

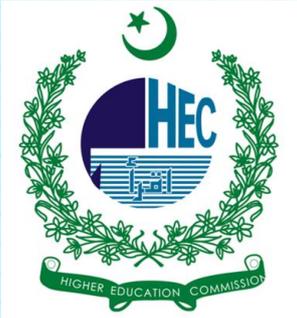
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**Memory, Power, and Patriarchal Silence: A Critical Discourse
Analysis of Kanza Javed's *Rani***



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Abstract

This study applies Teun A. van Dijk's socio-cognitive model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to Kanza Javed's short story *Rani*. The analysis explores how discourse constructs and reproduces ideologies of patriarchy, gendered morality, class hierarchy, and silence within a rural Pakistani setting. Through a close textual reading aligned with van Dijk's framework focusing on ideology, power, mental models, and discourse structures the study reveals how lexical choices, narrative strategies, and presuppositions normalize social inequalities while simultaneously exposing their violence. The story foregrounds memory, Alzheimer's, and fragmented narration as discursive mechanisms through which suppressed trauma resurfaces. By examining gendered labeling, narrative positioning, and acts of symbolic punishment, this paper argues that *Rani* both reproduces and critiques patriarchal ideology. The narrator's retrospective confession functions as discursive resistance, challenging intergenerational complicity and moral silence.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, ideology, patriarchy, memory, power relations, narrative discourse, socio-cognitive approach

Background of the Study

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) emerged as an interdisciplinary field concerned with the relationship between discourse, power, and social inequality. Scholars such as Norman Fairclough (1995), Ruth Wodak (2001), and Teun A. van Dijk (1998, 2008) conceptualized discourse as a social practice that both reflects and shapes ideology. Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach particularly emphasizes the triangular relationship between discourse, cognition, and society. According to van Dijk (1998), ideologies are socially shared belief systems that control group attitudes and knowledge structures. These ideologies become naturalized through discourse and reproduced across generations.

Within literary discourse, CDA has been employed to uncover embedded power relations, especially in postcolonial and gendered contexts. Feminist stylisticians argue that narrative voice, lexical selection, and characterization reveal ideological positioning (Mills, 1995). In South Asian literature, patriarchal structures

frequently manifest through linguistic labeling, silencing, and moral judgment. Thus, CDA provides a suitable methodological framework to analyze how literary narratives encode socio-cultural hierarchies.

Kanza Javed's *Rani* presents a layered narrative involving memory, gendered shame, class hierarchy, and intergenerational trauma. The story's rural setting, combined with themes of divorce, illegitimacy, and social ostracism, makes it particularly relevant for a socio-cognitive CDA analysis.

Statement of the Problem

Although *Rani* foregrounds issues of patriarchy, moral policing, and memory, limited scholarly attention has been given to how its discourse structures construct and reproduce ideological power relations. The problem addressed in this study is how linguistic choices, narrative strategies, and cognitive framing in the story reflect and reinforce patriarchal and class-based ideologies. Specifically, how does discourse construct Nargis as "other," normalize domestic violence, and internalize shame within the narrator? Furthermore, how does memory function as a socio-cognitive mechanism through which suppressed ideology resurfaces?

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative textual analysis grounded in van Dijk's socio-cognitive model of Critical Discourse Analysis. Selected excerpts from *Rani* are analyzed through categories of ideology, discourse structures (lexicalization, presupposition, implication), social cognition (mental models, memory), and power relations. The analysis aligns textual evidence with theoretical constructs proposed by van Dijk (1998, 2008), focusing on how discourse reproduces dominance and how narrative perspective mediates ideological representation.

Theoretical Framework: Teun A. van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis

Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach postulates that discourse functions as a mediator between social structures and cognitive structures (van Dijk, 1998, 2006). According to van Dijk (1998), ideologies are socially shared belief systems stored in social memory that organize group-based attitudes and representations. These ideologies influence how group members interpret events and produce discourse.

Power, in this framework, is enacted when dominant groups control discourse production, access to communication, and the distribution of knowledge (van Dijk,

1998). Elite discourse such as media, education, political, and institutional language plays a crucial role in shaping public cognition and maintaining ideological dominance (van Dijk, 2006).

This study is based on the idea that ideologies are shared systems of beliefs that shape how groups understand their identity, values, and norms (van Dijk, 1998). It also considers the “ideological square,” which shows how groups usually present themselves positively while portraying others negatively (van Dijk, 1998, 2006). The study examines how word choice and hidden assumptions in language reflect particular viewpoints and create biased representations (van Dijk, 1998). Furthermore, it recognizes that discourse both shapes and is shaped by mental models stored in personal and social memory, influencing how people interpret events (van Dijk, 1998, 2006). Finally, it highlights that dominance is maintained through control of discourse, especially when powerful or elite groups manage access to public communication and knowledge (van Dijk, 2006).

Analysis

1. Ideology as Shared Belief Systems: Divorce as Moral Deviance

Van Dijk (1998) defines ideology as socially shared belief systems that regulate group identity and moral order. The narrator’s divorce is described as “an unnatural thing” and “a terrible crime” (Javed, 2025, p. 4). The lexical choice “crime” reflects a collective ideological structure in which female autonomy threatens patriarchal stability. The discourse does not merely reflect parental disappointment; rather, it encodes a shared cultural belief that marriage must be endured regardless of suffering. The repeated emphasis on endurance “They should be endured. Pushed through. Dealt with” (p. 4) naturalizes suffering as feminine virtue. Thus, ideology operates as common sense within the family’s cognitive framework.

2. Presupposition and Moral Normalization

The statement “No woman in the family had ever gotten a divorce before” (Javed, 2025, p. 5) functions as a presupposition. According to van Dijk (2008), presuppositions embed ideological assumptions without explicit argumentation. The sentence presumes divorce to be abnormal and dishonorable. The absence of prior divorce is framed not neutrally but as moral precedent. Through this presupposition, patriarchy is reproduced as inherited social knowledge stored in group memory.

3. Positive Self-Presentation and Moral Authority

Van Dijk's ideological square emphasizes "emphasize our good qualities" (1998). Daddi's role as guardian of morality exemplifies positive self-presentation. She positions herself as protector of family honor by condemning Nargis's uncovered body as "shameless" (Javed, 2025, p. 15). Her surveillance of female modesty constructs her authority as righteous. Even violence is justified as moral correction. Through discourse, Daddi presents herself as defender of tradition, thereby legitimizing dominance.

4. Negative Other-Presentation: Construction of Nargis

In contrast, Nargis is labeled "barren," "cursed," and "a loose woman" (Javed, 2025, pp. 14–16). These lexical items align with van Dijk's concept of negative other-presentation (1998). Nargis's identity is reduced to reproductive failure and sexual suspicion. The ideological square operates clearly:

Our women (obedient, honorable)

Her (immoral, deviant)

The repeated questioning "What must she have done?" (p. 15)—constructs guilt through insinuation rather than evidence. Discourse here enacts symbolic exclusion.

5. Lexicalization and Symbolic Violence: Cutting the Braid

Van Dijk (2008) argues that lexical choices shape ideological cognition. The description of the braid falling "like a dead snake" (Javed, 2025, p. 19) is metaphorically loaded. The simile associates femininity with something dangerous and contaminating. Hair, culturally symbolic of beauty and honor, becomes the site of punishment. Lexical intensifiers "savage," "ferocious," "dead hair"—discursively dramatize the violence while simultaneously normalizing it within Daddi's moral logic.

The act of cutting Nargis's hair is not only physical violence; it is discursive erasure. Dominance is reproduced through bodily control.

6. Silence as Discursive Reproduction of Dominance (p. 19)

The narrator repeatedly states, "I said nothing" (Javed, 2025, p. 19). Silence functions as ideological complicity. Van Dijk (1998) emphasizes that dominance persists when group members internalize power structures. The child narrator's inaction reflects

how ideology becomes embodied and unquestioned. The absence of resistance reproduces patriarchal authority.

7. Mental Models and Fragmented Memory

Van Dijk (2008) explains that mental models store personal experiences shaped by social cognition. Daddi's Alzheimer's destabilizes explicit memory, yet the name *Rani* resurfaces repeatedly (Javed, 2025, pp. 8–9). Memory fragments reveal suppressed trauma. The chant for *Rani* indicates unresolved guilt encoded in cognitive structures. The disease metaphorically exposes buried ideology. What society attempted to erase returns through disrupted cognition.

8. Ideological Control of Female Sexuality

When Daddi calls Nargis “behaya aurat” (shameless woman) (Javed, 2025, p. 15), lexicalization reinforces sexual surveillance. Van Dijk (1998) notes that ideological discourse often regulates group boundaries. Nargis's uncovered body becomes perceived threat to social order. The moral panic reflects shared patriarchal cognition that female sexuality must be controlled.

9. Reproductive Ideology and Female Worth

Daddi's statement, “It's a long, empty life without a child” (Javed, 2025, p. 20), illustrates reproductive ideology. Female identity is equated with motherhood. Both Nargis and the narrator are stigmatized for childlessness. This reflects a shared belief system where fertility determines moral value (van Dijk, 1998). The ideology transcends generations, shaping both oppressor and victim.

10. Confession as Counter-Discourse

The narrator's admission “We were not good to her” (Javed, 2025, p. 20) signals discursive resistance. Van Dijk (2008) argues that discourse can reshape mental models and challenge dominance. The bathing scene becomes symbolic purification. Through confession, the narrator destabilizes the ideological square by acknowledging collective guilt. The dominant “we are good” narrative collapses.

The discourse reflects that ideology as shared belief systems: Divorce and illegitimacy constructed as moral deviance. Positive self-presentation / Negative other-presentation: Daddi as moral guardian; Nargis as deviant. Lexicalization and presupposition: Words like “crime,” “cursed,” “shameless” embed judgment. Mental models and memory: Alzheimer's reveals suppressed ideological trauma. Discourse

as reproduction of dominance: Silence, labeling, and bodily punishment normalize patriarchal power.

Discussion

The analysis shows that in *Rani*, patriarchal ideas are presented through certain labels and hidden assumptions in language. This supports van Dijk's (1998) view that the way discourse is structured reflects the shared beliefs of a group. In the story, divorce and illegitimacy are treated as moral weaknesses, which strengthens traditional gender norms. In addition, social class makes gender oppression even stronger. Nargis's situation shows how gender and poverty work together to marginalize her, which relates to van Dijk's (2008) idea that dominance has many dimensions. Finally, memory plays an important role in challenging these beliefs. Alzheimer's is used symbolically to uncover hidden pain and guilt. The narrator's confession questions dominant ways of thinking, showing that discourse can not only support ideology but also challenge and resist it.

Findings

The study shows that the story *Rani* presents a society where men usually have more power than women. It does this by using negative words for women, by assuming certain moral rules without questioning them, and by showing unfair treatment in a subtle way. Power is shown through gender labels, social class differences, and by keeping some voices silent. Memory in the story helps reveal hidden guilt and makes readers think critically about these unfair ideas. In the end, the story moves from simply showing this unfair system to encouraging awareness and resistance against it.

Conclusion

Applying van Dijk's socio-cognitive CDA reveals that *Rani* is a powerful exploration of ideology, memory, and gendered violence. The story demonstrates how discourse naturalizes patriarchal control while embedding trauma in collective cognition. Through retrospective narration, the text critiques its own ideological foundations, suggesting that acknowledgment and confession can destabilize entrenched power structures. Thus, *Rani* functions not only as a literary narrative but as a discursive intervention into patriarchal memory.

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