (Ozi), and Mumtaz: a mother, lover, and wife at the same time. These three players perform their role in the proceedings as bystander, petitioner and protector respectively. But here, the main focus has been laid on the authoritative looks and appearance of the two lawyers who are dressed in black and white, and which are both forbidding, both hungry. One is tall and the other is short and fat.

#### **Extract 1**

*"Their eyes flick around them; their lips silently voice oratories of power and emotions. To be human is to know them; to know what such beings are and must be, these two are lawyers." (Moth Smoke: p. 7)*

#### **Description**

It is already stated that the description level of Fairclough's (1989) framework is the level of analysis which concerns with formal properties of the text (discourse) such as vocabulary, different kinds of speech practices, punctuation as well as grammar. The ten fundamental questions and the necessary sub-questions of his framework are brought into practice in the process of the analysis of the text.

The vocabulary used in the passage is formal (see question 2 of the framework). The creator of the text has created some kind of oppressive situation here, which prevails dread and fear. Therefore, the ideologically significant used words, phrases, and expressions are: the phrase "flick around", the expressions "silently voice oratories of power" and "To be human is...", and the word "lawyers" (Q. 1 of the Framework). The adverbial phrase "silently voice" is a figure of speech named oxymoron (see Q-4 of the framework). The possessive pronoun "their" in the clauses "their eyes... them" and "their lips... of power" and the infinitive "to" in the clauses "to be human...them" and "to know... lawyers" are used as over wording (Q-1 of the framework). The first sentence is a compound and positive one while the second sentence can be considered as complex having subordinate and coordinates clauses (see Q-8 of the framework). The conjunction (logical connector) "and" is used two times in the extract (see Q-8). Both the sentences of the selected extract have two and three clauses respectively. All the clauses have their separate grammatical experiential features and different kinds of processes (see Q-5) i.e. the first clause of sentence 1 contains its subject (S), verb (V), and object (O) which represents action; the second clause of sentence 1 also is an SVO clause and represents action. The first two clauses of sentence 2 are infinitive while the third one is an

explanatory clause. The pronouns having relational values are "their" occurred two times, "them" and "these" are used inclusively (see Q-6).

### **Interpretation and Explanation**

The above excerpt is a declarative statement about the appearances of the two lawyers, their authoritative looks, and their hostility towards the poor accused (Daru Shehzad). It discursively constructs the lawyers' abuse of institutional power. The situation, the arrogant attitude of the lawyers, and the created circumstances by the creator of the text represents dominance and suppression.

The clause "their lips... of power and emotion" in the first sentence is a discursive depiction of power on the part of the lawyers on one hand while it constructs powerlessness and oppression on the part of the accused (Daru Shehzad). Daru is the central character of the novel accused of a crime not had committed by him. The word "power" constructs dominance while the word "emotion" represents the enthusiasm of the lawyers to oppress the accused depicted in the novel. Although the lawyers have no personal enmity and malice towards Daru yet they are the slaves of their ambition for money they received from the wealthy petitioner, Aurangzeb. The infinitive phrase "to be human" discursively constructs their beings as human but it also represents their inhuman nature who blindly runs after wealth and destroys the innocent lives of powerless people for a crime not committed by them.

The text has some figures of speech used as linguistic features that show the artistic values of the producer of the discourse (text). The adverbial clause "... silently voice... of power" is used for the discursive demonstration of authority in the discussions; not performed but through the dominative influence of the lawyers. The word "power" gives the lexicographical meaning as "the ability/right to control things or people" (Merriam Webster online). The word "lawyer/s" is the nominalization of a person who assists or guides people in law relating matters. But here, as shown in the excerpt, the lawyers are exposed as inhuman and liars in the context of the society depicted in the novel.

### **Discourse on Institutional Power and Powerlessness**

The selected excerpt is a dialogue among three characters Daru Shehzad (a cashier), Mr. Jiwan (a big customer of the bank), and the Branch Manager of the bank. The conversation that took place in the bank shows how a poor cashier is thrown from his job for a minor mistake. The Branch manager fires Daru from his job for nothing but for the sake to make his big client Mr.Jiwan pleased. The sentences have given numbers sequentially for analyzing them one by one.

#### **Excerpt 2**

*"1. My BM is looking at me with hard eyes 2. This is unacceptable Mr. Shezad. 3. Please let me tell you what happened, sir 4.You told Malik Saab to take his business to another bank?... 5. "Enough!" my BM yells...6. His voice brings me to my senses...7. Fear grabs me by the throat and makes me wave my hands like I'm erasing the wrong answer from a blackboard 8. I'm very sorry, sir, I say". (MS: pp.21-22)*

#### **Description**

The passage taken from the novel is a narrative statement that is told by the narrator of the story i.e. DaruShehzad. It discursively constructs the abuse of institutional power on the part of the branch manager (BM) and the helplessness of the poor cashier (DaruShehzad). The discourse also represents how the upper class exploits the masses through their influences and control. Mr.Jiwan is the representative of the upper class who has influenced to exploit socially and politically the poor through depriving them of their jobs.

The vocabulary is informal in the sense that the discourse takes place between unequal or the superior and inferiors (see Q-2). Sentences 1 and 2 are simple declarative sentences, sentence 3 is an imploring sentence, sentence 4 is an interrogative, and sentence 5 is imperative while the remaining all sentences are simple declarative sentences (see Q-6 of the framework). Pronouns used having their grammatical relational values in the extract are: the possessive case of the first person pronoun "my" occurred three times in sentences 1, 5, and sentence 7, the objective pronoun "me" occurred five times in sentences 1, 3, 6 and two times in sentence 7, the second person pronoun "you" occurred two times in sentences 3 and 4, the possessive case of the third person pronoun "his" occurred two times in sentences 4 and 6 (see Q-6). All these pronouns are used exclusively which are limited to only single individuals in the selected passage. The only demonstrative pronoun "this" is used in sentence 2 to indicate as the source of reference inside or outside the text (see Q-8). The agency is not clear in the

sentence "this is unacceptable..." because the use of "this" doesn't provide a clear idea of what the BM points to (see Q-5 of the framework). The word "what" in sentence 3 is used as a pronoun which indicates an event happened sometime before the conversation, and also used here, as a conjunction to connect words, phrases, or clauses (see Q-8). Other logical connectors to join the two clauses or phrases used are: the preposition "by" and the use of simile "like" in sentence 7.

### **Interpretation and Explanation**

The excerpt discursively depicted and constructed the use of institutional power in an abusive way by the BM of the bank. The producer of the text also represented the upper strata of the society depicted in the novel as to how they use their influences in the affairs of the state and institutions. The novel shows that society is totally under the control of a few persons who have high status, power, and wealth. It depicts such a society where the lower strata enjoy no rights and privileges while the upper strata enjoy all the privileges and has control over all the resources of the state.

The word "let" in sentence 3 is used as a transitive verb which means to give opportunity to the speaker to explain the main cause of the event which is happened already. The word "please" in the same sentence is used as a functional word which expresses politeness or/and emphasis in the request or imploring which Daru makes to explain the happening of the occurrence between him and Mr.Jiwan. Again the BM's yell "enough!" in sentence 5 has used here, as an adverb in the sense of depriving Daru from explaining the event as shown in the novel. The expression "my BM yells" discursively shows the exercise of institutional power by the BM. The use of the word "yell" shows "power in discourse" (Fairclough, 1989: p.55). The expression "his voice....senses" in sentence 6 constructs the authoritative use of language to show the poor cashier (Daru) as inferior and dominated.

Again, the word "fear" in sentence 7 discursively depicts the powerlessness of the lower class. The expression shows Daru's real identity in a society where the lower class is considered as less privileged who has no right to talk to elites disrespectfully. Here, the use of the abstract noun "Fear" in the expression "fear grabs... throat" is attributed to the capacity to grasp someone by the throat. This discursively shows the powerful sway of elites on the lives of the deprived people. The producer of the text constructs two classes in the novel i.e. the lower class and the upper class. These two classes are represented as powerless and powerful respectively. The first class is represented as having no rights and control over the resources of the state while the other class is constructed as powerful which controls all the resources of the state (Malik: 2017).

### **Discourse on Symbolic Representation of Self-identity as well as Power**

The excerpt given below is a discursive construction of the loss of self-identity and the power symbolically. Symbolism can be considered as a Figure of Speech which the producer of a text uses for effective depiction of his ideas and feelings. S. T. Coleridge, William Buttler Yeats, and E. M. Forster have used a lot of symbolism in their writings. These prominent poets and writers have used certain symbolic words and phrases to explain as well as interpret their ideas and notions of the society in which they live.

The selection of the passage is based on the figurative representation of some ideologically specific words, phrases, and sentences. The word "the sun" symbolically shows self-realization and identity. Here, in the excerpt, the author of the text successfully depicted figuratively Daru Shehzad's character that deliberately proceeds towards his destruction. He knows well that the way he has chosen directly leads towards his destruction. He falls in love with his friend's wife Mumtaz Kashmiri and makes an illegal connection with her. Although he belongs to the middle class, he considers himself as elite. That is why he loses his identity and becomes the prey of the accusation for a murder that has not been done by him but has been committed by his friend Auranzeb who belongs to an elite class.

### **Excerpt 3**

*"1. The sun is completely blotted out by a dirty sky 2. I shut my eyes as the wind picks up, whipping through the branches with a rising howl as dust sweeps over me, smoothly abrasive.3. The Gandhi builds, pushing me back a step, screaming in my ears, bending my outstretched arms as I stand my ground". (MS: p.99)*

### **Description**

The vocabulary used in the selected paragraph is formal having its experiential, grammatical, and expressive values (see Q-2 of the framework). There are three sentences in the excerpt. Sentence 1 is

passive (Question 5 of the framework), sentences 2 and 3 are complex sentences having their main clause, subordinate and coordinate clauses (see Q-8). The word "as" (occurred three times) can be considered here, as the logical connectors used to connect phrases (see Q-8 of the framework). The ideologically loaded words, clauses, phrases, or sentence used in the excerpt are: the words "sun", "wind", "Andhi", "dust", the adjectival phrase "dirty sky", and the expression "screaming in my ears" (See Q-1).

### **Interpretation and Explanation**

Here, in this excerpt, the author of the novel used symbolic words and language to express his ideas and emotions constructed in his mind. There are some words used which shows the writer's experience of the society and the psychological as well as mental processes of the individuals living here. It depicts a society where the people live their lives without knowing their place and identity because self-realization and identity is the main problem in such a society in which wealth and riches are considered as the standard of personality and identity. In such a society the individuals lost their place and they suffer for it.

The word "sun" represents Daru's deliberately lost identity and place in society. The adjectival phrase "dirty sky" constructs the polluted psyche of Daru as yaqoob (2010) asserts that the novel has been set in the dirty atmosphere of Lahore (Pakistan). She puts that the polluted atmosphere has polluted all his thinking of self-identity and place. As the novel depicts that high position and living standards are considered to be possessed by those who have money and wealth but those who have no money are considered as they have no right to the resources of the state. The passage shows the distinction between social class based on wealth and influences.

The expression "I shut my eye... up" discursively shows Daru's deliberately blinding his eyes over his deeds which are paving the way to his destruction. The word "wind" is the symbolic construction of the calamity impending on him due to his deeds. As he is a poor man who has thrown from his place as a cashier in a bank, he completely becomes penniless and ruined. On the other hand, he also has to face the consequences of the illegal relations with Aurangzeb's wife Mumtaz Kashmiri. The phrase "rising howl" also represents the signs of the calamity impending on his head. The clause "The Gandhi builds, pushing me back a step" is again an ideological symbol for the construction of his blindness to his fate. Here, the writer wants to show his character as his fate maker. This shows that his conscience completely becomes deaf and blind or his own will to be ruined.

The entire passage is the symbolic construction of a society where there is no place left for the people who have no resources. Society has been divided into classes based on the unequal distribution of rights and resources. The elites enjoy all privileges and have control over the resources of the state while the poor are not allowed to achieve their basic rights of living. Therefore, they are compelled to achieve their rights through destroy their own lives as well as that of the elites if they can. They become criminals, drug edicts, robbers, and killers who lose their consciousness and intelligence. And that is the main cause of their powerlessness in the society in which they live.

### **Conclusion**

The text under study, *Moth Smoke*, is constructed on powerlessness and power abuse as the main themes of it. The novelist depicted all the evils and problems in the society in the novel. The text has some figures of speech used as linguistic features that show the artistic values of the producer of the discourse (text). The lawyers are exposed as inhuman and liars in the context of the society depicted in the novel.

The producer of the text constructs two classes in the novel i.e. the lower class and the upper class. These two classes are represented as powerless and powerful respectively. The first class is represented as having no rights and control over the resources of the state while the other class is constructed as powerful which controls all the resources of the state. Society has been divided into classes based on the unequal distribution of rights and resources. The elites enjoy all privileges and have control over the resources of the state while the poor are not allowed to achieve their basic rights of living. Therefore, they are compelled to achieve their rights by destroying their own lives as well as that of the elites if they can. They become criminals, drug edicts, robbers, and killers who lose their consciousness and intelligence. And that is the main cause of their powerlessness in the society in which they live.

It is recommended for other scholars to conduct stylistic analysis on the novel, especially focusing on deviation occurred in the novel. There are some other research topics too through which

full-length research can be conducted. These topics may prove important that are' the symbolic study of environmental effects on the human psyche, Social Issues, Class Conflict, etc.

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