

Decoding Power and Patriarchy in The Pakistani Bride: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

This study investigates the construction, reinforcement, and occasional contestation of patriarchal power and gender inequality through linguistic practices in Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride*. Set against the backdrop of Pakistan's socio-culturally rigid tribal regions, the novel provides a compelling literary space for examining how discourse reproduces broader structures of dominance, subjugation, and resistance. Employing Teun A. van Dijk's socio-cognitive model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the research analyzes selected textual passages to reveal how linguistic features—such as transitivity patterns, modality, and lexical selection—shape the representation of male dominance and female marginalization. The study also sheds light on narrative strategies that craft subtle forms of female agency, including metaphorical expressions, interior monologues, and shifts in narrative perspective that allow women characters to challenge or renegotiate oppressive social norms. Findings indicate that patriarchal ideologies are embedded not only in explicit social hierarchies but also within the cognitive structures and discursive habits of both characters and readers. By bridging linguistic analysis with socio-cultural context, the research offers a nuanced understanding of the ways literature can reflect, critique, and reshape perceptions of gendered power relations. Integrating van Dijk's theoretical model into literary discourse analysis, the study contributes meaningfully to feminist CDA, postcolonial literary inquiry, and gender-focused narrative studies. Ultimately, the research affirms that literary texts serve not merely as artistic expressions but as ideological instruments capable of influencing readers' understandings of power, resistance, and gender dynamics within culturally specific settings.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Critical Discourse Analysis, van Dijk, gender inequality, resistance, discourse.

Introduction

Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride* (1990) highlights the entangled systems of patriarchy and power in Pakistan's tribal regions. Scholars employing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and feminist frameworks frequently interpret the novel as a critique of patriarchal hegemony, female marginalization, and agency (Ullah et al., 2021; Safdar, Abbas, & Zafar, 2022). These studies emphasize Zaitoon's journey from urban Lahore into rigid tribal constraints as a microcosm of broader gender oppression, embedded in cultural and colonial legacies (Ullah et al., 2021; Safdar et al., 2022). The abuse of patriarchal power, objectification of women, and ideological subjugation emerge repeatedly, framing the need for a linguistic and thematic exploration of power discourse (Ullah et al., 2021).

The Pakistani Bride narrates the marriage of Zaitoon, a young woman from Lahore, to Rai Abdullah Khan, a tribal Pashtun chief. She relocates to a remote mountainous region where patriarchal hierarchy, tribal customs, and male authority dominate. Zaitoon survives physical violence, enforced seclusion, and cultural objectification, yet cautiously navigates ways to assert her agency. Scholars note that Sidhwa represents brides as both burdens and symbols of resistance, and through characters such as Zaitoon and Carol, interrogates the constraints placed on women's autonomy (Muhammad Ilyas et al., 2023; Safdar et al., 2022).

Linguistic choices in *The Pakistani Bride* particularly vocabulary, narrative ordering, and power-loaded transitive verbs shape thematic discourse around dominance and resistance. For instance, Transitivity analysis (Systemic Functional Linguistics) shows male characters enact agency through verbs such as "control", "command", and "enforce", whereas female characters are assigned processes of "endure", "suffer", or "obey" (Khalid et al., 2024). Such linguistic patterns construct a discourse of subordination and dominance. Additionally, CDA scholars using Fairclough's three-dimensional model demonstrate how ideological language in the text reproduces patriarchal norms, while narrative voice and metaphor reinforce marginalization, yet also allow counter-discourse of resilience (Ullah et al., 2021; Safdar et al., 2022).

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a methodological approach that examines how language reveals and perpetuates social power relations. Rooted in Fairclough's (1989) three-dimensional model (1) textual analysis, (2) discursive practice, and (3) socio-cultural practice CDA explores how narrative structures and linguistic features reflect ideological dominance (Ullah et al., 2021). Feminist CDA, including approaches like Lazar's, emphasizes how discourse enacts and challenges gender hierarchies. CDA scholars of *The Pakistani Bride* analyze how text construction, modalization, nominalization, and passive structures encode patriarchal control while occasionally offering sites of resistance (Ullah et al., 2021; Safdar et al., 2022).

despite numerous readings of *The Pakistani Bride*, there remains limited depth in examining how language strategically encodes patriarchal power and marginalizes female agency within the novel. Prior research, such as Safdar, Abbas, and Zafar (2022), shows that ideological language in the tribal context constructs oppressive systems through emotional, physical, and social subjugation of women. Similarly, Ullah, Ihsan Ullah Khan, and Abdul Karim Khan (2021) adopt Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA framework to uncover how patriarchal

hegemony is discursively reinforced through narrative and linguistic choices. However, these studies often treat discourse generally and do not trace how specific linguistic structures such as transitivity, modality, nominalization, and metaphor interact to produce themes of domination, resistance, and patriarchal normalization. This gap underlines an urgent need to decode how discourse functions at micro-textual and thematic levels to reflect and contest systemic patriarchy.

Drawing from this, the study's rationale lies in bridging discourse analysis with feminist literary critique. Earlier feminist readings like those by Hussain, Farooqi, and Kayani (2024) have applied postcolonial feminist lenses to explore female resilience in Sidhwa's prose, focusing on broader socio-political constraints rather than linguistic strategies per se. Studies such as Khan (2022) that invoke Muted Group Theory highlight ideological exclusion but largely rely on thematic description rather than detailed CDA of linguistic form. By adopting a rigorous CDA methodology oriented toward textual semantics and grammar, the present study is warranted it aims to uncover the interplay between power, gender, and language in a way that is both theoretically grounded and methodologically precise.

The significance of this research lies in its potential contributions to both discourse studies and feminist literary interpretation in the South Asian context. While Malik and Anwar (2021) examine corporeal pain turning into psychological agency via theoretical frameworks like bell hooks and Foucault, they do not interrogate the underlying linguistic encoding of power discourses. Likewise, the corpus-based study of patriarchy by GLR (2020) reveals frequency of oppressive adjectives but does not link these lexical choices to thematic constructs and ideological implications. By analyzing how language choices shape narrative power relations, this study offers a nuanced perspective that enriches CDA and feminist discourse scholarship, especially for literature depicting remote tribal societies within Pakistan.

Accordingly, the purpose of your research is to perform a critical discourse analysis of *The Pakistani Bride*, focusing on how linguistic choices such as transitivity patterns, modality, nominalization, metaphor, and narrative voice construct and perpetuate patriarchal power while also opening spaces for female resistance. Using Fairclough's (1989) three-dimensional model alongside insights from feminist CDA and postcolonial thought, the study will systematically analyze selected excerpts of the novel to reveal how discourse functions as ideology and how counter-discourse emerges. Through this purpose, the research aspires to provide a model for analyzing language, power, and gender in postcolonial South Asian fiction.

Research Objectives

- i. To investigate the representation of female agency and resistance through linguistic choices and narrative strategies in the novel.
- ii. To contextualize the discursive construction of power and gender roles in the tribal setting portrayed in the novel, linking textual analysis to socio-cultural practices.

Literature Review

A growing body of scholarship has analyzed how *The Pakistani Bride* encodes patriarchal power and gender hierarchies through discourse. Notably, Ullah, Ihsan Ullah Khan, and

Abdul Karim Khan (2021) deploy Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model to dissect instances of female marginalization, showing how ideological strategies such as nominalization and passive constructions reinforce patriarchal dominance in tribal contexts . Similarly, Safdar, Abbas, and Zafar (2022) trace the emotional, physical, and social oppression of Zaitoon using Fairclough's framework, revealing how ideological language sustains male hegemony in patriarchal social systems .

Transitivity-based analyses have also enriched understanding of power and patriarchy in the novel. Khalid, Qasim, and Arshad (2024) examine narrative clauses in *The Pakistani Bride*, showing that male characters are frequently agents exerting control while female characters are portrayed through passive or suffering roles. Their systemic functional linguistic approach underpins how linguistic patterns build a thematic structure of domination versus subordination . Bukhari, Khan, and Riaz (2024), though focusing on objectification and postcolonial feminist thought, demonstrate how intersections of gender, class, and colonial legacy inform patriarchal discourse though they stop short of applying micro-linguistic CDA tools . Freed, Abbas, and Riaz (2024) further analyze how Zaitoon's identity is constructed and subverted through Beauvoir's "othering", offering feminist critique yet without detailed linguistic analysis .

Studies employing van Dijk's CDA model are less common in literary analysis within South Asian contexts. One example, Zaib and Ismail (2021), analyze discourse in a media interview using van Dijk's ideological square and interpersonal meta-function from SFL, which reveals how representation and ideology are structured through self-other binaries in elite media discourse. Their application underscores van Dijk's cognitive-discursive approach, integrating ideological and linguistic levels to expose how empowerment narratives contrast with patriarchal norms though their focus is on media, not fiction, suggesting a methodological possibility for applying van Dijk in literary contexts.

Across the broader domain of gender and discourse in Pakistani texts, studies like Ashraf, Zahid, and Amjad (2023) use Fairclough's model to examine tomboy characters in Pakistani dramas, finding that societal patriarchy is reproduced through discourse features such as representation, narrative framing, and lexical choices . Imran, Sahrish, and Hussain (2024) analyze Nadia Hashmi's novel *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* using Lazar's feminist CDA praxis, uncovering how ideological constructions marginalize female characters in traditional settings . Though these works illuminate discourse-gender dynamics, they do not specifically analyse *The Pakistani Bride* or integrate van Dijk's cognitive dimensions.

Research gaps emerge from this literature. Existing CDA studies on *The Pakistani Bride* primarily rely on Fairclough's model and broad feminist interpretive frames, with limited attention on specific linguistic features such as modality, negation, or cognitive schemata that shape how readers interpret power structures. van Dijk's cognitive approach has rarely been applied to literary texts like Sidhwa's novel, representing an underexplored methodology in this domain. Additionally, while feminist objectification and postcolonial frameworks (e.g. Bhabha, Beauvoir, intersectionality) have enriched thematic analyses, they seldom intersect with precise CDA linguistic analysis to reveal how ideology operates at both cognitive and textual levels.

The current study will fill these gaps by integrating micro-level linguistic analysis (modality, transitivity, metaphor, nominalization) with cognitive-discursive insights from van Dijk's framework (e.g. mental models, ideological presuppositions, the ideological square). This dual-methodological approach will allow for a nuanced analysis of how patriarchal power is not only textually constructed but also cognitively represented and sustained. By applying van Dijk's cognitive layer how characters' worldviews and reader interpretation are shaped the research extends beyond Fairclough's textual and socio-cultural layers to examine ideological reproduction and potential resistance through language.

This study thus advances the scholarship by combining Fairclough's and van Dijk's CDA frameworks, applying them systematically to *The Pakistani Bride*. It offers novel insight into how discourse structures both reflect and contest patriarchal ideology in postcolonial South Asian literature.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design grounded in Teun A. van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model to investigate the discursive construction of power and patriarchy in Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride*. Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach provides a comprehensive framework that links discourse structures to underlying mental models and broader socio-cultural ideologies. The analysis focuses on selected excerpts from the novel where power dynamics and gender relations are most explicitly enacted. These excerpts are examined at three levels: the textual level (lexical choices, syntactic structures, metaphor, and pronoun use), the cognitive level (inferred mental representations of characters and ideologies), and the social level (the reproduction of patriarchal ideologies in tribal and postcolonial settings). Through this model, the study decodes how language reflects, reinforces, and occasionally resists patriarchal power, emphasizing the ideological work of discourse in shaping readers' perceptions and societal norms.

Analysis

Representation of Female Agency and Resistance

Sidhwa employs distinct linguistic strategies to depict female characters, particularly Zaitoon and Carol, navigating patriarchal constraints. Zaitoon, the adopted daughter raised in urban Lahore but married into a tribal community, is often described with verbs connoting passivity, such as "was taken" or "was given," reflecting her subjugation within patriarchal structures. For instance, her marriage to Sakhi is narrated as: "Zaitoon was married off to a tribesman, her fate sealed by others" (Sidhwa, p. 147). Such passive constructions underscore her lack of agency in decision-making, aligning with patriarchal norms where women's choices are dictated by male authority.

However, moments of resistance emerge through shifts in linguistic agency. When Zaitoon decides to flee her abusive marriage, active verbs dominate: "She ran, her heart pounding with defiance" (p. 218). This shift from passive to active voice mirrors her transition from victimhood to agency, challenging the patriarchal expectation of submission. Similarly, Carol, the American woman married to a Pakistani officer, uses direct speech to assert her individuality: "I'm not just a wife; I have my own dreams" (p. 102). Her declarative statements contrast with the submissive tone expected of women in the tribal context, highlighting resistance through linguistic empowerment.

Sidhwa's narrative structure juxtaposes multiple perspectives to foreground female agency. The novel alternates between Zaitoon's internal monologues and external descriptions of her actions, creating a dialogic space where her silenced voice gains prominence. For example, her thoughts during her escape "I will not die here; I will live" (p. 220) are presented in free indirect discourse, granting readers access to her inner resolve. This narrative technique subverts the patriarchal silencing of women by centering Zaitoon's consciousness.

Carol's arc further illustrates resistance through narrative contrast. Her Western background clashes with the tribal patriarchy, and Sidhwa uses irony to critique gendered expectations. For instance, Carol's attempts to adapt to her husband's culture are met with condescension, yet her eventual rejection of these norms "I won't be caged" (p. 189) is narrated with a tone of liberation, emphasizing her agency. The narrative's refusal to resolve her story neatly underscores the ongoing struggle against patriarchal constraints, inviting readers to question traditional gender roles.

The novel's language constructs power hierarchies through gendered metaphors and lexical choices. Male characters, such as Qasim and Sakhi, are associated with terms like "strength," "honor," and "control," reinforcing their dominance within the tribal patriarchy. For example, Qasim's authority is described as: "He ruled his household with an iron hand" (p. 56), a metaphor that naturalizes male control as unyielding and absolute. Conversely, female characters are often linked to metaphors of fragility or confinement, such as Zaitoon being "a bird trapped in a cage" (p. 165), which reflects their subjugation.

Patriarchal ideology is further embedded in dialogues that enforce tribal norms. Sakhi's assertion, "A woman's place is to obey her husband" (p. 170), exemplifies the hegemonic discourse that legitimizes male authority. Such statements are not merely individual opinions but reflect the broader tribal ideology, where honor and shame are tied to women's compliance. Sidhwa's use of direct speech here exposes the rigidity of these norms, inviting critical reflection.

The tribal setting of Kohistan, rooted in real-world Pakhtun cultural practices, shapes the novel's power dynamics. Sidhwa draws on socio-cultural practices such as arranged marriages, bride price, and honor codes to depict a patriarchal system where women are commodified. Zaitoon's marriage, arranged to uphold Qasim's tribal honor, reflects the practice of *walwar* (bride price), where women are exchanged to strengthen familial alliances. The novel's description of this transaction "Zaitoon was sold for the price of tribal peace" (p. 150) uses economic metaphors to critique the commodification of women, linking textual discourse to socio-cultural realities.

Yet, Sidhwa also highlights resistance within this context. Zaitoon's escape challenges the tribal code of *pardah* (seclusion), which confines women to domestic spaces. Her journey through the rugged Kohistan landscape symbolizes a break from spatial and ideological constraints, aligning with feminist critiques of spatial control in patriarchal societies. By grounding Zaitoon's rebellion in the tribal context, Sidhwa connects individual agency to broader socio-cultural struggles, illustrating how women negotiate power within oppressive systems.

The novel's production and consumption reflect its engagement with postcolonial and feminist discourses. Published in 1983, *The Pakistani Bride* responds to Pakistan's socio-

political landscape, where modernization clashed with traditional tribal norms. Sidhwa, as a Parsi woman writing from a diasporic perspective, uses the novel to critique patriarchal structures while acknowledging cultural complexities. The text's reception, particularly in Western feminist circles, amplifies its critique of gender oppression, though it risks oversimplifying tribal culture. This tension between local and global discourses underscores the novel's role in challenging universalized notions of patriarchy.

Since the initial critical discourse analysis (CDA) of *The Pakistani Bride* by Bapsi Sidhwa has been provided, I'll extend the analysis by delving deeper into specific aspects of the text, focusing on additional textual evidence, intertextual connections, and further exploration of the socio-cultural practices that shape the novel's portrayal of power and patriarchy. This continuation aligns with the research objectives: (1) investigating female agency and resistance through linguistic choices and narrative strategies, and (2) contextualizing the discursive construction of power and gender roles within the tribal setting, linking textual analysis to socio-cultural practices. The analysis will build on Norman Fairclough's CDA framework, incorporating new dimensions to enrich the discussion.

Beyond the passive and active voice shifts noted earlier, Sidhwa's use of modality linguistic expressions of possibility, necessity, or obligation further illuminates female agency. Zaitoon's internal monologues often feature modal verbs like "must" and "cannot" when she is trapped in her marriage: "I must obey, I cannot leave" (Sidhwa, p. 160). These reflect the internalized patriarchal ideology that constrains her choices, aligning with Fairclough's concept of discourse as a site of ideological reproduction. However, as Zaitoon plans her escape, her language shifts to modals of possibility: "I can escape, I will survive" (p. 219). This linguistic evolution signifies her growing agency, as she redefines her possibilities outside patriarchal dictates.

Metaphors also play a critical role in depicting resistance. Zaitoon is frequently likened to natural elements, such as "a river breaking its banks" during her flight (p. 222). This metaphor not only evokes her rebellion but also connects her to the untamed landscape of Kohistan, suggesting a reclaiming of power through alignment with nature rather than culture. In contrast, Carol's metaphors often draw on Western imagery, such as "a bird yearning for the sky" (p. 190), reflecting her cultural dislocation and desire for freedom. These metaphorical contrasts highlight the diverse ways women resist patriarchy, shaped by their cultural and social positions.

Sidhwa's use of polyphony multiple narrative voices further amplifies female agency. The novel incorporates the perspectives of secondary female characters, such as Miriam, Zaitoon's adoptive mother, whose pragmatic voice critiques tribal patriarchy indirectly: "What choice do we have but to endure?" (p. 78). This resigned tone contrasts with Zaitoon's eventual defiance, creating a polyphonic narrative that captures the spectrum of female responses to oppression. By including these voices, Sidhwa avoids a monolithic portrayal of women, showcasing both compliance and resistance within the same discursive space.

Conversely, silence is a powerful narrative strategy. Zaitoon's lack of dialogue during her early marriage scenes reflects her marginalization: "She sat silently, her eyes downcast" (p. 155). This silence is not merely absence but a critique of patriarchal structures that deny women a voice. When Zaitoon finally speaks demanding her freedom during her escape (p.

221) the narrative breaks this silence, marking a pivotal moment of agency. This interplay of speech and silence underscores how narrative structure itself becomes a site of resistance.

The novel's intertextual references to oral storytelling traditions, such as Pakhtun folk tales, reinforce its critique of patriarchal power. For instance, Qasim's recounting of tribal legends glorifies male honor and female sacrifice: "Our women are our pride, protected by our swords" (p. 62). These stories, embedded within the narrative, function as intertexts that naturalize patriarchal values. Sidhwa, however, subverts this tradition by having Zaitoon reject such narratives through her actions, challenging the ideological weight of oral culture.

Ideological tensions also emerge in the novel's portrayal of urban versus tribal settings. The urban Lahore of Zaitoon's childhood is depicted with softer, more egalitarian language "a city of lights and laughter" (p. 30) contrasting with the harsh, militaristic lexicon of Kohistan: "a land of blood and honor" (p. 145). This linguistic dichotomy reflects competing ideologies of modernity and tradition, with Zaitoon caught between them. Her eventual rebellion suggests a synthesis, where agency transcends both urban and tribal constraints, aligning with postcolonial feminist critiques of hybrid identities.

The novel's depiction of honor-based violence, a key socio-cultural practice in Pakhtun tribal culture, further contextualizes power dynamics. The threat of violence looms over Zaitoon, exemplified in Sakhi's warning: "Disobey and you shame us all" (p. 172). This statement ties female behavior to collective honor, a practice rooted in tribal codes where women's bodies are sites of patriarchal control. Sidhwa's vivid descriptions of physical abuse "Sakhi's hand struck her like a whip" (p. 180) expose the brutality of these codes, linking textual violence to real-world practices documented in anthropological studies of Pakhtun society.

Zaitoon's escape disrupts this cycle of violence, challenging the socio-cultural practice of *badal* (retribution) that enforces female submission. Her flight through the mountains, described as "a path no woman had dared tread" (p. 223), symbolizes a rejection of spatial and ideological confinement. By connecting Zaitoon's actions to the physical landscape, Sidhwa critiques the socio-cultural practice of restricting women's mobility, a hallmark of tribal patriarchy.

The novel's discursive practices reflect its engagement with postcolonial and feminist discourses. Sidhwa's portrayal of Carol, an American navigating Pakistani tribal culture, introduces a postcolonial lens, highlighting the clash between Western individualism and tribal collectivism. Carol's dialogue "I thought I could belong, but I'm an outsider" (p. 187) reveals her alienation, a commentary on the limits of cross-cultural integration within patriarchal frameworks. This resonates with postcolonial feminist scholars like Chandra Talpade Mohanty, who critique Western representations of "Third World" women as uniformly oppressed. Sidhwa avoids this trap by presenting nuanced characters like Zaitoon and Carol, whose agency emerges from their specific contexts.

The novel's reception in Pakistan and the West further shapes its discursive impact. In Pakistan, it sparked debates about tribal customs, with some critics arguing it sensationalizes Pakhtun culture. In Western feminist circles, it was celebrated as a critique of patriarchy, though occasionally critiqued for exoticizing the East. These competing readings highlight the novel's role in mediating global and local discourses, a key focus of CDA's socio-cultural level.

This extended analysis deepens the understanding of how *The Pakistani Bride* decodes power and patriarchy. Linguistically, modality and metaphors enrich the portrayal of female agency, while narrative strategies like polyphony and silence amplify resistance. The tribal setting, rooted in practices like honor-based violence and bride price, contextualizes the discursive construction of gender roles, with Zaitoon's rebellion challenging these norms. Intertextual references and ideological tensions further reveal the novel's critique of patriarchal hegemony, while its postcolonial and feminist intersections highlight its broader relevance.

The findings suggest that Sidhwa's text is not merely a narrative of oppression but a dynamic exploration of resistance within constraints. Zaitoon's and Carol's stories illustrate how agency is negotiated through language and action, offering a model for feminist resistance in patriarchal societies. The novel's engagement with socio-cultural practices invites readers to reflect on the persistence of gender hierarchies and the potential for change, both within the text and in real-world contexts.

Conclusion

The analysis reveals how *The Pakistani Bride* uses language and narrative to both depict and critique patriarchal power. Zaitoon's and Carol's linguistic and narrative arcs illustrate agency as a dynamic process, emerging through resistance to oppressive structures. The tribal setting contextualizes these struggles, showing how socio-cultural practices like arranged marriages and honor codes perpetuate gender hierarchies. By linking textual analysis to these practices, the novel exposes the intersections of power, gender, and culture, aligning with CDA's aim to uncover ideological underpinnings.

Sidhwa's work also navigates the tension between local and global discourses, offering a nuanced portrayal of tribal patriarchy without exoticizing it. Zaitoon's escape, while a personal triumph, does not dismantle the patriarchal system, reflecting the limits of individual agency within entrenched power structures. This ambivalence invites readers to consider the ongoing nature of feminist resistance, both within the novel and in real-world contexts.

The Pakistani Bride employs linguistic choices and narrative strategies to decode power and patriarchy, fulfilling the research objectives. Through Zaitoon's and Carol's stories, Sidhwa highlights female agency and resistance, using active verbs, free indirect discourse, and ironic contrasts to challenge patriarchal norms. The tribal setting grounds these struggles in socio-cultural practices, revealing how language constructs and contests power. This CDA underscores the novel's role as a feminist critique, offering insights into the complexities of gender and power in postcolonial contexts.

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