

**A STUDY OF THE EXPRESSIONS OF ANDROCENTRIC IDEOLOGY CAUSING  
OPPRESSION IN KHALED HOSSEINI'S AND THE MOUNTAINS ECHOED**

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**Abstract**

*The study is an attempt to investigate the role of language in expressing androcentric ideology causing oppression in Khaled Hosseini's novel And the Mountains Echoed. Gender issues are constructed discursively and ideologically in such a way that they seem fictitiously factual. Lazar's (2005, 2007) feminist views have been used as conceptual framework to analyze the issues under study. The ten tools of critical stylistics, developed by Jefferies (2010), have been applied to find out the role of language in the construction of the aforementioned issues. Analysis of a few novelistic passages can illustrate the importance of language. However, the present study takes a sample passage to critically analyze the role of language in the construction of gender issues. The discourse-producer manipulates language to construct gender-related issues, like oppression and marginalization. Several linguistic tools have been used to (re)present and construct these issues. Nouns and noun phrases are used to express gender and ideology, while material action intentional, along with other tools has been utilized to depict oppression against women.*

**Keywords:** Language; Ideology; Oppression; Gender; Critical stylistics

**I. Introduction**

The current study is based on critical analysis of the integral role of language in the construction of ideology and gender issues in the chosen excerpt from Hosseini's novel *And The Mountains Echoed* (2013). Happenings in Afghanistan are described during war. The effect of those wars on the lives of people has been presented. How Nila leaves her husband to migrate to France, along with Pari has been discussed. Further, the destruction of

Afghanistan and its reconstruction after wars has been narrated. Several issues, like womanhood (Sam, 2015), the role of economy as a trap (Kaur, 2016), ethnicity (Pertwi, 2016) and psychological conflicts (Agustina, 2016), have already been investigated in the novel under study. However, the integral role of language in the construction of the aforementioned issues is the domain of this study.

Gender has been extensively and historically discussed as a scientific, natural and constructed truth. It has entered into our beliefs, actions and institutions, and is taken for granted. To understand gender in true sense, one has to step back and rethink human existence which is not an easy task to do. Gender has to be studied as an ‘accomplishment’ and ‘effect’ and not as ‘natural’ and ‘cause’ (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). Further, the authors argue that gender is a social construct. Humans are born with different sex, which means that sex is biological. On the other hand, society divided man and woman and transgender as different genders. The difference is exaggerated into those aspects of life where it is completely irrelevant. Importance is given to one gender over another. Another theorist, Butler (1990), believes that gender is not a biological act, but ‘performative’ and involuntary. It is constructed because of the repeated styles and acts with the passage of time. Ford (2002) also supports the argument and argues that the actions and styles of men are liked and valued while the actions and styles of women are considered derogatory. Men are usually considered stronger than and mostly favored over women.

A debatable aspect of gender-related issues is oppression against women. Johnson (2000b) defines oppression as a systematic manipulation, misuse, maltreatment and injustice of a dominant group over a subordinated group. Members of the dominant group, regardless of their individual beliefs, participate in oppressing the weaker group. In this way, oppression becomes institutionalized, and hard to identify. In patriarchal societies, women are usually exploited, oppressed, discriminated, victimized and abused because they are subjected and subordinated. Bhasin (2006) argues that the term ‘patriarchy,’ by itself, justifies a powerful system that works in favor of men. Women in patriarchal system are viewed psychologically, emotionally and physically weak and, hence, are controlled and treated unequally. They are politically and economically oppressed as well. Engel (1884) believes that, in patriarchal system, women are not less than prostitutes. They are treated as slaves. He declares capitalism as the main cause of women’s oppression.

Kress and Hodge (1993) define ideology as “systematically organized presentation of truth” (p. 15). Ideologies are sets of beliefs, got from experience, which help in structuring the world. Language is the carrier and container of ideologies. Likewise, Fairclough (1989) believes that ideology is the construction of reality in such a way that it seems natural to others. It generates consent and is in the service of sustaining power. He further says that ideology is more powerful and effective when it is hidden. Once known, it cannot sustain unequal power relations. He links ideology with language and then with power. Van Dijk (2006) states that ideologies are “belief systems” (p. 2). These belief systems are shared by members of a group and represent their social identity. Ideologies are not surface-based, but very fundamental beliefs. Hence, they cannot be easily discarded. As a result, a society, that believes in the patriarchal ideology, may consider men superior to women and oppress, abuse and exploit women in many ways (Sultana, 2010). Gender is not only an ideology, but also an ideological structure wherein asymmetrical relations emerge. Power underlies ideology, remarkably patriarchal gender ideology. Traditional gender ideology is a mindset that causes conflicts in gender relations.

Lazar’s (2005, 2007) views provide a theoretical and conceptual base for the issues under study. Her feminist views are based on the assumption that elusive and opaque ideologies are present, often resisted and sustained, in discourses. The interplay of hegemonic ideologies varies from context to context and culture to culture. She does not merely believe in deconstructing text and talk; she also argues that there is significance of the deconstruction, both for men and women. Further, discourse is demystified for the interrelationship between ideology and gender. Ideology, gender and power are elusive in nature. Moreover, gender is socially ascribed because of social practices, ethnicity, age, sexuality, social identity, patriarchal ideology, social class and position, geographical location and (dis)ability (Lazar, 2007, p. 141).

## **II. Objectives**

Main objective of the study is:

To analyze the role of language in expressing androcentric ideology causing oppression in Khaled Hosseini’s novel *And the Mountains Echoed*.

## **III. Methodological Framework**

The methodological framework of the study is critical stylistics presented by Jeffries (2010). Through critical stylistic tools, she has plugged the gap between CDA and

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stylistics. She also believes that linguists have worked and are working on the ideological nature of language. She further explicates that the efforts made and the methodologies developed therein are patchy. Therefore, there was the need to give a properly developed toolkit for understanding of ideologies in a text. Mostly, the concern is with the hidden ideologies because they are more sinister and menacing as a result of ‘naturalization.

There are ten tools presented for the critical analysis of ideologically laden text and talk: “naming and describing,” “representing actions/events/states,” “equating and contrasting,” “exemplifying and enumerating,” “prioritizing,” “implying and assuming,” “negating,” “hypothesizing,” “Presenting other’s speech and thoughts” and “representing time, space and society.”

To analyze a passage, the analyst has numbered the sentences. A large number of passages in the text depict the role of language in the construction of ideology and gender-related issues. However, a sample passage has been chosen for the role of language in the construction of the issues under study.

The selected excerpt (from sentence 1 to 11) has been taken from chapter four of the novel, and sheds light on the character of Nila Wahdati. Nabi hosts several servants of the adjacent families after dinner. During their gossip, they discuss Nila because Mr. Wahdati wants to marry her. The discourse is in the form of direct speech among the servants, including Nabi. From sentence 12 to 30 have been selected from chapter six of the novel. The lines are taken from an interview of Nila Wahdati in France. She has left the country, and now lives in France, with her daughter, Pari. The lines are a flashback over the past of Afghanistan. She tells Mr. Monsieur Boustouler (the interviewer) that she has left her country, and cannot leave her daughter live in the prevailing conditions of Afghanistan. The excerpt is critically analyzed for the research question how does language play an integral role in the representation of ideology, gender and oppression.

Passage

“Over tea one night. . . I did not want this for my girl.” (Hosseini, 2013, pp. 81-183)

#### **IV. Analysis and Discussion**

In the given passage, a discourse is presented, which highlights the character of Nila, and in the same way, oppression against gender and ideology is constructed through that discourse. The discourse-producer(s) has/have used several stylistic tools to discursively (re)present gender in the Afghan society.

The first sentence of the passage is an indirect speech from Zahid, so the narration is homodiegetic. The negation “not” constructs the normal status of marriages in the Afghan society, where parents give proper approval and arrange marriages of their children. A complex phrase is presented, in which there is hyphenated possession and modifying noun. The hyphenated structure shows that Nila and Mr. Wahdati are not married yet. The modification down plays the noun and Nila’s character is supposed to be “poor.” Secondly, the modification suggests women with good character, on the other hand. The constructed ideology shows that, in Afghanistan, usually, parents approve marriages with women of good character only. As Afghanistan is a patriarchal society, the character of Mr. Wahdati is not in question, which becomes clear with the passage of the story and that is why, Nila leaves him and goes to France with Pari. Only the character of a woman is judged before marriage in the patriarchal societies.

The second sentence is also an indirect speech from Nabi. He says that Zahid believes that Nila does not have “*nang*” and “*namoos*” (pride and honor). The Afghan patriarchal society considers these elements pivotal for women. The presence of the original Pashtu words presents the importance and value of these qualities in the Afghan society. She is young, and in this age, she is not expected to have made relations with a lot of men. It is assumed in the clause that mature and grown up ladies may have affairs and relations with men. The passive structure in the sentence does not have actor (men) so “she” is prioritized and secondly, a scare quote is presented which shows that the narrator separates himself from the remarks of Zahid. Nabi has a soft corner for Nila; therefore, the scare quote has been used. The simile equates the actions of having relations with men to that of Mr. Wahdati’s old car. As the car is too old and has been driven to all the places in the town. Likewise, Nila is supposed to have made affairs with many men in the town. To equate a woman to a car is to consider her as a commodity and not a human being. Those women who go outside their household are thought to be immoral and of bad character.

In sentence 3, the technique of fronting has been used through which readers are convinced that the idea to be presented is the “worst” idea. Nila does not “deny” the “allegations” leveled against her. Normally, when allegations are leveled against someone, they are denied. If they are not denied, it means that they are true. The new information presents that Nila discusses her love making scenes in her poetry. It is assumed that her love scenes are discussed in her poetry. In this way, the ideology is constructed that she is bold

enough to accept the allegations and this is not considered good for a woman in the patriarchal society.

Sentence 4 is a narratorial comment from Nabi. Subject of the sentence is a noun phrase; hence discourse of the people, who sit there, has been supposed to be of “disapproval.” Subordination is used in the sentence and the reaction of the people is presented first. In this way, her poetry and discussion of her affairs in the poem are assumed to be disapproved by the people. The next sentence also uses a noun phrase, as subject of the sentence. The noun phrase does not clearly mention the actor of the action. Nabi knows who speak these words but the phrase constructs the effect that all the men may use the same remarks. Secondly, the noun “village” presents a contrast to the life in town. It supposes the relative freedom of women in Kabul. The pronoun refers to men in general because in the patriarchal societies, decisions are taken by men and not women. The modality “would” supposes the strong certainty of killing women in the name of honor in villages. The patriarchal values are adhered to strongly in villages as compared to cities, like Kabul. Only the leveling of allegations is enough for them to cut the throat of a woman.

The discussion, of slaying throat, in the previous sentence, sensitizes Nabi to stop the talk against Nila. He tells them that he has “heard” “enough.” The effect of the sentence is that he stops them from talking the issue, further. The word “berated” depicts the element of anger in scolding the men. The action verb shows the hidden feelings of Nabi. He has started loving her and cannot tolerate anything against her. Through simile, it is supposed that old women are of no use but to sew sweaters/dresses and gossip. The point of comparison between the men and “old women” is “gossiping.” This simile is a noun phrase and presents sexist and androcentric ideology about women. The verb “reminded” functions as factive verb and shows that before this occasion, he has talked to them on the subject. The point of comparison between “people” and Mr. Wahdati is their wealth. In the sentence, two classes are placed against each other: the rich and the poor. The two classes are dependent on each other. The narrator then uses modality “would” which illustrates the strong possibility of the dependence of poor on rich. As Nabi takes sides with Wahdati’s, that is why he does not mention that the rich also cannot survive without the poor. The noun “collecting” shows the condition of the poor in villages. It depicts the poverty and poor condition of living in villages. The modification supposes that the only source of living is to look after their cattle.

The italics in sentence 8 construct the effect that the narrator presents the original words of the men. He reminds them “loyalty” and “respect.” The question is asked to remind them that they should remain loyal to their masters and respect them as well. The italics, further, shows that these words are ideologically loaded. Nabi asks for respect and loyalty from other men but he himself throws these things aside by keeping his eyes on Nila.

In sentence 9, Nabi thinks about real men who really exist and who has made love to Nila. The noun phrase establishes the fact that those men are real actual human beings and they still live. They belong to the same world to which he belongs. However, they are fortunate. It is assumed thus that she has been sexually involved with men. The conjunction “as” supposes the next statement as true. The sentence constructs the ideological effect that Nabi thinks as a man about those men who are physically involved with Nila. This, further, shows the envy of Nabi for those men. Nabi also knows about the affairs of Nila but he is interested in her and because of this reason does not want to discuss her in public.

The next two sentences are questions asked from the readers. The ideological effect of the sentences is that Nila is the paragon of beauty to Nabi. He is unmarried and Nila symbolizes an ideal woman. To him, all other things are irrelevant. Likewise, sentence 11 also initiates the interest of the readers through a metaphor. Nila is like the end of the world to Nabi. These two sentences, together, present the feelings of Nabi for Nila. He is interested in her physical beauty and is envious of the lovers of Nila.

The noun “king” (in sentence 12) suggests the nature of the government in Afghanistan. It is monarchy, and king Amanullah rules the country. The state verb suggests the shape of Afghanistan, which he wants to change. The present shape, according to him, is not good. The expression “kicking and screaming” has a metaphorical meaning and implies that people will resist the change because they are so much used to the status quo. He intends to use force to implement reforms. Afghanistan is the country of deep-rooted culture and mere the use of force cannot change that culture. The reversive opposite “new” suggests the old Afghanistan, which is patriarchal. The two Afghanistans (patriarchal and enlightened) are placed side by side. He has the vision to change the social decrepit conditions of Afghanistan. Sentence 14 depicts that women in Afghanistan already observe *pardah*. The negation suggests that the king will allow women not to observe *pardah*.

Sentence 15 is the narratorial comment of the discourse-producer and starts with “Imagine,” hence constructs a hypothetical situation. The phrase suggests a woman

anywhere in Afghanistan and in this way the actor is not definite. Secondly, the phrase is in passive construction where “a woman in Afghanistan” is prioritized. The noun “*burqa*” is another point of importance and is the Pashto counterpart of the word “veil.” It is the traditional way of observing *pardah* in the Afghan culture. It will be, indeed, an extraordinary thing to forbid wearing of *burqa* in Afghanistan. The Afghans are traditional people and wearing of veil for women is mandatory. The King challenges the traditional patriarchal structure of the country.

The king wants to enlighten the country but the time his wife obeys him, he faces strong resistance. The expression “for one” suggests the commitment of the king that if nobody else obeys the order of not wearing veil, he himself will strongly propagate and implement it. The adjectival transformation prioritizes the absence of veil from Queen Soraya, his wife. Women, in Afghanistan, are not supposed to show their faces in public. Sentence 18 shows the reaction of *Mullahs*, the religious leaders in Afghanistan. *Mullahs* strongly react against the non observance of *pardah*. A historical reference is given to the Hindenburg. The reference is used as an analogy. The bold action of Queen Soraya infuriates the *Mullahs*. Patriarchy and religion, in Afghanistan, are so much strong and permeated that this single episode brings a very strong and negative reaction from the religious zealots of the country. Consequently, the king has to run away to British India to save his life. King Amanullah Khan (1919-1929) pays the price for his modern and Western ideas and the country still remains as it was.

In sentence 19, the discourse-producer presents another decree of the king. The noun phrase contains iterative which suggests that the custom of “polygamy” is a common practice in Afghanistan and a man can marry more than one woman. The negation also hypothesizes this practice. The noun phrase assumes that most of the men in Afghanistan marry more than one woman. Polygamy is common among the lower class uneducated men.

Sentence 20 is a narratorial comment from the discourse-producer. The modification supposes that every king has a large number of women in his *harem* (women’s quarters). Polygamy is a practice among common and uneducated men, while kings (in old times) do not marry all the women in *harem* but keep them for sexual gratification. The negation assumes that the kings do not bother all their wives; even they do not see their children from these women. The kings keep the women for their sexual satisfaction and are not concerned with their children born of the relation. The word “fathered” illustrates that

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these children are not the result of marital relationship. The sentence constructs the ideology that in a country where kings have many wives the talk against polygamy is a bold step.

The time deixis, in sentence 21, is in fronting part of the sentence, which constructs the effect that before the time of King Amanullah Khan, there are oppressive practices (like forced marriages). In Afghanistan, men have the authority to decide about marriage and the woman to be married, whether the woman wants or not. Most of the marriages are arranged marriages. Women are considered to be the property of men.

The word “more” supposes that women are sold in Afghanistan, in the name of marriage. The modification “bride price” and negation “no” supposes the alternative situation, where women will have every right to decide about their husbands and they will not be sold. The noun phrase takes for granted that women in Afghanistan are brave. The second noun phrase talks about “child marriage.” The word “more” supposes this practice as well. In the patriarchal societies, women are sold, in their young age for a huge price. Grown up women do not bring good price. The practice varies from society to society. Sometimes, a young girl is married to an old man for money, and other times, a small girl is married to a small boy (both minors) because of *swara* custom or the household needs a helping hand. All these practices: polygamy, forced marriage, child marriage and bride price are common practices in Afghanistan and the discourse-producer uses noun phrases to highlight these issues.

In sentence 23, the modality “will” shows the desire of the king that all women should go to school. The iterative constructs the effect that only the selected women are allowed attend school. All women, especially women in rural areas, are not allowed to go to schools. The sentence means that all women, without discrimination, will get education.

From sentence 24 onward, the discourse-producer limits her discourse to the specific condition of women in Afghanistan, to justify her leaving the country. The discourse-producer uses modality to express what she desires for her daughter. The complement “turned” is prioritized. Women, according to the discourse-producer, are born free, and are equal to men. Therefore, they should be equal to men and should have freedom of thought and expression. Nila wants her daughter to practice this born gift. The next prepositional phrase uses apposition and modification after the demonstrative “those” which suppose that most of the women in Afghanistan live unhealthy life. Women are oppressed and suppressed throughout their life. The iterative, further, hypothesizes the “lifelong”

struggles of women. Women are treated like slaves and do not make any complaint against their slavery. Women are in danger of “showing,” “saying” or “doing” anything which is against the desires of men. Nila does not want Pari to live a life like these women.

In sentence 25, a relative clause takes for granted that women of Afghanistan are respected in the West. There are also some people, in the West, who support and encourage these women to raise their voice for their rights. These subjugated women of Afghanistan become “heroines” to some people in the West. The verb “turned” supposes that these women are not heroines in Afghanistan but for the West they appear to be “heroines.” The point which makes them “admired” is their “hard lives.” The prepositional phrase “from a distance” constructs the effect that the lives of women, in Afghanistan, seem admirable to those who have not seen them labor and serve their men all day. The relative clause negates the possibility of the Western women to live life like them. Western women cannot assume the status of the Afghan women, just for a single day. Admiration from distance is one thing, while living and slaving in a patriarchal society is another thing.

The word “see” illustrates that these women are aware of their “desires” and “dreams.” In the patriarchal societies, women cannot resist male and can see how men play with their desire and dreams. Despite the oppression and men’s dominance, women do not complain. Women’s servitude is bad but their remaining silent is worse. Women in Afghanistan are contended with their lives, despite the fact that they can see oppressions being done against them. From sentence 24 to 26 relative clauses are used with noun “women” to present facts about the lives of Afghan women as inferior and subjugated. Nila Wahdati says that these women cannot and will not resist their fate.

Sentence 28 presents an opposite idea. Only those can see their hard lives who observe them “closely.” Women in Afghanistan have no other choice that is why they seem contended and pretends to be so. Apposition is used to semantically equate “helpless look” and “desperation” of the women. The women are helpless and hopeless. Women in Afghanistan are not genial and they just pretend to look so.

The Afghan women are presented to deserve pity because of their ‘hypocritical’ attitude. They are not happy but they pretend to be happy and are not successful in doing so. She does not like this kind of life for Pari. She presents a very dark picture of the Afghan women, and wants to keep her daughter away from Afghanistan. The text elucidates that she leaves Afghanistan not because of the issues she mentions but because she does not want to

live with her paralyzed husband because of her own reasons. Secondly, Pari is not her real daughter. She has bought her from her poor parents. In this way, the discourse of Nila Wahdati is not in line with her actions in Afghanistan. However, she has constructed successfully the pathetic condition of women in Afghanistan, which is the result of history and also the patriarchal institutions like religion.

## **V. Conclusion**

Critical analysis of the excerpt depicts that language plays a significant role in expressing social issues, especially the issues under study in the Afghan society. The above passage has been analyzed for the role of language in the construction androcentric ideology causing oppression. In the first place, the discourse-producer has used linguistic tools, like noun phrases (e.g. “A murmur of disapproval,” “brave women of Afghanistan”), nouns (e.g. “polygamy”), pre-modifiers (e.g. “helpless”), similes/metaphors (“like a sewing circle of old women”), mental cognition (“imagine”) and narratorial mode (NRSA) to depict ideology against/in favor of gender in the Afghan patriarchal society. Analysis of the passage also illustrates that critical stylistic tools, like similes/metaphors (“like a sewing circle of old women”), nouns (e.g. “*nang*”, “*namoos*”), adjectival transformation (“dreams renounced”) and negating (e.g. “No,” “didn’t”) has been utilized in the discursive production of gender. In the discursive production of gender oppression and discrimination in the Afghan patriarchal society, the critical tools of material action intentional (e.g. “slit”), nouns (“cow dung,” “desperation”), adjectival transformation (e.g. “this is the worst of it,” “desires doused”) and implicature (“kicking and screaming,” “the lungs of mullahs inflated”) are used. The discussion sums up that Hosseini has used language to express androcentric ideologies which resulted in oppression of women in Afghanistan.

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