



## Gender Construction, Discrimination, and Identity in One Half From the East: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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**Abstract:** This study aims to investigate gender construction, discrimination and identity issues in Nadia Hashmi's novel *One Half from the East*. CDA is a valuable tool for identifying gender-biased discourse in the two novels and facilitates a deeper exploration of discourse production and social analysis, setting it apart from other linguistic approaches to literary analysis. The study attempts to explore and unpack the discourse structures in the novel that build gender discrimination, gender construction and identity in the Afghan social and cultural context. The current study follows Critical discourse analysis as a research tool to examine the social injustices and inequalities that have been practised in Afghanistan for centuries. Norman Fairclough's tri-dimensional approach (Dialectical Relational) to CDA was used to unveil the social and cultural practices that constrain equal social rights for both genders. Hashmi beautifully depicted and portrayed gender-related issues and highlighted the social wrongs which have been practised and are taken for granted. The study revealed that social injustices existed in the social structures of Afghan society due to the prevailing social and cultural norms which are rooted in the traditions and conventions of Afghan people. The researcher arrived at that the low social status of the female gender is deeply rooted in the social and cultural practices prevailing in Afghan society

**Keywords:** Gender Discrimination; identity; discourse structures; inequalities; dialectical relational.

### 1. Introduction

The current study focuses on the discourse structures in Nadia Hashmi's novel, *one half from the East* to unpack the ideologically, socially, and culturally constructed gender-biased discourse related to Gender Construction, Discrimination, and Identity. The novel, *One Half From the East*, is set in the city of Kabul and a small village far away from Kabul. The 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). To investigate gender-related issues in the novel, The researcher used Critical Discourse Analysis (Henceforth CDA) as a research tool to examine and analyse the lexical, phraseological, and syntactical items in the discourse structures of the novel to reveal the ideologically and socially constructed gender identity, gender discrimination, and culturally powerful groups in society. The current research follows Fairclough's (2001, 2014, 2018) dialectical relational and dialectical reasoning approach as the primary method of analysis.

## Research Objectives

- To explore ideologically loaded phraseological and syntactical structures related to gender construction, discrimination and identity in the novel, *One Half From the East*
- To examine the unequal construction of gender in the discourse structures of the novel, *One Half From the East*.

### 1.1 Research Questions

- a) What are the ideologically loaded lexical, phraseological, and syntactical structures regarding gender construction, discrimination, and identity in *One Half From the East*?
- b) How gender has been constructed unequally in the discourse structures of the novel, *One Half From the East*?

## 2. Related Review of Literature

The relationship between gender and discourse is one of the crucial phenomena in modern contemporary research. 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. A woman is the product of culture, not nature. In other words, she is not born a woman but becomes a woman by social and cultural norms. Weatherall (2002) claims that language that treats men and women differently is not entirely new. Feminists have had concerns for a long time the way they are represented in language. She points out that feminists have tried to create awareness of gender-related issues in language. There are several ways in which language can be sexist. One of the ways is to make women invisible in language. For example, women are mostly found hidden, as absent from the subjects or topics of stories.

Mills (1998) argues that the long debate among feminist literary critics is evident if the language used by women writers in their text is probably different than the language used by men. This debate had its origin in the work of Virginia Woolf. She stated that there was a sentence that had been developed by women waiters of the time, and it was termed as a female sentence or, in other words, a sentence of feminine gender. Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2003) claim that gender and language established their research status with the publication of Lakoff's article 'Language and Women Place.' Crawford (1995) points out that the concept that men and women speak different languages gained popularity in the early 1970s among researchers in the fields of linguistics, psycholinguistics, and communication. She notes that linguist Lakoff introduced the distinctive features of woman language in the early 1970s with her publication in 1973 titled *Language in Society*. Likewise, (Eckert & Mc Connell-Ginet, (2023).) state that language reflects and constructs gender identities, emphasizing the social contexts that influence language use

Critical discourse analysis (henceforth, CDA) is an analytical approach to analyse text and talk in a social and political context. According to Wodak & Meyer (2001), CDA is mainly concerned with analysing transparent and opaque structures of power, dominance, and control as practised in language. Similarly, Richardson views CDA functions both as a theory and method to analyse institutes and individuals' language in different contexts. According to (Fairclough (2012:9) and Ishtiaq et al.,2021) Critical Discourse Analysis takes the critical tradition of social analysis into language, and it mainly focuses on the discourse and its relationship with other social elements, i.e., power relations, institutions, ideologies, social identities, and so on. Van Dijk (2015) defines CDA as a kind of discourse analytical research that is mainly concerned with how social power abuse, inequality, and dominance are exercised, reproduced, and refrained by text and talk in a political and social context

According to Hashmi (2016), *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*. "Hashimi'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 is 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. " This study differs from others on the selected novel's discourse by not only describing gender discourse, power relations, and ideological constructions but also explaining the reasons behind certain injustices in societal structures.

### 3. Methodology

The current study follows a qualitative research approach 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 propositions regarding gender construction, discrimination and identity. The analysis has been carried out under the framework of Fairclough's (1989, 2001, 2014) model of CDA. The source of collection for the current study is primary; the research collected words, phrases, and sentences from the selected novel.

This study follows Norman Fairclough's approach to CDA (1989, 2001 & 2014) to analyse the selected extracts from the novel, *one half from the East*. Fairclough considers discourse as a social practice and advocates a dialectical relation between discourse and society. He avers that discourse is shaped by social structure, and the same social structure is shaped by socially used discourse. He views three main components of discourse, i.e., text, interaction, and social context. Based on these three aspects of discourse, he developed his famous Tridimensional approach (dialectical relational approach) to discourse analysis. This approach consists of three levels (stages), i.e., description, interpretation, and explanation. Based on these three dimensions of discourse, the researcher has used a dialectical relational approach to CDA to analyse discourse at three levels. At the first level (textual analysis), formal linguistic properties used in the discourse were labelled and identified. The research identified and analysed ideologically laden items and relational, experiential, and expressive values of vocabulary and grammatical features. The second level of analysis consists of discourse practice, which is concerned with a sociocognitive aspect of how text is produced and interpreted. The interpretation here means understanding the meaning embodied in the text. According to (Fairclough, 2001), the interpretation involves two things: first, what is in the text, and second, what is in the interpreter member resources (MR). Fairclough considers these member resources (MR) the interpretative procedures drawn upon in the process of discourse production and interpretation. At the third and final level of analysis (explanation), which Fairclough names discourse practice, the researcher explored the broader dimension of discourse by explaining the effects of discourse on social structures. The linguistic properties which are labelled and identified at the first level and their meanings are explained here. At this level, the researcher explained his position as a critical discourse analyst and took the side of the oppressed, spoke against an oppressor, and suggested how to transform society by eradicating social wrongs.

### 4. Discussion

The below extracts are taken from Nadia Hashmi's *One Half From the East*, ch 9, ch 22 & ch 30.

#### 4.1 Textual analysis

The passages under analysis have several ideologically laden words, phrases, and sentences which manifest gender construction, discrimination, and identity. The ideologically laden lexical items regarding gender construction, discrimination, and identity have been depicted in different values such as experiential, relational, and expressive values in terms of grammar and vocabulary, as sketched in Fairclough's (1989, 2001 & 2014) framework.

#### 4.2 Textual Analysis

There are many words in the discourse structures of the major characters that have experiential, relational, and expressive values. The expressions, *Being a boy, your pants, and your head, your shoulders, chin out, feet apart, boy parts, palms open, and arms swing, eggs in your pockets, my feet, my chin, my elbow, berries and sip tea, body parts* repeatedly used, *boy things* line and, *more importantly,* are ideologically loaded (Question 1 & 3 of the framework). These vocabulary/ expressions have both experiential as well as expressive values in which the discourse producers have encoded and represented gender identity and inequalities. *Cracking any shells, built of rock and metal, and made of flower petals and paper bags, the rope, bucket whizzes, well, clanking and thudding against the bricks walls and dark earth, are metaphorically used to show to the strength of boys and weakness of girls and their destiny in the dominant male society* (Question 4 of the framework).

There are several expressions in the extract above which have experiential, relational, and expressive value in terms of grammatical features. The repetitive use of the pronoun *you*, and the possessive pronoun *you*, have relational

value (Question 6 of the framework), whereas relationships have been built through the use of these grammatical features. The expressions *look at the way you stand* and *the way you hide your eyes*, *Stand tall* and *Stick your chin out*, *Keep your palms open* and, and *Set your feet apart* *When you run, slap your whole foot on the ground, not just your toes* and *Run like you're not afraid of cracking any shells!* has an imperative mode, and they are used ideologically loaded (Question 6 of the framework). Similarly, *being a boy is not all in your pants* (Question 6 of the framework) has an expressive value that is used ideologically by the discourse producer. *You've got boy parts, don't forget to show gender identity. Are you carrying eggs in your pockets, "But do the body parts matter?"*, *Are you a boy because you have those body parts or are you a boy because you get to do boy things?"* are yes/no questions, which are grammatical questions (Question 6 of the framework).

### 4.3 Interpretation and Explanation

In the first stage of the analysis procedure, the formal properties of discourse have been identified and labelled. The second stage consists of the interpretation and explanation of the text's formal properties, which have already been identified in the textual analysis phase. The discourse in selected passages in the textual analysis is about gender construction, discrimination, and identity. This part of the analysis focuses on the process of discourse production and its social impacts at situational, intuitional, and societal levels.

The discourse producer attempts to draw different identities of males and females in the ongoing dialogues which occur between Obayd and Rahim. The discourse producer uses several lexical items that are ideologically loaded in a social structure of which the two interlocutors are part. For example, when Rahim tries to build a male gender identity, he says to Obayd in line 1 that to be a boy or a girl, it is not in *your pants*, but in *your head* and *shoulder*. Rahim explains to Obayda that being a boy or a girl is partly psychological, and it is not your body that defines you as a boy or a girl, but it is a social practice that differentiates you based on your body. In other words, it is a social phenomenon, not a natural one. Rahim used certain lexical items such as *being a boy*, *your pants*, *your head*, *your shoulder*, *chin out*, *feet apart*, *boys' part*, *palm open*, *arm swings*, *eggs in your pocket*, and *boys' things* in the discourse which are dialogically loaded.

It appears from the discourse structure that when boys walk, their heads and shoulders are up because it is considered a feature of masculinity, which is attributed to males alone. Rahima tried to convince obeyed that boyhood is not at all in your pants. It means you are not a boy because you got boys' parts (your genitals); you are a boy because you do boys' things. The discourse shows gender construction and gender identity, which is manufactured in a social process (see for more detail Lazar, FCDA, 2005 and Gul et al.,2023). Similarly, *chin out* is another feature attributed to boys, not girls. Keeping *feet apart* is a property of boys, and boys learn this at an early stage. Rahima tells Obayd that do not think you have got girls' parts; think you have got boys' parts. The utterance shows that body parts do not matter and have no role in making you a boy or girl, but boys and girls are the construction of society rather than your organs and genitals. He further instructs Obeyed like a teacher who keeps your *palm open* and lets your *arms swing* while you walk. The lexical items in the discourse structure provide evidence that gender is a socially constructed phenomenon. Furthermore, the distinction between two opposite sexes is made based on body parts and given physical attributions to boys and girls by society. The expression carrying *eggs in your pocket* is used ideologically and attributed to girls. Being a boy, you should not walk like a girl. Girls have different identities and different constructions in society.

Girls walk delicately, and if they run and walk roughly, they look awkward. This awkwardness is metaphorically shown by the fragility of the eggs. Girls walk carefully and decently as they are trained in their early childhood, while boys walk and run carelessly. They are carefree to run and walk without thinking of breaking any eggs. The discourse producer, Rahim, points out the body parts *of my feet*, *elbow*, and *chin* of Obayd and comments that there is no difference in the feet, elbow, and chin of a boy and a girl then why your feet are apart, why don't you carry your elbow the way boys carry and why your chin is down and is not up like boys? It is because you are trained in this way. You are taught to carry your body in this way by your peer groups, parents, and other social elements which are one part. Gender discrimination has been shown in the lexical choice in the discourse of producers when boys and girls are distinguished in their habits of eating and behaving. For example, girls eat *berries*, and when they take *sip tea*, they are very much careful compared to boys, who are carefree in their eating habits. Likewise, discourse producers use *body parts* and *boy things* repeatedly (Question 1 of the framework) to emphasize that males and females are two different creatures. It appears from the discourse that under social conventions, girls and boys are trained in specific ways, and they are supposed to follow the social norms which are established by the social structure in which they live.

Gender inequality, identity, and construction are also built in the discourse structures through metaphorical expression used by discourse producers (Question 4 of the framework). For example, *cracking any shells* is metaphorically used to compare the fragility of eggs with the weakness of girls (for further explanation of metaphorically used expressions in discourse structures, Fairclough, 2014, ch 6). It is inferred from the utterance that girls are weak, and if they walk or run roughly, their body parts can be easily broken or damaged. When girls walk or run, they are afraid that they might lose something due to their femininity. It seems they carry eggs in their pockets, and if they run, the eggs may break into pieces. Another expression that is used metaphorically is *built of rock and metal* and *made of flower petals and paper bags*. Gender has been manufactured by the discourse producer (Rahim) to show girls' miserable conditions in a male-dominated society. The strength of boys is compared with *rock and metal*. The structure shows that boys are made of rock and metal. Rock and metals are hard, and so are men, and they cannot be easily molded or broken compared to women.

On the other hand, the discourse producer assumes that girls are made *of flower petals and paper bags*. The metaphorical expression shows the delicacy, exquisiteness, and sensitivity of girls. Flower petals and paper bags are very sensitive, delicate, and weak and can be easily torn into pieces at any time. They are replaceable too after they are used for some time. Other metaphorical expressions used in the discourse structures are *the rope*, *bucket whizzes*, *well*, *clanking*, and *thudding against the brick walls and dark earth*. In lines 18 and 19, several metaphors are used to reveal gender discrimination and identity. For example, when Obeyed notices Rahim being a girl in front of a well. We notice that the rope and bucket dropped from her hand indicate that she is no freer and the rope of her life is in the hands of others (males). The term *rope* refers to control, and *the bucket* is used metaphorically for girls who are in control of males.

Similarly, the term *whizzes* shows a sudden change in the life of Rahima, who was previously enjoying the life of boys. The word *well* refers to the dark aspect of Rahima's life, which is used metaphorically. The word *well* may be used to indicate the horrible aspect of the life of girls after they get married. The lexical items *clanking* and *thudding against the bricks, walls, and dark earth* imply the life of Rahima after she got married to an elderly warlord who is in his fifties while Rahima is just 13. Clanking and thudding are used metaphorically to refer to the hard and harsh life of Rahima (for further explanation see Fairclough, 2014, ch 5). The discourse structures imply she is living a life in a dark world where she is controlled, and her life rope is in the hands of a warlord. Her life is as hard as a bucket moving, clanking, thudding against the walls and finally dropping into the well. Her miserable life has been compared to a dark well and rope that is attached to a bucket. The significance of metaphorically used expressions cannot be taken for granted. The discourse producer has experienced such discrimination and inequity in society, so he expressed his thoughts through the medium of language. The underlined concept behind the discourse structures appears the social conventions and social practice. According to Fairclough, these underlying conventions and practices form the belief system, i.e., member resources (MR) and become common sense for the people of the social structure.

## 5. Conclusion

This study was conducted to investigate gender discrimination, identity, and ideologically moulded discourse structures in the novel, *One Half From the East*. Norman Fairclough's Tri-Dimensional Approach (Dialectical Relational Approach) to CDA was applied to analyse the discourses from the selected novel. Judith Lorber's Concept of Gender as a Social Construction was used as a theoretical consideration to analyse the selected extracts from the novel. The research aimed to answer the research questions which were posed in the introduction chapter. Research questions 1 and 2 were answered by applying the tools and method of Norman Fairclough (1989, 2001 & 2014). The study found in light of research question 1 that there were several ideologically used lexical items such as words, phrases, and sentences in the discourse structures of the novel. The selected passages from both novels revealed the unequal social status of the female gender through the socially used discourse structures. Gender identity and gender discrimination were also explored in the discourse structures of the major characters in the novel.

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