



Exploring and evaluating discursive power: A critical discourse analysis of Khaled Hosseini's *A thousand splendid suns*

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Abstract

The current study focuses on the exploration and evaluation of discursive power in Khalid Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* based on Fairclough's concept of power with a feminist critical discourse studies perspective. In "Language and Power" Fairclough argued that power and ideologies are not linked to particular groups of people or linguistic forms or permanent attribute of a person or social group but ideology is linked to discourse and other moments of social practices. He also emphasized that orders of discourse vary in different social cultures. In this process all social orders of discourse are put together as a hidden effect of power. Power is discursively exercised and challenged at the agency and institutional levels. Linguistic and interactional structures and strategies serve as powerful means for power. The novel under study contains a number of discourses which indicate that power is exercised and resisted for multiple ends, viz. interests, persecution, social identity, social status, image and supremacy. It is a discursive site for the novelist who has revealed how patriarchal power is discursively exercised and challenged by characters in dialogues. As power is highly context-sensitive, and the analysis of context in relation to text is the fundamental as well as integral part of critical discourse analysis. Therefore, discursive power in the novel under study is critically analyzed in the socio-political and cultural context of Afghanistan where the Afghans, especially women and children, are subject to power abuse. It is a projection of a male dominated and suppressive society.

Keywords: discourse, power, persecution, feminist critical discourse studies, socio-political and cultural context

Introduction

A majority of studies in critical discourse analysis focus exclusively on one aspect of the language/power relation, language as a context for power and domination. Fairclough (1994:50) ^[14] argues that power is "implicit within everyday social practices" and that it is predominant "at every level in all domains of life". His idea of 'power behind discourse' looks at power dynamics between the two speakers themselves, and how their current situation affects their power asymmetry, or difference. The notion of power is further elaborated by Fairclough, (1989) ^[14] who explores various dimensions of the relations of power and language focusing on two major aspects of the power/ language relation: power in discourse and power behind discourse. Power in discourse is concerned with discourse as a place where relations of power are actually exercised and enacted. Power in or behind discourse, in Fairclough's view, is unstable as it may be won (exercised) or lost by a person or group at any stage in or through social struggle. He argues that "power in discourse is to do with powerful participants controlling and constraining the contributions of non-powerful participants" (Fairclough 1989, p. 46) ^[14]. He distinguishes three main types of constraints: constraints on contents (what one says or does); on relations (the social relations of the participants/people in discourse) and on subjects (subject positions of the participants/people).

Power behind discourse focuses on how certain types of discourse are shaped and constituted by relations of power. In

other words, power behind discourse means that the whole social order of discourse is put together and held together as a hidden effect of power. Fairclough (1989, p. 55) ^[14] argues that "The idea of 'power behind discourse' is that the whole social order of discourse is put together and held together as a hidden effect of power." In other words, there are relations of power behind discourse. He argues that "in terms of 'power in discourse', discourse is the site of power struggles, and, in terms of 'power behind discourse,' it is the stake in power struggles – for control over orders of discourse is a powerful mechanism for sustaining power" (Fairclough 1989, p. 74) ^[14]. Power behind discourse is a matter of "the conventions of discourse types constraining participants' contributions" (Fairclough 1989, p. 74) ^[14] in terms of the contents, relations and subjects. Like power in discourse, power behind discourse puts constraints on the speaker's or writer's "contents of discourse and on the social relationships enacted in it and the social identities *subjects+ enacting them," (1989, p. 74) ^[14] but here these constraints generally may have long-term structural effects on the knowledge and beliefs, social relationships and social identities of an institution or society as well. Fairclough (1989) ^[14] presents a model for the analysis of discourse which is the most elaborate and worked – out in this respect. This is why it has been adopted in the context of the present study. It is capable of revealing strategies and devices of power in discourse. It is mainly concerned with discourse as a place where relations of power are realized and enacted, that is,

where participants are unequal. In other words, language is not a neutral channel. On the contrary, it is a tool for manipulation. Thus, unless otherwise specified, reference is to the (1989) model. He offers the following features which are devices of manipulation and control: Instructions / Evaluating the other participant's verbal behavior / Questions / Interruption / Explicitness / Controlling topics / Reformulation / Repetition. Fairclough openly and unequivocally acknowledges his own political position and social values. For him, an awareness of unequal relations of power in society involving hierarchical dimensions of domination and subordination, and a consciousness of “how language contributes to the domination of some people by others is the first step towards emancipation” (Fairclough, 1989:1) ^[14]. Fairclough is committed to the “emancipation of the oppressed” of the underprivileged, and of unequal and dominated groups and individuals in our society. In considering how CLA/CDA can contribute to struggles for social emancipation Fairclough convinces us that critical linguistic efforts should concentrate on those areas, discourses and texts where participants are most at social risk. Thus, not all areas of linguistic research, in his view, have equal social significance. The sites of inequality and domination are those that affect socially vulnerable lives, where opportunities and potentialities— in terms of class, race, gender, inequality, and injustice socially, mentally and physically challenged groupings, for example—are jeopardized.

The prime aim of this study is to explore and evaluate the interplay between discourse and power. So the discourse-oriented power can be explored and critically evaluated either in various forms of communication and interaction (e.g. conversation, dialogue, etc.) or other discursive constructions.

The relationship of Discourse and Power

Discourse and power are interconnected and interdependent in numerous ways which also rely on the kind of specific situation and context in which a particular kind of language/discourse is constructed as an interactive, communicative, representative, discursive and social tool/medium by the social actors (the participating subjects). Both language/discourse and power are highly context-sensitive and substantive phenomenon. There is a multitude of varied ways and means (or power bases/resources) that are utilized to exercise/maintain and resist/challenge power. Power exercise and/or resistance can be done through decisions, actions, force and weapons, but language/discourse is one among such ways that provides various linguistic and discursive resources for power exercise and resistance in different socio-political fields and institutions.

Fairclough *et al.* (2011) ^[8] explore and examine critically power in/through language/discourse in a variety of disciplinary, interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary discourses in the field of linguistics and social sciences. They are of the view that the relations of power are discursive in nature, and that power can be exercised, challenged, negotiated and reproduced in/through language/discourse. Foucault (1972, 1976/1978, 1980, 1984/86) ^[10, 11, 12, 13], the most influential and widely followed theorist, not only elaborated the terms ‘discourse’ and ‘power’ multi-dimensionally, but also demonstrated how they are productively interlinked in various socio-political structures and systems (or fields and institutions). As mentioned earlier, he links power with

knowledge and truth, but he argues that it is in discourse where power and knowledge are integrated. For him, discourse is both power container/carrier and an effect of power. Discourse is a contestable site of power struggle for the one who exercises or resists power. Discourse and power are socially constitutive and conditioned as discourse produces power and vice versa.

Farfan and Holzschleiter (2011) ^[9] have endeavored to expound the complex interrelationships between discourse and power theoretically and methodologically. Their focus is on the co-constitutive and dialectical relationship between power and discourse, and on the perception that discourse and power are not static phenomena, but dynamic and “ever changing constituents of social life in interactive, relational, contextual and constructivist ways” (2011, p. 139). Generally speaking, language and communication as fundamental discursive practices are regarded as the critical role-players “both in the perpetuation as well as the transformation of powerful discourses” (2011, p. 144). They argue that not all research traditions (methodologies) may necessarily and directly use the terms like “discourse” and “power.” Discourse analysis and critical linguistics, according to them; attempt to bring together the micro and the macro levels in the study of the interplay between power and discourse. They argue “As power is discourse and discourse is the ultimate expression of power, so discourse analysis is confronted with the multimodalities of its expression in, for example, grammatical, illocutionary and complex communicative forces and specific encounters” (Farfan & Holzschleiter, 2011, p. 150) ^[9].

Language (discourse) is a powerful and meaningful medium of socio-communicative interaction, and relations of power do manifest in verbal interaction implicitly and/or explicitly, directly and/or indirectly. According to Watts (1991), power is inherent to verbal interaction, and that verbal interaction is a place where power is distributed, negotiated and exercised alongside other interrelated concepts of “self-image,” “status” and “dominance” (1991, p. 54). In summary, power is exercised on the basis of higher status in Watts’s view.

Van Dijk (2008) studies power not only in monologues and dialogues, but also in discourses as interaction, communication and social practice. His emphasis is on the forms of discursive reproduction of elite power, especially on power abuse, that is on domination, causing social inequality and injustice. Discursive reproduction of power (abuse) involves not only cognitive, but also historical dimension/background and cultural dimension/background. In his view, power is enacted, expressed, exercised and distributed in a number of ways in different discourse genres. Discursive enactment of power in such discourse types is persuasive as the more powerful persuade the less powerful to think and act with obedience and obligation by giving political, economic, social and/or moral reasons as well as by selective release or constraint of information. As there are various levels/dimensions of discourse and power, so power relations are enacted, expressed, distributed, signaled, concealed or legitimized at various levels of discourse between discourse participants or groups. It is first enacted at the pragmatic level through restricted access or “by the control of speech acts, such as commands, formal accusations, indictments, acquittals, or other institutional speech acts” (2008, p. 39). Second, the control or domination of turn allocation, strategies of self-presentation or the control of any other level of spontaneously occurring talk or

formal dialogue is use/abuse of discursive power. Third, it is the more powerful speakers in classrooms or courtrooms who select and control the type of discourse genre. Fourth, usually topics in other kinds of conversation are controlled by the principles of the communicative or interactive situation, but it is normally the more powerful speakers who control and/or evaluate the initiation, variation or change of topics, and often control and/or evaluate style and rhetoric as well.

Method of Analysis

Fairclough's socio-cultural approach

The central signifier in CDA has been the concept of power (passim). According to Van Dijk, 'the real ethical problem we need to focus on in critical discourse research is ... the illegitimate exercise of power, power abuse or domination (Van Dijk, 1997: 24; original emphasis)^[19]. This perspective is echoed by Fairclough, for whom the 'critical analysis of discourse is nothing if it is not a resource for struggle against domination' (Fairclough, 2001: 216)^[15]. Power as domination is understood as an oppressive force in society; one which is calculated to subjugate opposition to the mechanisms by which the status quo is maintained in the interests of power holders.

Fairclough's system of discourse analysis has three dimensions, since discourse is seen simultaneously as: (i) a text (spoken or written, including visual images), (ii) a discourse practice production, consumption and distribution of the text, and (iii) a socio cultural practice. Subsequently, Fairclough provides a three-dimensional framework for the analysis of text and discourse: (a) the linguistic description of the formal properties of the text; (b) the interpretation of the relationship between the discursive processes/interaction and the text, and finally, (c) the explanation of the relationship between discourse and social and cultural reality.

According to Fairclough, there are some underlying assumptions behind certain selections of discourse. These assumptions are never value-free and innocent; rather they are ideologically driven and motivated. Therefore, discursive practices may have ideological effects since they can produce and reproduce unequal power relations between social classes, gender groups and ethnic and cultural majorities and minorities through the ways they represent things and position people. From this point of view, Fairclough (1989)^[14] argues that "the exercise of power, in modern society, is increasingly achieved through ideology". Drawing on the discourse-power-ideology relationship, he introduces the concept of hegemony which he defines as "a way of theorizing change in relation to the evolution of power relations which allows a particular focus upon discursive change, but at the same time a way of seeing it as contributing to and being shaped by wider processes of change" (Fairclough, 1993:92 cited in Jahedi *et al*, 2014:30). For him, "the political concept of „hegemony“ can be usefully employed in analyzing orders of discourse" (Fairclough, 2001, p.124)^[15]. He then states that "an order of discourse is a network of social practices in its language aspect. The elements of orders of discourse are not things like nouns and sentences (elements of linguistic structures), but discourses, genres and styles" (Fairclough, 2003, p.24)^[16]. He further contends that orders of discourse are not static, but may change over time. Changing the power relations in a social interaction determines these changes. Fairclough then asserts

that: How discourses are structured in a given order of discourse, and how structuring changes over time, are determined by changing relationships of power at the level of the social institution or of the society. Power at these levels includes the capacity to control orders of discourse; one aspect of such control is ideological-ensuring that orders of discourse are ideologically harmonized internally or (at the societal level) with each other (Fairclough, 2001, p.25)^[15].

The selected discourses on power in the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, are analyzed in relation to its textual, co-textual, intertextual, socio-political, cultural and historical contexts from critical discourse analytical perspective. The perspective of feminist critical discourse studies (Lazar, 2007; Lehtonen, 2007)^[25] is applied for the interpretation and analysis of the aforementioned issue in the selected passages of the novel under study. Critical discourse studies perspective does not entertain the notion of language as an objective and non-neutral phenomenon and product. The prism of this perspective perceives language as subjective, relational and plural in nature. This perspective also questions the stability of linguistic meaning and the transparent representation of reality – reality as discursively constructed. Moreover, feminist critical discourse studies critique the prevailing social structures of gender and power in gendered discourses under which women are oppressed, subordinated and marginalized discursively and socially. This perspective is analytically active and political in empowering the less powerful or powerless women as a group or class.

A Thousand Splendid Suns

Hosseini's novel, included in this study, is *A Thousand Splendid Suns* was published in 2007. It is a story related to when the tragic history and stories of the suppressed and suffering Afghan women whose feministic voices were either silenced or marginalized in the patriarchal society of Afghanistan. Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* narrates the story of two women, Mariam and Laila in Afghan society which stands with conventional norms and does not give space to its females. Throughout the story, global and regional powers struggle to bring chaos and destruction to both women's lives, and to the country of Afghanistan. These girls, with their different life experiences, are destined to be wives of Rasheed. Rasheed, a traditionalist and tribal man, represents traditionalism and tribalism under the umbrella of patriarchy in which Mariam's and Laila's freedom and respect are at his disposal. He is the embodiment of patriarchal and tribal character. He favors the Taliban and their Islamic agenda. Jalil and his family of three wives and almost nine children are Farsi-speaking Tajik like Nana (Mariam's mother) and Mariam. Similarly, Laila and her family are Farsi-speaking Tajik. On the other hand, Rasheed is a Pashtun. Tariq, Laila's lover, and his family are also Pashtuns. The novelist has shown the effects of patriarchal forces on women in Afghanistan by narrating the domestic issues of violence and discrimination between Rasheed and his two wives. It is a story of identity crisis, women oppression and marginalization at the domestic and social levels of patriarchy in the Russian and Taliban eras. Mariam is the illegitimate daughter of a wealthy man named Jalil. Mariam and her mother, Nana, who had been one of Jalil's servants, are kept in a remote and separate house called Kolba. Mariam is taken as a bastard which is

somewhat socially an unacknowledged/unrecognized identity and a symbol of shame in Afghanistan. Therefore, they are deprived of their due rights and privileges like the ones given to Jalil's other legitimate wives and children domestically and socially. After Nana's suicide, Mariam at the age of 15 is forcibly compelled to marry Rasheed, a Kabul shoemaker, who is 30 years older than Mariam. When it is learnt that Mariam is barren, he seeks to find faults with her and reasons for beating her. Life becomes terrible for her. She is tormented by Rasheed for 19 years. She is forced to wear burqa, and she bears Rasheed's abuses and agony at the time of the Russian regime and genocidal civil war in Afghanistan. Accidentally, Laila, a 15-year-old war orphan, is married to Rasheed in 1992. Laila is fertile to have produced two children for Rasheed. Mariam, who was already in anguish and trouble, initially becomes hostile to Laila. Later on, they become close friends, and learn how to fight against the evils of the day, and their strong friendship proves to be challenging for Rasheed. They share a lot of hardships and anguish. In eras of war and Taliban rule in Afghanistan, these two women resist and challenge patriarchy by helping each other during Rasheed's power abuse and violence. Mariam and Laila are subjected to Rasheed's power at the domestic level and to the Taliban's power at the social level. They are so oppressed by Rasheed that they escape their home with the hope to find peace, but they are arrested and sent back by the patrolling Mujahideen. Rasheed's fault-finding nature and violence are endured by them. After some time, Tariq, Laila's lover, visits their home, and Laila comes to know about Rasheed's hoax with her. Rasheed turns violent after knowing about Tariq's visit to his home. Rasheed had duped Laila, but Laila had also hidden the secret of Aziza's illegitimate birth from Rasheed who was already aware of this secret. Snubbing and beating had become a normal routine at Rasheed's home. On one occasion when Mariam observes that Rasheed is close to killing Laila by suffocating her, she kills Rasheed to save Laila. Mariam confesses her crime before the Taliban, and she is executed by them. Laila and Tariq meet again and start a new life, but Mariam's memories are still fresh in their minds.

Analysis

The data selected from the novel is large. However, a couple of passages as sample are analyzed below by applying CDA as research method and the perspective of feminist critical discourse studies.

Discourse on Power Abuse in Domestic Context

The passage under study is a discursive construction and representation of domestic violence in which Rasheed abuses patriarchal power to oppress his wives. He uses male supremacy to oppress Mariam and Laila. Text 1 and 2.

Text 1

Then she heard the front door opening, and Rasheed was back in the living room.

"Get up," he said. "Come here. Get up."

He snatched her hand, opened it, and dropped a handful of pebbles into it.

"Put these in your mouth."

"What?"

"Put. These. In your mouth."

"Stop it, Rasheed, I'm—"

His powerful hands clasped her jaw. He shoved two fingers into her mouth and tried it open, then forced the cold, hard pebbles into it. Mariam struggled against him, mumbling, but he kept pushing the pebbles in, his upper lip curled in a sneer.

"Now chew," he said.

Through the mouthful of grit and pebbles, Mariam mumbled a plea. Tears were leaking out of the corners of her eyes.

"CHEW!" he bellowed. A gust of his smoky breath slammed against her face.

Mariam chewed. Something in the back of her mouth cracked.

"Good," Rasheed said. His cheeks were quivering. "Now you know what your rice tastes like. Now you know what you've given me in this marriage. Bad food, and nothing else."

Then he was gone, leaving Mariam to spit out pebbles, blood, and the fragments of two broken molars. (Hosseini, 2007, p. 110-111)

Analysis and Interpretation

The passage under study is a discourse on power abuse in domestic violence. Rasheed is abusing his patriarchal power over Mariam, a subordinated and oppressed woman, and lame excuses are sought out to do so. Rice not cooked perfectly according to Rasheed is sought as an excuse abusing power in gender violence. Previously, Rasheed left the house in anger after throwing a rice-filled plate away from the table, and then returns in anger. Rasheed enters the living room by opening the front door. As soon as he enters, he issues commands to Mariam as "Get up" in sentence, and "Come here". The language of power is accompanied by his physical force when he forcibly opens her mouth and drops "a handful of pebbles into it". He abuses power when he commands her to put the pebbles into her mouth. Mariam astonishingly reacts and asks him what he is saying. The expression in sentence is repeated emphatically in three different sentences to demonstrate his furious tone. Mariam urges him to stop forcing her, but her statement is interrupted as Rasheed applies force to clasp her jaw, her incomplete utterance is indicated as a long dash in sentence. This interruption is one of the ways of controlling the contributions of Mariam, and this interruption is one of the ways to exercise power in discourse (see Fairclough, 1989 for further details) ^[14]. He uses physical or "actional power" when his "powerful hands clasped her jaw", and when he roughly pushes "two fingers into her mouth" prying it open, and forces "the cold, hard pebbles into it".

Mariam's struggle against him, her mumbling and how he keeps pushing the pebbles into her mouth indicating that he was abusing power ("actional power") despite Mariam's resistance. Moreover, the word "sneer" also indicates his merciless smile. Once the pebbles are in, he commands her to chew. Mariam "mumbled a plea" with her mouth full of "grit and pebbles", and tears overflowed from "the corners of her eyes". Despite Mariam's pitiable plea, Rasheed angrily roared to chew as the capitalized expression "CHEW!" indicates. The discourse-producer has manipulated the capitalized expression as a discursive strategy to express Rasheed's bellowing. Rasheed was a smoker, and a "gust of his smoky breath slammed against her face". Mariam had no option, but to chew, and this chewing caused the cracking of something "in the back of her mouth". Rasheed appreciates the way she chewed, and her "cheeks were

quivering”. Rasheed punished her on account of bad cooking, he might have taken her bad cooking of rice as an excuse to beat her. After the punishment, he tells her that the taste of the rice for him was the same as that of the pebbles. He also complains that his marriage with her has given him nothing except bad food. After his exit, Mariam spat “out pebbles, blood, and the fragments of two broken molars”.

Text 2

The passage under study is a discursive construction and representation of domestic violence in which Rasheed abuses patriarchal power to oppress his second wife, Laila.

“You try this again and I will find you. I swear on the Prophet’s name that I will find you. And, when I do, there isn’t a court in this godforsaken country that will hold me accountable for what I will do. To Mariam first, then to her, and you last. I’ll make you watch. You understand me? *I’ll make you watch.*” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 290-291)

Analysis and Interpretation

In the passage under study Rasheed abuses the patriarchal power over his second wife, Laila. Previously, Rasheed had mercilessly beaten Mariam and Laila as they had tried to run away from Rasheed but unfortunately their attempt was a failure. The brutality Laila and Mariam experience when they are forced to return back to Rasheed is indicative of the violent, sexist culture in which they live. Rasheed's violence reveals his attitude toward the women: they are his property, to treat as well or as poorly as he wishes. By locking both of them up and depriving them of food, water, and sunlight, he demonstrates his complete control over their fates. His power over them, coupled with the anti-women laws of Kabul, make it impossible for the women to escape. There is no one they can trust but each other. Submission to these rules is their only means of survival.

In the above passage, Rasheed clearly threatens of the consequences of trying to escape in the future. He utters that if Laila tries to escape he will find her. In the next sentence, he swears upon the Prophet (PBUH) to strengthen his threat and reaffirm that he will find her. Further he openly declares that he will not be held accountable for any kind of punishment he will decide for her. He threatens that he will punish them one by one in front of Laila, first Mariam, and then Aziza. He says that he will make her watch the punishment given to Mariam and Aziza before punishing her. Rasheed’s threat is written in italics to stress on its intensity.

The analyzed passage indicates power abuse in terms of imposing one’s own will over the other despite the other’s resistance (see Weber, 1978 for more details), and in terms of controlling the contributions (behaviors/actions) of the target speaker. The target speaker’s behavior and action are controlled not only through interruption, but also through commands/warnings as discursive strategies (see also Fairclough, 1989 for further details) ^[14]. Rasheed is also abusing his physical power accompanied by his language of power to impose his own will over Mariam. Therefore, this power may also be called as “coercive power” and as “actional power” (see Van Dijk, 2001; Wodak & Meyer, 2009 for more details). It is manifest from the analysis of the text that women, like Mariam, are treated as servants and subordinates by traditionalist Pashtuns like Rasheed who are strongly supported

by their association and affiliation with the male-dominant society to exercise power in greater quantities, and to control women under the rubric of culture-driven ideology (see Van Dijk, 2008 for more details). The researcher, as a feminist critical discourse scholar, challenges the prevailing gender “ideological structure that divides people into two classes, men and women, based on a hierarchical relation of domination and subordination, respectively” (Lazar, 2007, p. 146) ^[25]. He also challenges all traditional and current forms of gender asymmetry or sexism, including “exclusionary gate-keeping social practices, physical violence against women, and sexual harassment and denigration of women,” that cause oppression, deprivation, inequality, violence, powerlessness and restrictions for women (Lazar, 2007, p. 148) ^[25]. Woman’s position, status, identity, rights and privileges are to be acknowledged domestically and socially on equal grounds for peaceful gender relations in that territory of Afghanistan where these issues still exist.

Discourse on power exercise in male dominated society

The passage under study is the discursive construction and presentation of male supremacy. Patriarchy gives men the authority to impose their will on their female counterpart.

Text 3

“We need to legitimize this situation,” he said now, balancing the ashtray on his belly. His lips scrunched in playful pucker. “People will talk. It looks dishonorable, an unmarried young woman living here. It’s bad for my reputation. And hers. And yours, I might add.”..... “It’s not your decision. It’s hers and mine.” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 227-228)

Analysis and Interpretation

In this passage Rasheed is dictating his decision to Mariam about what is going to happen by using his power as a male. This passage foregrounds the power of a husband in the male dominated Afghan society where women are not allowed to decide or defend their rights. The text reveals that any discussion between the couple is one sided owing to male supremacy. In this text Rasheed informs Mariam about his intention of marrying Laila. When he says that we need to legitimize the situation, clearly indicating that the decision is already taken and it has to be legally fixed. The author exquisitely describes Rasheed’s body language to support the situation. Rasheed further says that it looks dishonorable that an unmarried young woman lives with them and it’s bad for their reputation. Finally he makes it very clear that Mariam has no right to interfere in his decision, the decision is Laila’s and his. Mariam has no say in the whole situation. Each society has a particular point of view towards the roles played by women and men and has specific expectation from them (Bell, McCarthy, & McNamara, 2006) ^[24]. These expectations depend on cultural, social, political, economic and religious factors (Bell, *et al.*, 2006) ^[24]. Customs, law, class, ethnic background, as well as prejudices of a particular society have a certain disposition towards women and men; and these issues construct particular attitudes and behaviors towards gender.

Discourse on power abuse in Taliban controlled Afghanistan Text 4

Crossing the street, she was spotted by the Taliban and riddled with questions— What is your name? Where are you going? Why are you alone? Where is your mahram?—before she was sent home. If she was lucky, she was given a tongue-lashing or a single kick to the rear, a shove in the back. Other times, she met with assortments of wooden clubs, fresh tree branches, short whips, slaps, often fists.

One day, a young Talib beat Laila with a radio antenna. When he was done, he gave a final whack to the back of her neck and said, “I see you again, I’ll beat you until your mother’s milk leaks out of your bones.” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 343)

Interpretation and Discussion

In the above text the narrator portrays the problems faced by Mariam while going to meet Aziza when Rasheed stops accompanying her. In the Taliban ruled Afghanistan it was forbidden for women to go out without mahram so Mariam had to suffer a lot whenever she was spotted by the Taliban. When caught she was interrogated by them before being sent home. She was scolded, kicked or shoved at the back. She had to undergo other sorts of punishments like beaten with wooden sticks, fresh tree branches, short whips, slaps and often fists. One day a young Taliban hit her with a radio antenna. She was hit at the back of her neck and given an ultimatum declaring the consequences if she was caught in the future. “I see you again, I’ll beat you until your mother’s milk leaks out of your bones,” this utterance indicates the treacherous nature and severity of the punishment.

Power, ideology and discourse are connected in social positions endowed with power relations and accordingly ideologies spread and cultivate. Fairclough (2000, p. 23) states that discourse can constitute, reproduce, and transform social relations of power and domination (power abuse). These are loosely presented as consisting of an alliance of governments, capitalists and general stakeholders in capital, who together constitute the dominant bloc within capitalist societies, and within global capitalism more generally (Fairclough, 1999, 2001; Wodak, 2001; Meyer, 2001). According to Van Dijk, ‘the real ethical problem we need to focus on in critical discourse research is ... the illegitimate exercise of power, which is power abuse or domination (Van Dijk, 1997: 24; original emphasis)^[19]. This perspective is echoed by Fairclough, for whom the ‘critical analysis of discourse is nothing if it is not a resource for struggle against domination’ (Fairclough, 2001: 216)^[15]. Power as domination is understood as an oppressive force in society; one which is calculated to subjugate opposition to the mechanisms by which the status quo is maintained in the interests of power holders. These are loosely presented as consisting of an alliance of governments, capitalists and general stake holders in capital, who together constitute, who together constitute the dominant bloc within capitalist societies, and within global capitalism more generally (Fairclough, 1999, 2001; Wodak, 2001; Meyer, 2001)^[15].

Discourse on power exercise and resistance between the same genders

The passage under study is a dialogue between Mariam and Laila in which power is challenged and exercised between the same genders. Mariam, having known that Laila is more privileged

than her as a subordinate to Laila, not only challenges Laila’s privileged position and status, but also exercises power over her to make her understand that she is not subordinate to her.

Text 5

“I won’t be your servant,” Mariam said. “I won’t.”

The girl flinched. “No. Of course not!”

“You may be the palace *malika* and me a *dehati*, but I won’t take orders from you. You can complain to him and he can slit my throat, but I won’t do it. Do you hear me? I won’t be your servant.”

“No! I don’t expect—”

“And if you think you can use your looks to get rid of me, you’re wrong. I was here first. I won’t be thrown out. I won’t have you cast me out.”

“It’s not what I want,” the girl said weakly.

“And I see your wounds are healed up now. So you can start doing your share of the work in this house—

“The girl was nodding quickly. Some of her tea spilled, but she didn’t notice. “Yes, that’s the other reason I came down, to thank you for taking care of me—”

“Well, I wouldn’t have,” Mariam snapped. “I wouldn’t have fed you and washed you and nursed you if I’d known you were going to turn around and steal my husband.”

“Steal—”

“I will still cook and wash the dishes. You will do the laundry and the sweeping. The rest we will alternate daily. And one more thing. I have no use for your company.) I don’t want it. What I want is to be alone. You will leave me be, and I will return the favor. That’s how we will get on. Those are the rules.”

When she was done speaking, her heart was hammering and her mouth felt parched. Mariam had never before spoken in this manner, had never stated her will so forcefully. It ought to have felt exhilarating, but the girl’s eyes had teared up and her face was drooping, and what satisfaction Mariam found from this outburst felt meager, somehow illicit.

She extended the shirts toward the girl.

“Put them in the almari, not the closet. He likes the whites in the top drawer, the rest in the middle, with the socks.”

The girl set the cup on the floor and put her hands out for the shirts, palm up. “I’m sorry about all of this,” she croaked.

“You should be,” Mariam said. “You should be sorry.” (Hosseini, 2007, pp. 238,-240)

Interpretation and Explanation

The passage under study is a discourse on power exercise/resistance between the same genders in which Mariam, Rasheed’s first wife, cannot tolerate her subordinate status in relation to the more privileged position and status of her rival, Laila. Mariam was mute in Rasheed’s previous and powerful speech because she could not resist his power exercise, and now she exercises power over Laila by challenging the supposed power and dominant status of Laila in the ongoing dialogue because she considers her position and status more dominant than Laila’s. Rasheed had previously assigned Mariam the duty of serving Laila, but Mariam challenges Laila’s identity and dominant status, and refuses to be her servant. Laila (“the girl”) reacts surprisingly at Mariam’s remark, and responds that Mariam should not be her servant. Mariam is furious and

intolerant of her own degraded position and subordinate status as a wife, and challenges Laila's gender identity and dominant status by arguing that she may be "the palace *malika*" and she herself may be "a *dehati*," but she will not accept her orders. She also ventures to say that Laila can "complain" to Rasheed, and that he can "slit" her "throat," but she will not take orders. The interrogative style is another way of exercising and challenging power. What was said in the beginning is repeated indicating that Mariam is not going to be her servant at any cost. Negation in the sentence indicates Laila's denial of what Mariam thinks, but the long dash in the sentence shows that Mariam has interrupted and disconnected Laila's turn of speech. This interruption signals Mariam's use of power in discourse as explained by Fairclough. Mariam is apprehended of her exclusion in and casting out from her house. That is why she challenges Laila by arguing that Laila is "wrong" to think that she can "get rid" of her by using her "looks." She reminds Laila of her first arrival and dominant position in that house by the expression "I was here first". She negates the possibility that she can be "thrown out", and also challenges Laila that she will not allow her to "cast" her out. Laila, in the next sentence, negates what Mariam perceives. Mariam distributes domestic work, and assigns Laila her "share of the work" in the house. Laila nods as a sign of agreement, and she explains that she had come down to thank her for taking care of her, but her turn is again interrupted by Mariam in this sentence as a sign of power exercise in discourse. It is the discourse-producer who gives voice to each character and more or less space to their voices in the ongoing dialogue. Following sentences indicate Mariam's regret at why she had looked after her who, after her recovery, became her rival in the house. The very word "steal" in the sentence stuns Laila who exclaims with wonder by the word "steal", but her turn is again interrupted by Mariam's speech.

However, these sentences, whether affirmative or negative, indicate Mariam's imposition of her own will over Laila as power in discourse (see Weber, 1978 for more details). Mariam's expression "Those are the rules" is indicative of Mariam's dominant position and status in this discourse as she enforces the rules to be obeyed by Laila. According to the discourse-producer, "Mariam had never before spoken in this manner," and "had never stated her will so forcefully". This sentence indicates that the more forcefully a person or group states or imposes his/her or their will, the more power in discourse (discursive power) he/she or they exercise. It indicates that Mariam is not moved by Laila's gloomy condition. The sentence "Put them in the almari, not the closet" is an imperative (order) in which Laila is asked to put the shirts in the almari. Order in discourse, according to Fairclough (1989)^[14], is another discursive strategy to be used for exercising power over the subordinate. Although Laila says sorry to Mariam, yet Mariam does not cool down, and uses discursive power by the repetition of "You should be" sorry. Looking at the text from feminist critical discourse studies perspective, it is arguable that Mariam's exercise or challenge of power is aimed at strengthening and stabilizing her position and status at Rasheed's home. It is pertinent to add that men and women struggle for establishing their social status in diverse ways, but this competition in relation to status also occurs within the members of the same gender category, i.e. men vs men, and women vs women (see Eckert, 1997 for further details)^[5].

Nevertheless, the text under study confirms Eckert's views that women are regarded as more status-conscious than men, and that "women are more status-bound than men" (Eckert, 1997, p. 217, italic in original)^[5]. Mariam fears of her exclusion and sense of deprivation because she had observed how Rasheed played politics over Laila's beautiful body as a source of her privileged position before Rasheed. Laila appeared dearer to Rasheed on sexual grounds, and Rasheed's sexist language caused power exercise/challenge as verbal fight between Mariam and Laila. Moreover, Mariam did not want herself to be subjected to Laila's power like the way "individuals are constituted as subjects in and through their subjection to power relations" (Allen, 2009, p. 299)^[1].

Conclusion

The analysis of the selected discourses on power in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* demonstrates that power was exercised and challenged between the Taliban and other Afghan civilians, especially women, between the individuals of more or less rival ethnic groups, and between opposite or same genders. Hosseini has attempted to show in his novel that the Taliban and the tribal and traditionalist Pashtuns like Rasheed are the real power abusers in the Afghan society. He has tried to challenge patriarchal systems/structures – tribal and traditionalist patriarchy in the semblance of Rasheed and religious patriarchy in the form of the Taliban. Afghan civilians, especially women suffered, and were oppressed within these two extremes of patriarchy. That is why he has resisted their peculiar patriarchal powers in a number of monologues and dialogues by manipulating discursive structures, devices, techniques and strategies in the novel.

The analysis of the novel further indicates that the Taliban exercised/abused their power over the Afghans in terms of enforcing their own will, religious ideology and ideological rules and principles (see Weber, 1978 for further details). They also exercised/abused power in terms of administering/monitoring and controlling the Afghan civilians' actions in social life (see Foucault, 1976/78, 1980, 1984/86 for more details)^[11, 12, 13], and in terms of controlling and constraining the participants'/characters' contents (what one says or does), relations (their social relations in discourse) and subjects (their subject positions) (see Fairclough, 1989 for further details)^[14]. However, they used "coercive power," (see Van Dijk, 2001 for more details) to implement the Islamic law which is non Islamic as such forceful imposition is neither a practice nor a part of Islam rather it is against the values of Islam to impose its law on the Afghan Muslims by force. The discourse-producer has discursively demonstrated in the *A Thousand Splendid Suns* that their power was abused in violence, punishment, killing of innocent people, massacre/carnage of the Hazara minority, destruction of the Buddha statues, explosion of girls' schools, ban on women's education and their independent movement outside their homes, and ban on the artistic and recreational activities.

Rasheed also exercised/abused patriarchal power over his wives in the same way as Taliban did. Rasheed's wives as feminine characters resisted and challenged Rasheed's patriarchal authority and power in a number of ways. Such a discursive resistance to power is a struggle for women's empowerment. Rasheed abused his patriarchal power by forcing his wives to live according to his will and wish. He considered them his property

and had total control on them. He always used violence, humiliated and disgraced his wives. He wanted them to be fully submissive and were exploited as workers and sex tools. Power was abused to achieve his desired goals and ends. The constructed power is an issue because it is abused against the opposite gender whose status, role and identity are endangered and unequally recognized. The thorough analysis of all the selected discourses on power in the novel under study sheds light on the notion of power including its exercise/abuse and resistance/challenge with the following findings:

Power is more or less dependent upon the socio-economic status, institutional role/rank and gender or ethnic identity of those who exercise or resist power. It also depends upon the quantity and quality of power resources – material, physical and symbolic resources including language. A powerful person or group may not always and necessarily exercise/abuse power in all contexts. Rarely, a weaker person or group may exercise or challenge power by using limited or restricted power resources. Power exercise/abuse or resistance/challenge is based on a multitude of reasons like for gaining material resources. However, the root cause of power exercise/abuse or resistance/challenge is difference—difference in language, race, caste, ideology, religion, culture, history, nationality, authority, socio-economic status, institutional role/rank, gender or ethnic identity and socio-political and economic interests and agenda (see Weiss & Wodak, 2003 for difference as one of the cause of power). The analysis of the selected discourses on power in the novel under study confirms many of the prime causes of power abuse or resistance mentioned above. Discourse is a powerful medium of and site of social struggle for power because it provides certain discursive devices, tactics, techniques, strategies, structures (syntactic, semantic and pragmatic structures, etc.) and speech acts to be manipulated by those who exercise or resist power for their own aims and objectives.

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