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FEMININE SEX ROLE AND GENDER MASCULINE ROLE IN *ONE HALF FROM THE EAST*: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to probe feminist concept of sex role and gender masculine gender role in Nadia Hashmi's novel One Half from the East from the perspective of feminist critical discourse analysis. This study also intends how gender roles are structured in discourse constructions to reinforce existing social realities, disseminating gender inequalities and discrimination. Addressing social issues such as socially constructed gender roles in the discourses of novel's major characters is an attempt to raise awareness and expose gender discrimination and inequities. The study is a qualitative exploration; therefore, passages have been taken from the discourses of major characters from the novel concerning gender roles. These selected passages were analysed textually through the lens of Lazar's (2005) feminist critical discourse analysis to reveal the gender discriminations through socially given gender roles to the main characters in the novel. The study found that Hashmi's novel, One Half From the East, discursively portrays the distinct gender roles ascribed to the major characters, with femininity and masculinity defined in relation to biological sex. These roles, firmly rooted in the Afghan sociocultural structure, are expressed through the discourses of the novel's central characters, highlighting the structural foundations of gendered expectations.

Keywords: FCDA, Gender inequalities, Discrimination , Discursively, Masculinity

1. Introduction

Critical discourse analysis is a form of discourse analysis that examine the text and talk to explore hidden ideologies, power relations and gender inequalities through language use. Feminist critical discourse analysis is comparatively a new form of discourse analysis in which many studies have been conducted recently to examine gender related issues in discourse structures. This research work intends to critically analyse the discourse structures of Nadia Hashmi's novel, *One Half From the East* to examine gender-related issues to crate social awareness and raise voice against these social constructed issues. Critical discourse analysis is used as a research tool to probe feminine sex role and masculine gender roles in the discourse structures of the novel. The study is conducted in the context of the *Bacha Posh* tradition which has been practised in Afghanistan for centuries. The *Bacha Posh* is an old custom in Afghanistan that has prevailed for many centuries. The tradition allows families without a son to dress one of their daughters as a boy to preserve the family's dignity, name, and honour. Afghan society, which is governed by male-dominant values and norms, disapproves of not having a son. The girls are not permitted to go out of the home alone or work in manual labour. A girl in this society is considered a burden. In the village, these *Bacha Posh* wear shalwar kameez; in the capital city, like Kabul, they wear jeans and shirts. They do many things, like going to the market with their mother to support and defend their little sisters. They become the guardian of the family when fathers are not at home.

1.1 Research Objectives

The following are the main objectives of the current study:

1. To explore gender ascription in relations to different genders in *One Half From the East*.
2. To investigate the causes and effects of socially fixed gender roles on the main characters in the novel *One Half From the East*.

1.2 Research Questions

The study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the traits of feminine sex roles and masculine gender roles portrayed in the discourse structures of *One Half From the East*?
2. How do the socially given roles affect the lives of major characters before and after they change from one gender to another?

2. Literature Review

Critical discourse analysis (henceforth, CDA) is an analytical approach to analyse text and talk in a social and political context. According to Wodak & Meyer (2015), CDA is mainly concerned with analysing transparent and opaque structures of power, dominance, and control as practised in language. Similarly, Richardson views CDA functions as both a theory and method to analyse institutes and individuals' language in different contexts. According to Fairclough (2012: 9), Critical discourse analysis takes the critical tradition of social analysis into language, and it mainly focuses on the discourse and its relationship with other social elements, i.e., power relations, institutions, ideologies, social identities, and so on. Van Dijk (2015) and (Gul et al., 2023) defines CDA as a kind of discourse analytical research that is mainly concerned with how social power abuse, inequality, and dominance are exercised, reproduced, and refrained by text and talk in a political and social context.

CDA is used as a research tool to unveil gender discrimination in discourse. The most apparent discrimination that takes place in discourse is gender identity. CDA practitioners identify and explore the implied discourse structure where gender has been portrayed socially, politically, and economically unequal and how gender identity representation has been structurally represented. Identity is "crucially, about conveying to one another what kind of people we are; which geographical, ethnic, social communities we belong to; where we stand in relation to ethical and moral questions; or where our loyalties are in political terms" (Zotzmann & O'Regan, 2016: 113). Identity constructions cannot be separated from power relations and ideology. Zotzmann & O'Regan (2016:114) argue that "As identity constructions are imbued with power relations and ideology," thus critical discourse analysis seems an appropriate tool and choice to explore identity constructions and its process.

CDA is mainly concerned with those linguistic structures where inequalities, injustices, and discriminations are enacted transparently. These inequalities are enacted repeatedly so that they do not appear as inequalities and injustices but are taken for granted. With a similar view, Lazar (2007) asserts that gender ideology is embodied with hegemony and often, it does not seem as dominant at all; instead, it appears mainly consensual and acceptable mainly to most people in the community. Zotzmann & O'Regan (2016) examine that CDA is different from other approaches. It is explicitly committed to a critique of those social practices that are problematic, and it tries to transform them for better problematic social practices. "CDA is not a discipline but a problem-oriented field with a specific transdisciplinary research program" (p.114).

According to Butler (1990) and (Afaq et al., 2023) bodies are gendered through continuous practices. In her famous publication *Gender Troubles* (1990), she sees gender as performativity. She means that bodies become gendered through consistent performance of gender. Thus, we can conclude that our bodies are gendered when we continuously perform a certain activity. For example, girls' bodies are trained in early childhood differently, while boys' bodies are trained

differently. It is this continuous performance that, in a later stage, they become male or female. Wienclaw (2011), Nasir et al.,2023 and Khan et al.,2025, differentiate between sex and gender as gender is the psychological, cultural, behavioural, and social characteristics of being male or female. Gender is defined by one's gender roles and gender identity. Sex, according to Wienclaw, is the biological side of being either a male or female. She adds that genetically, females are known for having two x chromosomes, and males are identified by having an X and a Y chromosome.

According to Hashmi (2016), *One Half From the East* sheds light on a distinctive cultural perspective on the roles which have been assigned to boys and girls, which cause gender identity, particularly in Afghan society. In her other review (2016) she says that we learn in school in early childhood that girls are made of beautiful things like sugar and spices while puppy dogs' tails and snips and snails constitute little boys. Her focus is that gender differences are supported and can be noted in almost every society. It is these cultural differences which addressed and portrayed so poignantly by Hashmi in her novel, *One Half From the East*. "Hashimi's tale is a heartbreaking treatment of the impact of powerlessness as experienced by those who do not have the freedom to control their own fate". This trauma has been depicted very vividly by Hashmi." Hashmi has written a pitch-perfect character in Obayda as she accepts the limitations of her life as a girl...then is awakened to what might have been when she experiences life as a boy."

3. Research Method

The current study follows a qualitative research paradigm to analyse the selected extracts from the novel *One Half From the East*. According to Wodak & Meyer (2009) and (Ishtiaq et al.,2022), Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a qualitative analytical approach for critically describing, interpreting and explaining the ways in which discourses construct, maintain, and legitimize social inequalities. This research descriptively analyses feminine sex role and masculine gender roles in Afghan sociocultural context. The analysis has been carried out under the framework of Lazar's (2005 &2007) model of FCDA. The sources of collection for the current study are primary in nature; the research collected words, phrases, and sentences from the selected novels.

Lazar's approach offers a better methodological procedure for feminist critical discourse analysis. Her approach is the extension of critical discourse analysis, but it explicitly addresses gender-related issues in conversation, speech, and talk. The current research also aims to uncover socially prescribed gender feminine sex role and gender masculine roles in the discourse structures of *One Half From the East*. Thus, her approach offers the tools to discover such imbalance in gender representation and socially and culturally given gender roles. Therefore, the research found the Lazar approach suitable to conduct this study. This approach to CDA provides five principles(praxis) that make it easy for a researcher to systematically analyse discourse by labelling words, phrases, and sentences and then analyse such linguistic structures accordingly.

4. Discussion

The subsequent analysis of the following passages is based on feminine sex roles and gender masculine roles in the discourse structures of the novel *One Half From the East* to probe the move from the feminine sex role to the masculine gender and vice versa. To peruse research questions of the current study,

sentences/extracts, and passages from the discourses of the main characters were selected and analysed to answer the research questions. Lazar's version of FCDA was taken as a theoretical consideration to analyse the discourse structures of the novel.

4.1 Interpretations and Explanations of the Selected Extracts

*i. "Make her not just a son, but the most precious son that ever lived. Take away her chores. Don't let her do anything that girls usually do. Tell her she's a boy with every bite of food you feed her, with every word you speak to her, with every pass you give her on her boyish troublemaking."
(Chapter2)*

Sentences 1, 2, and 3 in the above passage are in the imperative mode, but they carry the value of assertive sentences where the discourse producer Khala Aziza suggests her sister make one of her daughters into a son and assign her the role and duties of boys. The discourse producer Khala Aziza describes the importance of the son in Afghan society. She does so because of the existing social realities and cross-cultural practices in Afghan society. She suggests her sister make one of her daughters a son. Her discourse implies that it is we (the society) who decide to make a girl or boy, and it is we who give them different roles according to their accepted identities. In sentence 1, Khala Aziza advises her sister to make one of her daughters a son unpacks the socially and culturally bound practices in an Afghan society where sons are privileged over daughters. A family without a son is not considered a safe and protected family. Therefore, it needs a son to protect it. In the same vein, Khala Aziza advises her sister to make Rahima one of the finest sons who ever lived. The verb *makes*, which means to prepare or create something, shows the gender process. Thus, the making of boys and girls alludes to the difference between the two genders' ideological one.

Furthermore, Khala Aziza's discourse proposes that having sons at home brings happiness and satisfaction. By saying this, she excludes daughters as the source of happiness and satisfaction. She says, "*Take away her chores*". For the use of imperative mode in discourse exchange, see Fairclough's *Language and Power* (1989, 2001 & 2014) The sentence mode is imperative while it has the value of suggestion (speech act). Khala Aziza is trying to convince her sister to take action. The syntactic structure proposes that chores and errands are the socially and culturally given duties to boys and girls according to their culture. Chores are typically attributed to girls, and they are expected to learn them in their early lives, while errands, on the other hand, are socially linked with boys who are expected to perform them outside of their homes. The structure shows that the chores and errands are the constructions of social setup, not something that is imposed on girls naturally. So, it is inferred from the utterance of Khala Aziza that social identities are built and rebuilt by the dominant social actors of a social group. She adds '*Don't let her do anything that girls usually do*'. The mode of the sentence is negatively imperative while it possesses the value of a speech. Kala Aziza stresses her sister for not allowing her daughter to perform what girls act in their routine. Her words illustrate girls as objects or materials which are prepared in a factory. It appears from the discourse structure of Aziza that the roles and duties are assigned to boys and girls according to their sexes

by social groups, i.e., parents, peer groups, and social order. And then, these different roles and duties are recognised and verified by social and cultural norms. The social construction of gender and masculine and feminine gender roles can be tracked from the discourse of Khala Aziza when she asks Obayda's mother, *"Tell her she's a boy with every bite of food you feed her, with every word you speak to her"*. The syntactic structure reveals the making and remaking of boys and girls. The most significant and pivotal role is played by parents whose everyday instruction transforms them into what they become later in their lives. Gender processing is clearly illustrated in the utterance of Khala Aziz. The practice of gender process continues in the entire lives of boys and girls (for more detail see Lorber Paradoxes of Gender, 1994). We become what is taught to us. It is suggested by the discourse producer to her sister to Rahima as a boy whose original identity is a girl. She insists that Rahima can only become a boy if she is remembered by every moment of her mother who is a boy, not a girl. We can infer from the lexical items of Khala Aziza that gender is a socialised process. Society decides what to feed a boy and what to a girl. Boys are supposed to wear one kind of clothing while girls other kinds. Similarly, girls and boys are trained to talk in a particular manner. From the discourse of Aziza, it appears that gender roles are constructed in society. Their roles are assigned to them according to their genitals. Moreover, these roles are not natural but are given to them by parents and society.

ii. *You won't have to worry about tying your hair back. Remember last Friday, when you wanted to hang upside down from the branch of that old poplar tree in the park? How long have you been asking me to let you run with the boys when they chase each other through the streets? How many times have you asked to ride your cousin's bicycle? Today is the day I will tell you yes. Yes, yes, yes."* (Chapter 3)

The interaction between Obayda and her mother, extract 2, shows the gendering process. Obayda, who was previously a girl, asked to become a boy. Her role being a boy from a girl changed, and she adopted a new identity. The discourse producer attempts to convince and prepare her daughter for a new role. She says to her, *"You won't have to worry about tying your hair back"*. The mode of the sentence is declarative. The adverb not with a modal auxiliary verb will show the experiential value of the discourse producer regarding getting worried. The negative sentence indicates a different reality from the expectation of Obayda. Obayda needs not to worry about tying her hair back. The verb *worry* shows the concern of Rahima in the case of tying her hair. The expressive modality *won't* be used by the discourse producer to console her daughter by predicting the future time. Rahima's mother pictures Rahima's uneasiness with her hair. It means tying hair is a hectic routine for girls, and they are tired of it. Her mother makes her aware of her new role of being a boy; she will get relief from the social attribution attached to the female gender. *Remember last Friday, when you wanted to hang upside down from the branch of that old poplar tree in the park?* At the suggestion of her sister Khala Aziza, the discourse producer is trying to motivate and prepare her daughter for the new role. The mode of the sentence is declarative, but it carries the value of the question. Obayda is being prepared and motivated by her mother for the new role. Girls are not allowed for certain activities, like hanging from a branch of a tree or climbing up the trees.

Nevertheless, once she becomes a boy, she will be enjoying what she has missed

as a girl. Therefore, her mother is defining and preparing her for the target role. Her discourse implies that hanging upside from a branch of a tree is the quality of boys, and girls are not supposed to do so. What Obayda, being a girl, was not allowed to do, now being a boy, she does. The discourse framer justifies the distinct world of males and females through the discourse structure. The rhetorical question *how long have you been asking me to let you run with the boys when they chase each other through the streets? And how many times have you asked to ride your cousin's bicycle?*

The mode of the sentence is a grammatical question. The aim of the discourse producer is not to enquire about information from her daughter Obayda but to convince her to get a new social role as a boy. The question word *how long* is used to focus on the length of time. The verb *let* is used to talk about permission. Thus, her mother is stating the desire of Obayda, which she had made as a girl, to let her run with boys, but her mother had stopped her from running with boys. The same character Obayda who will become Obeyed, is allowed now to run with and play with boys. There seems no change in her body for this new social role. She only requires proper training in this journey.

Obayda's mother is explaining the well-defined rules for boys and girls. Under the prevailing social conventions, she creates a clear boundary between the world of boys and girls. Her utterances unpack the idea that girls and boys are different beings and cannot even play, talk, or live together. Thus, different worlds for boys and girls have been created according to their sexes. For example, riding a bicycle and running through the streets are linked with the male gender, contrary to female ones. Her mother allows her by saying *Today is the day I will tell you yes. Yes, yes, yes.* It is evident from the discourse structure that gender is a social construction rather than naturalness. What was previously attributed to Obayda's social identity is reversed now. What she could not do with a socially given status, she could do now. Her mother tells her to do what she was refraining from her, is now allowed to do the same, with the same sex, but different social position.

The discourse proposes that sex has no role in defining what a boy or a girl is supposed to do, but it is a society that explains the different roles of the male and female gender. Moreover, gender is a social process, and the construction of gender is ideological. Obayda's old identity as a girl is transformed into a new one as a boy. With this transformation, only her social position changes while her sex remains the same. Thus, it is concluded that the roles which are to be performed by boys and girls are not natural, but the production of social processes and social factors. Changing or challenging the social constraint may change the perception of these differences and may provide equal statuses to both genders.

iii. *There are big things for me to get used to. My name is the biggest. (I'm Obayd now—good-bye, Obayda.) I wake up in the morning thinking my hair is still there, but it isn't. (Chapter 4)*

The discourse above extract 3 from *One Half From the East* is about gender roles and their effects on the characters after moving from one gender role to another. The socially and culturally manufactured rules define the identity of a boy and a girl. The narrator, Obayda describes her transformation from a girl into a boy. Nothing changed. However, only her name, dress, and hair changed. Obayda discourse signifies the importance of carrying a boy's name and dress. With her new identity as a boy, she is supposed to get used to the things that

boys do. She says one of the most important things that brought a change in her identity is the use of her name; my name is the biggest. (*I'm Obayd now—good-bye, Obayda.*) She was previously called Obayda, but the following day when she woke up, only one letter from the back of her name was dropped, and she got a new identity. She is called Obayd now. The next thing she has to get used to is her hair. She has to carry short hair as boys do. The dress she will be wearing will be that of boys now. The discourse of Obayda indicates the social construction of gender and socially given gender with the change of name, hair, and dress, Obayda gets a new identity. It signifies that sex has nothing to do with different male and female roles. However, it is a society that shapes and reshapes gender roles according to sex. In a nutshell, Rahima is describing the process and journey from a feminine sex role to a masculine gender one and how the new gender role affected her life. The most important step in her transformation, according to her, is the change of her name.

iv. I could ask for a bicycle. Girls aren't supposed to ride bicycles, but a boy could. And I'm a boy. (Chapter 4)

The above sentence 4 is about the socially given roles to boys and girls. The discourse of the narrator shows the process and making of the gender and new role of Obayda after transformation. Obeyed narrates the changes in his life after taking a boy role. He says *I could ask for a bicycle*. The expressive modal verb *could* suggest the possibility of action. Obeyed utterances suggest that he is allowed to ask for asking a bicycle. On the other hand, his utterance entails that the settled norms and conventions exclude and restrict girls from this privilege. We can assume from her discourse that with her old identity being a girl, it was not possible for her to ride a bicycle, but now with the change of her identity, he is allowed to ride one. *Girls aren't really supposed to ride bicycles, but a boy could. And I'm a boy*. The adverb *really* before the verb *supposed* sheds light on the significance of what Obayda is saying about girls. The verb *supposed* in the sentence indicates that what she believes about girls and boys is based on the knowledge and the social condition that is practised and exists in her surroundings. With his new role, Obayda is happy that he is a boy and could ride a bicycle. He has got this privilege over girls. We can infer from the narrator's discourse that riding a bicycle is typically attributed to boys while girls are not allowed to ride a bicycle. The social constraints could not let Obayda ask for a bicycle due to her feminine identity, but by getting a boyish identity, she is allowed. The discourse postulates that these different roles are assigned to boys and girls according to their fluid gender identity, not fixed. This gender fluidity is evident in the character of Obayda, who had a girl identity and feminine role previously. While after transformation, the same character of the same sex gets a new identity and new role according to his socially constructed gender identity.

v. "One little letter fell off the back end of my name and my world changed. It's the smallest little letter, barely even a sound. Rahim . . . Rahima. See? If you say it fast enough, you could miss it. Who ever thought such a tiny little letter could make such a big difference?" "Rahim . . . a." It is a tiny sound at the end, but it makes a huge difference. (Chapter 10).

The narrator Rahima in the above extract 5, implicitly describes the process of becoming gender and the role that is assigned to her after her transformation. The utterance *"One little letter fell off the back end of my name, and my world*

changed” implicitly describes gender as a social phenomenon. Rahima had observed the different worlds of males and females, but she is experiencing for the first time that it takes only a tiny letterer to change a girl into a boy (see Vivian Burr 2008). The discourse maker tries to put forward the idea that the gap between two genders is a constructed one through the linguistic structure. Rahima, whose role was a feminine gender, has been transformed into a masculine one by her parents. After this change, the first thing she notices in her identity is a name change. She is amazed at how a little letter that has been dropped from the back of her name and her entire universe changed. Lexically woven propositions signify the importance of masculine gender in a social structure. Rahima finds that masculinity and femininity are determined by social attributes, such as name, dress, and doing boys’ things rather than by body parts. She receives different treatment not only from her parents and siblings but also from her cousins and the people outside with whom she interacted. She gets the special attention of everyone due to her new role as a boy. She is astonished at how a small letter brought big changes in her life. The differences between the two worlds are huge where the two different creatures exist; however, the journey from one world to another takes just a single letter ‘a’. The utterance “a.’ *it is a tiny sound at the end, but it makes a huge difference.*” She explicitly and implicitly welcomes this considerable difference in her life because just a small letter ‘a’ has revolutionized her life, and the role with a new name has earned good luck for her. She is different from her entire family now. She says, “*Who ever thought such a tiny little letter could make such a big difference?*” after the change in her name, her social status, identity, and role also changed. With a new role, she gets a sense of freedom, joy, and new responsibilities, those ones which boys get. But interestingly, she is happy and enjoys this new role and new identity being a boy. It is inferred from her utterance that the practice of gender inequalities and gender roles are usually verified and testified by social norms and values. The first thing Rahima needs to move from a feminine sex role to a masculine gender one is changing her name.

5. Conclusion

The study found that gender roles are ideologically created by social and cultural norms. It was observed that these different roles are given according to sexes to gender. Based on biological differences, distinct roles are given to boys and girls. When the major characters Obayda and Rahima in *One Half From the East* were transformed into boys, their roles also changed. It shows that the roles given to boys and girls are socially created. The discourse structures of central characters also revealed that changing the roles of characters from girls to boys and boys to girls also changed their discourse structures. For example, Rahima, being a girl, had different ways of speaking. Furthermore, the study examined that gender roles are the product of social hierarchy. Khala Aziz insists her sister makes one of her daughters a son and takes away all her chores and makes her one of your finest sons who can do what a daughter cannot. This shows that gender roles are manufactured in society. Different roles are assigned to boys and gender according to their sexes, and these roles develop as they grow in their lives. Finally, they become what their parents, peer groups, and social structures want them to become. The social and cultural practices in society create distinct gender roles from generation.

5.1 Recommendations for Future Research

The present study was conducted by applying Lazar's FCDA praxis. The study was an analytical journey to explore gender-related issues in *One Half From the East*. The future researcher can explore other aspects and discourses in the novel. *One Half From the East*. For example, good research can be conducted to make "a comprehensive analysis of the novel's portrayal of intersectionality, focusing on how gender, culture, and identity intersect and impact the characters' experiences". The discourses in the novel can be thematically analysed to: Identify and analyse the major themes related to gender, culture, and identity in the novel. This could include themes such as the construction of gender norms, the impact of cultural traditions, and the negotiation of individual and collective identities. Similarly, future researchers can investigate the historical and socio-political contexts in which the story is set, exploring how these factors shape and influence the characters' lives by applying the discourse historical approach to CDA offered by Ruth Wodak.

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