

Discursive Constructions of Power and Class in Mohsin Hamid's *Moth Smoke*: A Critical Discourse Analysis Approach

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Abstract

Mohsin Hamid's *"Moth Smoke"* (2000) is a compelling exploration of social inequality and power dynamics in Pakistan, portraying the stark divide between the elite and the marginalized. This study employs Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework to examine how language, narrative structure, and character interactions construct and perpetuate class distinctions in the novel. By analyzing textual excerpts, discourse practices, and social practices, the research reveals how Hamid critiques systemic inequities and ideological biases embedded in Pakistani society. The findings highlight the novel's role in challenging dominant power structures and offer insights into the interplay of language, ideology, and social hierarchy. This study contributes to literary CDA by demonstrating how fiction can serve as a tool for social critique, urging readers to reflect on their roles in power-laden discourses.

Keywords: Class distinction, Critical Discourse Analysis, *Moth Smoke*, Power dynamics, Social Inequality

Introduction

Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides a robust framework for analyzing the intersection of language, power, and social inequality in literary texts. CDA exposes hidden ideologies in discourse, enabling a critical examination of how texts reflect and reinforce societal hierarchies (Fairclough, 2001; Van Dijk, 1993). This study applies CDA to *Moth Smoke*, a novel that vividly depicts the socioeconomic disparities in Pakistan through the lives of its characters. *Moth Smoke* follows Daru, a disenfranchised banker, as he navigates a society divided into the "air-conditioned" elite and the "sweating" masses. The novel's nonlinear narrative and unreliable narration underscore the fragility of social hierarchies, making it an ideal text for CDA.

While existing research has explored themes of class and power in *Moth Smoke* (e.g., Malik, 2017; Jay, 2005), this study addresses a gap by systematically applying Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model—textual analysis, discourse practice, and social practice—to uncover how language sustains inequities. Key terms such as "discourse" (language as social practice), "ideology" (dominant belief systems), and "power" (control over resources and narratives) are central to this analysis. By interrogating these concepts, the study aims to illuminate how *Moth Smoke* critiques and resists oppressive structures.

This research aims to show how Fairclough's CDA method throws light on the complex interactions between language, social hierarchy, and power subtleties while offering critical insights into how class distinctions are represented in *Moth Smoke*. This study helps the readers better understand how socioeconomic stratification is portrayed in the novel and also advances larger conversations about how literary works both reflect and influence readers' views of social injustice.

The novel represents an extreme socioeconomic gulf between the two social classes of Pakistan, highlighting the severe difference between the elites and the deprived people. Through the protagonist's terrifying descent into the shadowy worlds of drug abuse and illegitimate activity, the story of the novel represents the immense difficulties and hardships faced by those on the margins of society. The novel is a painful reflection on the strict reality observed by individuals on the margin of society, providing a truthful and realistic picture of their problems, desires, and aims as the protagonist contends with internal conflict and external pressures. Malik (2017) includes that *Moth Smoke* exposes the social prejudices of Pakistani society. The higher, or air-conditioned group in society enjoys their exceptional luxury, while the lower, or non-air-conditioned group makes every effort to acquire the same privilege that their opposites enjoy. Although the first group is significantly smaller, its members are generally referred to as elites and have much more power over their immediate surroundings. The second group, which is great in number, sweating, and includes poor people, does not believe in privileged treatment but does insistently struggle for it. The core idea of the novel is social inequality and class distinction, which refers to a group of individuals who are different from one another due to reasons like occupied land, means of production, and wealth discrimination. These variances between these classes lead to pressures, problems, and struggles.

Literature Review

The literature review is organized thematically to align with the study's focus:

1. Class and Power in *Moth Smoke*: Scholars like Malik (2017) and Faiz et al. (2022) analyze the novel's portrayal of elitism and marginalization, emphasizing its critique of consumer culture and corruption.
2. CDA in Literary Studies: Fairclough (2001) and Van Dijk (1993) establish CDA as a tool for unmasking power relations in texts. Recent studies (e.g., Wodak, 2020) extend this to postcolonial literature.
3. Socio-Political Commentary in South Asian Fiction: Jay (2005) contrasts *Moth Smoke* with other South Asian novels, noting its unique focus on globalization's economic impacts. Ecological critiques (e.g., Luke, 1997) are contextualized to show how environmental degradation parallels social inequities in the novel.

The novel portrays a civilization that is alienated from the natural world. It portrays a civilization in which there has been a disruption in the dynamic balance between culture and nature, which defines an individual's bodily and mental well-being (Wolanski, 1999). People are thus neither mentally or spiritually gratified nor in good physical health. They are economically weak, culturally ill, and lack a strong political and social conscience. Honari (1999) argues that "being happy means being physically sound, mentally intact, spiritually happy, socially active, politically aware, economically productive, and culturally responsible," they are ill, which also makes them sad (as quoted in Yaqoob, 2010). The story of the novel highlights that a society constructed on the strength of money and the luxury part produces a consumer culture bereaved of natural values and characterized by elitism, pride, and artificiality. One of the main causes of environmental abuse is a system that views man as apart from the natural world (Luke, 1997).

Methodology

Fairclough's three-tier CDA model guides the analysis:

1. Textual Analysis: Close reading of linguistic features (e.g., metaphors, irony) in two key passages.
2. Discourse Practice: Examination of how these texts are produced and consumed, including Hamid's narrative strategies.
3. Social Practice: Exploration of the passages' implications for Pakistani society's power structures.

Passages were selected for their thematic relevance and discursive richness. Ethical considerations include avoiding misrepresentation of the novel's context. Limitations include the focus on only two excerpts, though they are representative of broader patterns.

Critical discourse analysis focuses on revealing hidden ideologies, power dynamics, and social structures projected in language use. It is an appropriate approach for investigative power relations and social inequalities in discourse (text), particularly in the case of Hamid's *Moth Smoke*. CDA offers a framework for analyzing how language creates, preserves, and reproduces uneven power relations in society. Fairclough, (2001) puts that CDA serves as both theory and method, engaging in transdisciplinary interchange with other theories and methods. Accordingly, a new method of evaluating semiosis within broader analyses of social processes is made possible by the understanding of semiosis as a component or "moment" of material social processes (Fairclough, 2001).

When analyzing *Moth Smoke*, CDA is used to analyze the discursive techniques that various characters use in their communications as well as the narrative voice's use of the story to illustrate social injustices and hierarchy. This approach enables a thorough examination of the discourse (text) that represents power dynamics in the novel. CDA investigates how language usage reveals larger sociopolitical situations. In *Moth Smoke*, this includes analyzing how language supports or contradicts the power systems that are in place in Pakistani culture.

CDA focuses on revealing hidden meanings of discourse making it an appropriate method for examining the social injustices and power dynamics shown in works of literature. With the use of this analytical framework, the research seeks to illuminate the socio-political significance of the text and reveal underlying ideologies.

Fairclough's CDA framework is used to analyze *Moth Smoke* to look at the power dynamics and social injustices constructed in the text. Discourse analysis is a central notion from Fairclough's methodology that is relevant to this study. It Examines how language shapes and reflects power relations in society. In *Moth Smoke*, this includes analyzing how narrative descriptions and character speech contribute to the representation of societal injustices and power dynamics.

Overall, the research aims to dissect language usage in "*Moth Smoke*" using Fairclough's CDA framework to highlight underlying power dynamics and social injustices that are present in the book. It seeks to provide a thorough grasp of how language both reflects and affects the unequal power relations shown in literature by including ideas like discourse analysis, intertextuality, and ideology criticism in the analytical method.

Text Analysis

Text- I

"There are two social classes in Pakistan," Professor Superb said to his unsuspecting audience, gripping the podium with both hands as he spoke. "The first group, large and sweaty, contains those referred to as the masses. The second group is much smaller, but its members exercise vastly greater control over their immediate environment and are collectively termed the elite. The distinction between members of these two groups is made on the basis of control of an important resource: air-conditioning." (*Moth Smoke*, 2000)

Discussion

This passage offers a provoking analysis of Pakistani society's social and economic disparities. The passage provides a clear dissection between the 'masses' and the 'elite class,' which is consistent with a usual theory of social stratification. Resource control, which forms the foundation of this paradigm, is one of the central factors influencing social power.

The way that Professor Superb humorously describes "sweaty" and "air-conditioning" constructs the significant inequality in access to and living situations. As a symbol of the capability to control an individual's surroundings and escape the harsh reality faced by the majority, air conditioning tends to symbolize luxury and power. We may understand the relevance and ability of the excerpt to start significant discussions about inequality more completely if we engage with the historical background, study the underlying message, and relate it to larger global issues on inequality.

Analysis

Fairclough (1989, 2006) emphasizes that language and communication are used as instruments to support and maintain power relations, rather than just being a neutral medium. The excerpt discursively constructs this point by presenting how the 'elite' possess air conditioning, representing their control and dominance over their "immediate environment.

The text (discourse) criticizes Pakistan's system of social stratification, which rejects the 'masses' access to the means and luxurious lifestyles enjoyed by the 'elite.' This constructs how language creates and maintains social injustices. The professor's argument supports an ideological framework by trivializing socioeconomic inequalities. The notion that the

"masses" are "unsuspecting" and unaware of the extreme inequality in living circumstances emphasizes how discourse constructs and normalizes power differences.

Textual Analysis

The excerpt constructs and represents the complex character of social reality. The passage discursively constructs the nuanced social reality. It points out the problems of simplified terms like "elite," "masses," and "control." The author highlights the inherent prejudices of these terminologies and the potential harm they might do by personifying them. These labels cloud our perception of the complex web of social interactions because they are laden with historical baggage and power dynamics.

The passage is a humorous tale that is meant for the readers. It is possible to study the strategic consequences of this genre and style selection. Using humor constructs a critical message more open and less dangerous to the prevailing ideology while engaging the audience.

Word Selection and Meaning

In the context of social inequality, terms like "masses," "elite," and "control" have a lot of weight. These terms support the established power structures and assist in the creation of new social categories.

The term "masses" suggests a psychological picture of nameless, faceless individuals; a group without any intellect or identity. The term "elite" is just as deceiving. It constructs an image of a privileged few who are born into indulgence and have fixed authority due to their inheritance. The gulf that arises between "them" and "us" raises suspicion, resentment, and the delusion that change is unattainable.

Then word "control" reverberates through the passages of history, hinting at dominance and power relationships. It is easy to consider the powerful as puppeteers who control the helpless, leaving them with little choice but to submit to manipulation.

Figurative Language

A main element of the textual study is the metaphor of air conditioning serving as a social distinction marker. By revealing fundamental power dynamics, the symbolic depiction of air conditioning goes beyond the literal to show a deeper knowledge of societal inequity. The text producer uses the personification approach in the words "elite", "masses", and "control". He gives the words life making them look like they are muttering secrets and having "a dangerous history" and "weight heavy on the tongue." This rhetorical strategy stimulates the reader to doubt these phrases' supposed impartiality by evoking feelings of restlessness and doubt surrounding them.

Social Practices and Discourse

Fairclough (1992a) highlights the relationship between social practices and discourse. The extract discursively projects how the discourse around air conditioning both reproduces and maintains the social practice of the elites controlling luxury and resources. This emphasizes how social settings and power relations shape and be molded by language. Focusing on the discussion about air conditioning, the preferred extract suggests a concrete illustration of this theoretical framework in use. It mainly shows how our language and writing about air conditioning, together with the presumptions imbedded in that conversation, help to approve and support the control exercised by elite groups. This control covers the physical features of luxury, including comfortable living quarters and status symbols, as well as the control over access to priceless resources, including energy and the financial advantages connected with the air conditioning businesses.

Contextual Interpretation

The study takes Pakistan's background into account to fully understand the social practice. The excerpt's meaning and its implications for social transformation are constructed by the historical and cultural context of the state. Understanding Pakistan's complex historical and cultural background can help better comprehend the social dynamics in the selected excerpt and how they relate to social transformation. The passage serves as a helpful reminder of how language shapes social reality and the importance of action and critical dialogue in addressing social injustices.

CDA aims to represent how discourse can be used to disrupt conventional hierarchies of power and support social change. The excerpt discursively presents the irrationality and unfairness of socioeconomic inequities, which arouses critical thought and leads to action to resolve these problems.

This passage is a useful illustration of how to use Fairclough's CDA method for text analysis. We may learn more about how language functions to uphold and even challenge social inequities by concentrating on power dynamics, textual elements, and the connection between discourse and social activity.

Text 2

"And if they should think about the rest of the people, the great uncooled, and become uneasy as they lie under their blankets in the middle of the summer, there is always prayer, five times a day, which they hope will gain them admittance to an air-conditioned heaven, or at the very least, a long, cool drink during a fiery day in hell." (Moth Smoke, 2000)

I. Textual Analysis

The words "uncooled," "uneasy," "blankets," "prayer," "air-conditioned," "heaven," "fiery," and "hell" are used in the passage to discursively construct the difference between the poor "uncooled" and the rich (the cooled).

There are many clauses in this sentence, along with a conditional phrase that reads, "And if they should think..." This expression strengthens the difference between the rich and the poor and offers a feeling of theoretical reasoning. The passage constructs the falseness of those who are at luxury while others suffer by using irony. This irony is further highlighted by the contrast between "prayer" and "air-conditioned heaven".

2. Discourse Practice

The passage is concerned with societal injustices. The producer of the text discursively represents the huge gulf between wealth and poverty and uses irony and humor to draw attention to them. Hamid discursive represents this gulf, probably through discourse and storytelling techniques. He is not simply presenting the issue but also aiming to draw the attention of the readers. This passage highlights a key theme in the text, which is the stark disparity between wealth and poverty, and its impact on society.

Context

The use of the phrases "summer" and "fiery day in hell" discursively represents a situation in which despair and social injustice play a major role.

The text producer highlights the privilege and hypocrisy of people who enjoy luxury while others are suffering. Similarly, they question the conventional theological doctrines that support this kind of injustice.

3. Social Practice

The passage constructs two separate identities: the "uncooled" (poor and suffering) and the "cooled" (rich and privileged). Depending on their views and social standing, it puts the reader in a situation where they may identify with either group.

The passage attempts to increase awareness of the negative impacts of inequality and social injustice. It pushes readers to consider the social structures that support inequalities in opportunity and comfort as well as their privilege critically. It highlights the hypocrisy of the affluent who pray for consolation while disregarding the suffering of the impoverished via the use of sarcasm and irony. It challenges the societal structures that give rise to these disparities and exhorts readers to fight for a more egalitarian society. This is an obvious illustration of how Fairclough's CDA may assist us in comprehending the processes through which language is used to create and maintain social power structures.

Findings

The following are the main findings:

I. Story Organization and Unreliable Narration

The novel's fractured, nonlinear narrative reflects the fragility of societal hierarchies, erasing the reader's faith in dominant viewpoints.

Daru's unreliable first-person narrative reveals his prejudices and self-justifications, which reflect the distortions of the elite. The courtroom framing mechanism serves as a metaphor for society's judgment, wherein power rather than justice mediates reality.

2. Social Interaction Power Relations

Interactions between characters like Daru and Manucci or Daru and Murad Badshah show how economic difference determines dominance and subordination. Although even intimacy is contaminated by power disparities, the sexual connection between Daru and Mumtaz subverts yet finally supports class hierarchies.

Through the skillful use of language, Hamid exposes and questions social inequalities. Using Fairclough's CDA paradigm, this study shows how Hamid's language and narrative strategies support the work's core themes of power, inequality, and moral degradation. The findings reveal that literature is a strong instrument for social system analysis as language simultaneously promotes authority and offers chances for dissent. Future research might follow this method across additional postcolonial works or examine present class concerns in Pakistani literature.

Conclusion

Moth Smoke is a striking fictional enquiry of social injustice and power relations in a stratified society. The novel constructs how language choices, story structure, and character relations discursively create and support class differences using a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspective. Fairclough's three-dimensional approach has been very helpful in revealing the multifaceted means by which language reproduces more general systematic inequality and maintains social order. The way the novel presents people from all socioeconomic backgrounds exposes how power functions via language, therefore protecting supremacy and forming identities. Hamid constructs the systems supporting power and marginalization, whether through conversation, internal monologues, or the unreliable narrative. Examining these textual techniques helps this research show how literature may be vital for challenging social systems.

Moth Smoke encounters the deep-rooted social inequalities and asks readers to consider their roles in power-laden discourses. The results of this study support the relevance of CDA in literary studies by helping to clarify the interchange of language, ideology, and social inequality. Future studies can investigate how modern fiction still interacts with these ongoing concerns or broaden this study to include postcolonial works. Through such intellectual activities, literature is a fundamental instrument for revealing and contesting the processes of power and exclusion in society.

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