

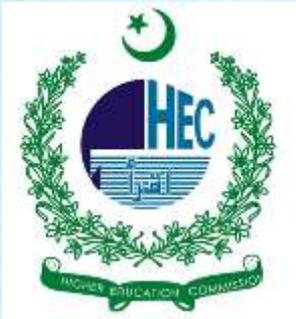
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DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF POWER AND SOCIAL IDENTITIES IN AHMED'S *THE PARKING LOT*: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS



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Abstract

*Literature tends to mirror and criticize the social power structures that form part of the society, especially in a situation which is affected by religious and social tensions. This study intends to examine the use of religious and political discourse in exhibiting power. It also analyzes the discursive strategies that create the identity of majority and minority groups in religious and institutional life. The data comprises of the Ahmed's *The Parking Lot* and the study has adopted Fairclough's *Three-dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis (1995)* as framework for studying discursive construction of power and social identities. The study has used qualitative interpretive approach to examine how language characteristics create the identity of majority and minority groups in religious and institutional life. The text is selected through purposive sampling method and analyzed on three levels; textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice. The findings of study highlighted that the identities of minorities are vulnerable and morally situated, whereas, the majority groups tend to be collectivized and linked to emotional intensity, institutional dominance or ideological power. It also describes that the identity of individuals is reduced to their religious group identity as in the present study, the Christians are identified as poor and helpless while the Muslim majority group is acknowledged as powerful.*

Keywords: *Power, religion, Critical Discourse Analysis, minority, majority.*

1. Introduction

Language plays a vital role in expressing the religious believes and perceptions of people. Religious discourse represents how people feel connected to the society and assert power relations on the basis of their religious identity (Pihlaja, 2020). The concept of social identity is used to refer an individual's sense of self, depending on one's actual or perceived membership in any social environment. It is based on personal and social experiences of a person and his or her perceived image in any social group, such as company, division, ethnic group or society. By getting social identification, people perceive themselves as a member of that social group. And for getting this sense of belonging individuals adopt characteristics of that group to fit in there. As Anwar et. al., (2025) in their study analyzed Cole's *Open City* and found that migration causes social detachment. The protagonist who migrated to a new place faces cultural displacement and is forced to adopt the characteristics of new culture for obtaining sense of belonging.

Power of authority practices and propels according the people's notion of identity; it is shaped according to the people's shared ideology about their identification. In the same way, individuals construct their identities according to the power structures of a society, based on this, they adopt or promote those practices that power demands. So, the relationship between power and identity is not linear and both of these influences each other (Davidson et al., 2009). This relationship of power, religion and identity is very important to consider, as it provides insightful understanding to the

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construction and subversion of religious discourses, social identities and power relations. On the basis of their religion, people get specified identities in society, people belong to different religious groups possess different social identities and also are judged differently. Religious minorities lack those social and political benefits that are provided to the religious authorities; they suffer a lot in their daily lives on the basis of their religion. They are victimized by authorities on the basis of religion card. As Cordell (2025) concluded that people should judge the human right abuses differently on the basis of their committers, and not on the basis of their religious identity.

Pakistan is a multicultural and multi-religious society; it always suffers in the matter of representation and treatment of its religious minorities. Although, the constitution of the country guarantees equality and freedom of religion, the power relations between the Muslim majority and the non-Muslim minority often turn out to be unequal. Pakistani English literature has been crucial in examining these tensions and Pakistani English fiction is usually a reflection of these social-political complexities, showing the ways of interaction of identity, power, and religion in daily life. Fiction has been employed by writers like Kamila Shamsie, Nadeem Aslam and Rabia Ahmed, not only as a form of narrative but also social commentary. *The Parking Lot* by Rabia Ahmad is one of those stories, which go out of its way and ventures into the minority life especially the life of Christians in Pakistan. The novel, through its characters, setting and plot, brings out the effects of systemic power bias and social stratification in the relations between the faiths as well as in the real-life experiences of the marginalized groups. It describes the difficulties and problems of the life of poor Christians. This study aims at discovering how discourse is used in *The Parking Lot* to express the struggles of the Christian minority and how linguistic and narrative tools reveal the inequality of power. The study also purposes to uncover the hidden ideologies that inform interfaith contact in the novel. This is notable as the minority representation in Pakistani fiction has been under-explored and in particular a linguistic and discourse-analytical approach to the same. Therefore, an analysis of this novel in terms of CDA offers an understanding of how literature can confront the prevailing social ideologies and also offer different perspectives of the minority life. Previous research on South Asian literature suggests that language is used as a medium to construct and assert the ideologies. According to Rojo, Esteban (2005), and van Dijk (2008), through the practice of discourse, social groups of people can be portrayed in one way or the other, it shapes their social identity and can be used to either marginalize or privilege them. Lashari et al. (2025), in their study, analyzed six language textbooks to examine their portrayal of religion and concluded that these text books focus only on Islamic teachings and marginalized other religion. They highlight and provide information about one religion and construct their identity. left others and naturalize unequal religious teachings in society.

The present research is important as it provides a critical linguistic analysis of the discourse that constructs religious minority identity and institutional power relations within Pakistani English fiction. Using Critical Discourse Analysis to *The Parking Lot*, the study does not simply grasp the issue of discrimination by thematic measures, but also unveils the nuanced discursive processes around which inequality and marginalization is naturalized. The study adds to the sparse literature on the portrayal of Christian minorities in Pakistani literature and describes the use of discourse to support, reproduce, or challenge more general sociocultural ideologies. Moreover, it reinforces the interdisciplinary discussion between literary studies and discourse analysis by suggesting the ways fiction could be used as the place of ideological negotiation and power construction.

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1.1 Research Objectives

- To examine the ways in which the power has been portrayed through religious and political discourses in the novel *The Parking Lot* by Ahmed.
- To analyze the discursive strategies which have been employed to construct major and minor groups' social identities in the novel *The Parking Lot*.

1.2 Research Questions

1. In what ways the power has been portrayed by religious and political discourses in the novel *The Parking Lot* by Ahmed?
2. What discursive strategies have been employed by the writer to construct major and minor groups' social identities in the novel *The Parking Lot*?

2. Literature Review

Norman Fairclough (2023) in his study of gender, social identity and power, makes a conclusion that these are highly interwoven in the discourse. He points out that discourse is not a neutral medium; it is a place where power relations are created, maintained or subverted. In this perspective, gender and social identities are considered to be discursively constructed, which means they are created and reproduced through recurrent patterns of representation, use of vocabulary and norms of interaction in literature. Additionally, Fairclough (2013) points out that the mainstream discourses tend to popularize social inequalities by making unequal relations between men and women, or various social groups. According to Lourdu et al. (2024), religion and politics usually have an impact on social justice and advocacy in India. They concluded in their study that different religious groups and organizations have been involved in the presently advocacy of the rights of the marginalized communities including Dalits and tribal groups.

Western literature also discusses the lives of religious minorities of those countries. Mandair (2024), studied the Western multicultural and modern discourse and analyze the representation of South Asian countries in Western political and multicultural discourses. He analyzed that the western countries claim a lot about the equal respect of all religious groups, but at the end identifies them on the basis of their religion, and portrayed their identities as Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims. Instead of defining their identity on their political and social contributions they identify it on the base of religion and ignore their personal identity. In Western literature South Asians are purposely portrayed as religious people to keep their old colonial belongings idea alive that identifies Eastern people as traditional, conservative and religious, while Western people as modern and secular, that highlights the difference in their identities on the basis of their religious ideologies.

Pakistani literature also portrayed the identity struggle of people who migrated to other countries. In this aspect Anwar et al. (2025) studied the Hamid's *Exit West* and concluded that migration affects the personal identity and sense of belonging of migrants. Pakistani people who migrate to US or Europe because of some reason feels unconnected in new culture. Some of the migrants adopt their culture for attaining their identity and some hold on their culture, which is a greater emotional and psychological challenge.

The language also plays a vital role in development of political identity. As Khatoon et al. (2019), examined the use of metaphors in the speeches of Pakistani politicians and concluded that metaphors are used in political speeches to construct "ideology and identity" and exercise "power and hegemony" over the rival party. Their study is further supported by Mehwish Malghani et al.,

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(2019) who examined the discursive strategies used by political parties in their party manifestos. The result shows that they use particular linguistic choices to build positive self-image of themselves and negative perception of the other group and reformulates political identities and ideologies. Additionally, McLean et al. (2024), worked on political discourse that occur in natural situation like, interviews, conversations and speeches and examine cross-cultural positioning of identity. They concluded that the politicians portrayed themselves as faith based and socially conservative parties. They use rhetorical devices to portray their national identity, and publicize themselves as the propagators of social conventional values. They employ self-narratives of suffering and victimization to defend their social identity and values. The study by Z. Iqbal et al., (2020) also indicate that political leaders use a persuasive political language to construct identity and promote a particular ideology to obtain political benefits. The role of religion in Pakistani politics also became a major theme in the analysis of Pakistani literature. Aslam et al. (2025) in their study concluded that power impacts the whole life of human beings, when people achieve power it changes their thinking ability, they openly resist the unjust actions, while they have to suffer and bear unjust actions when they are powerless.

Muneeza Shamsie et al. (2011), claims that Pakistani English literature represents two aspects of diversity and duality as it tries to balance between local culture and international literary practices. The analysis concludes that authors use English to convey the multilingual and multicultural identities of Pakistani people and deal with the topics of migration, gender, and social transformation. The Pakistani English literature appears as the hybrid postcolonial literature that represents the plural voices and changing national experiences. This is further demonstrated by Parray (2019), who stated that there is a monumental amount of research on the topic of the religion and politics of Pakistan, its military, and other aspects. Pakistani literature is enriched with the stories of religious dynamics of the society. Migration is one of the most discussed topics by Pakistani writers, as it causes the problems of identity crisis. In the same line, Tahir et al. (2020) studied Tehmina Durrani's "Blasphemy" and analyzed retrogressive roles of clergy and aristocracy. The results of their study demonstrates that religious discourse is an aggressive tool to silence the voices of one group or the other, justify social inequalities and legitimize authority. Their analysis is supported by the work of Sufia Sultana et al. (2019), who investigates that religious discourse is often employed to create deviant religious identity that incites fiery sentiments and political discourse functions to assert ideological power.

Moreover, Ahmad and Rizvi (2021) worked on the depiction of religious minorities in English newspapers. The results of their study reveals that the media reported on the minorities positively, but focus more on the provocative aspects of forced adaptations, assaults on the places of devotion, and violation of the right to freedom and other human rights aspects. The less hard topics like political participation, economic empowerment and marginalization of Minorities were not commonly addressed. The study revealed that the media should assign more space to the educational and entertainment requirements of the minorities. The greater part of the written stories was the work of local reporters which disapproves the general conception that only foreigners reported minority human rights abuses in Pakistan.

Contemporary Pakistani fiction is highly informed in the current political realities. Jadoon et al., (2018) in their study concluded that the military control is not enough to ensure the achievement of peace, the social and human needs have to be addressed. Through their analysis, they found that fiction reveals the impact of political and ideological conflicts on individuals' sense of belonging,

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fear, and marginalization, especially among the vulnerable groups. Furthermore, Veyret (2021) has argued that modern Pakistani novels in English do not follow traditional national borders and assert that Pakistan is not just one homogenized territory; it is a dynamic, challenging and a globally connected space. He asserts that the modern Pakistani English novels portray fragmented spaces and transnational identities and are deviant from the set national boundaries. The concept of deterritorialization in Pakistan is achieved through movements and migration themes where the identity is presented as fluid and influenced by the global networks. He came to the conclusion that new Pakistani novels were analyzed in terms of the migration and diaspora experience and reflect the identity division of migrated or diasporic people. Furthermore, Fuchs and Fuchs (2020) analyzed in their study, if opinions about caste are developed further, it would imply that the very existence of minorities in Pakistan serves as an uncomfortable reminder of past events, or of alternative imaginings of hierarchies and power structures, which have been suppressed in the 'collective unconscious' of Pakistani majority society. Religious minorities of Christians, Hindus and Sikhs always remind the pre-partition period of shared identity. The presence of these minorities in country always presents the country as a shared space of minorities and challenge the idea of one nation property. Their existence is considered as a symbol of potential threat for the Islamic identity of nation. They are not harmful for the safety of people, but still treated as destructive group just on the basis of their religion. These minorities do not have authorized religious identity but still considered as a group that memorize colonialism and partition.

2.1 Research Gap

There are various studies in Pakistani English literature that undermines the theme of power, identity and religion, most of these worked on them in isolation. These studies focus on the role of religious discourse in shaping and asserting identities, on political problems or on social identification problems. While there is insufficient work on the intervened effect of religious and political discourse on shaping, asserting and demolishing peoples 'identity, shaping and demolding the truth in the groups of people that pose different religion and financial conditions. *The Parking Lot* (2022) by Rabia Ahmed is a current and realistic description of this intersection, as the Muslim authorities urge to legitimize the dislocation and marginalization of the Christian minorities. Although the novel can be applied to the socio-religious association in Pakistan, there has been minute to no critical analysis of the novel in terms of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This absence of CDA analysis of religious and political power in the contemporary Pakistani fiction, indicates a substantial gap in prevailing literature.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Methodology

The study used a qualitative research design because it seeks to address questions on how language is constructive of power relations and social identities in *The Parking Lot* by Ahmed. The study is based on the theoretical and analytical approach of Critical Discourse Analysis.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

The study used updated version (2010) of Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis CDA (1992), which allows the researcher to analyze social inequality, the positioning of ideologies, and power relations.

3.3 Research Approach

The paradigmatic approach of the study is an interpretivist one, which aimed to analyze the construction of meaning through discourse. The study examines the socially constitutive and ideologically embedded discourse. Thus, the critical analysis attempts to reveal the latent ideological assumptions and power representations that lie in the language representation.

3.4 Sample and Procedure

This research uses Ahmed's *The Parking Lot* (2022) as the sample. This novel is strategically chosen due to the religious, political, and social issues raised in it, that are relevant with the topic of the study. The purposive sampling method is used because the novel directly portrays the plight of minority characters in a dominant religious context, and thus it is informative and useful in CDA. The study process consists of four steps:

Text Selection: The text is selected on the base of its relevance to the topic, those scenes from the novel are selected that describes social Identities and power relations.

Textual Coding: Identifying those linguistic and stylistic elements that are used in the novel to construct the identities, ideologies and power relations.

Implication of Fairclough Three-Dimensional Model: The chosen experts are analyzed, using Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model to analyze textual, discursive and social practice.

4. Data Analysis

The data is analyzed on three levels according to the Fairclough's model of Critical Discourse Analysis.

1. Textual Analysis: The linguistic aspects of the text studied at this point included lexical selection, the use of pronouns, the use of modality, transitivity, sentence arrangement, metaphor, and evaluative language to determine how identities and power relationships are manifested in the text.

2. Discursive Practice: In this step, the discursive practices have been examined that build the social identities and power dynamics. The analysis explored how the meaning is created and interpreted in the narrative setting through interdiscursive aspects of language.

3. Social Practice Analysis: Lastly, the interpretation from the text is discussed at broader ideological and social contexts. In this step, power imbalance, institutional control, religious marginalization, and structural inequality in the society has been discussed.

Excerpt 1.

In front of us a crowd of at least fifty men was struggling at the entrance, some trying to gain entrance to Yusufabad, others doing their utmost to prevent them. They pushed each other to the ground, shouting and hurling curses at each other; stones flew in every direction.

“Move! Hat ja! Eesai ka bacha! Damned Christian!”

“Yeh mera ghar hai! This is my home! Ja tu apnay ghar ja! Get out, go to your own home!”

“Set fire to this colony! Then we'll see what happens!”

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Textual Analysis

The use of verb 'struggling' reveals the continuous struggle of Christian community with powerful Muslim group and the lexical choice of verb 'prevent' adds evidence of their struggle. The verb 'pushed' appears to represent the physical aggression and the verbal aggression is shown through verbs 'shouting, cursing'. The use of verb phrase 'set fire' shows the violent action of Muslim majority and undermines the fear of destruction for Christian and these lexical choices unveils the seriousness of the situation and present it as violent and chaotic. The noun phrases 'Eesai ka bacha' and 'damned Christian' functions as derogatory labeling which identifies the person as a member of Christian community, reduces his individual identity to the identity of his community and used religion as a source of negative categorization for him, this hostile tone intensifies the conflict. The construction of imperative 'Move! Get out! Set fire to this colony!' reveals the intensive situation and describes the possible attempts of Muslim group that they used to control Christian community and prevail their authority. The lexical choice 'a crowd' in clause complex "a crowd of at least fifty men was struggling at the entrance..." reveals that people are taking action in groups instead of taking individual actions. The lexicons used in the construction of clause emphasizes the physical actions and represents the massive tension. The patterns of transitivity used in the passage help to demonstrate the way of representing action and responsibility. The actors are mostly the nameless members of the crowd. The text is predominated with material and verbal processes "struggling, pushing, shouting, and curses" which manifests violence as mutual action, implies a two-way struggle.

By making these transitivity decisions, the text not only describes the dynamics of the crowd physically, but also constructs the concept of power, aggression, and group identity in readers. There is a high degree of epistemic and deontic modality in the text which represents the authority and certainty while the absence of heading or negotiation constructs the absolute intolerance without any mitigation. The future certainty is shown through the clause "Then we'll see what happens!" which provides epistemic modality. The demotic modality in the expressions "doing their utmost" and "trying to gain entrance" reveals the expression of intension, effort and weak obligation. The code switching in the discourse 'Hat ja! Eesai ka bacha! Damned Christian' and 'Yeh mera ghar hai! This is my home' represents intertextuality. The coding of Urdu allows accessibility to whole community to understand the situation; it represents that there are multiple audiences and this code-switching allows them to interpret the conflict. The passage started with narrative description and then added direct speech; this shift provides close representation of the conflict and immerses the reader in conflict.

Discursive Analysis

The passage illustrates the ways in which language creates social identities and power relations. The use of non-humane connotations such as "Eesai ka bacha! Damned Christian!" and "Set fire to this colony!" create an outsider identity and a threat for Christians who are a minority group. Simultaneously, there were phrases like "Yeh mera ghar hai! This is my home!" that shows ownership and moral right of territory, sets a definite boundary between insiders and outsiders. Imperatives and threats are directed speech acts, whereas shouting and cursing are expressive speech acts, which express some stronger emotional intensity and aggressiveness. The code-switching in Urdu and English is an addition that gives more weight, exhibits power, and add means to social or educational status. Overall, the discursive practice shows how language is produced,

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circulated as well as consumed to delineate communal boundaries, legitimize violence, as well as enlist the participants in the struggle.

Explanation

The scene socially represents a mirror of the general structural and cultural dynamics. The physical confrontation and overall shouting reveal mob dynamics and the enactment of power dynamics where Muslim majority experiencing their dominance to a perceived minority threat. Territoriality is one of the significant social practices in this place because the right to houses and communities is displayed using the symbolic ownership that is linked with the sense of belonging to a community. The tensions are based on religious and communal issues where social conventions on protecting one's own community usually carry more weight than legal or formal regulations. The language switches are also historical and postcolonial which influences racism, which means that the conflicts between the urban areas describes the dimensions of the classes, education, and identity. Overall, the excerpt shows that language and social context are interdependent, as the discourse creates meaning and identity and the social practices create the circumstances, behaviors, and power relations.

Excerpt 2 :

"If the parking lot was legit, they would have mentioned it on this," he said "They probably only say what they told us if a client actually asks."

"Let me see what the pastor knows." I called Tahir to ask him if the colony had received any official notices to vacate the premises.

"No, it hasn't," he said.

"You would know, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, I would."

"Ok, because that's what the plaza people are telling their customers. They're almost certainly lying, but I thought I'd check."

Textual Analysis

The use of informal register "legit" here questions the legitimacy of 'Salatin group' and suspects their institution. The verb "mentioned" reveals the importance of written contents for official transparency. The clause "only say... if a client asks" provides selective disclosure about the hidden information that plaza group provides under their controlled communication to their clients. The noun phrase "official notices" presuppose the bureaucratic process that invokes the legal authority. The phrase "almost certainly lying" shows the discourse of distrust which delegitimizes the legitimization claim of 'Salatin group'. The modal verb "would" in "would have mentioned" shows the modality of assumption which constructs the assumption that legitimacy is connected with transparency. The modal verb "probably" adds the modality of suspicion which undermines the discourse of strategic doubt and highlights the uncertainty of speaker about her claim. In clause "would know, wouldn't you?", there is an expression of assumption embedded in auxiliary modal 'would' which interacts with tag question "wouldn't you?" to look for confirmation and reinforce responsibility indirectly without any confrontation. In clause "would know, wouldn't you?", there is a combination of a modal verb and a tag question where auxiliary modal 'would' undermines the expression of assumption while tag question "wouldn't you?", interacts to look for confirmation and

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reinforce responsibility indirectly without any confrontation. The modal expression “almost certainly” is embedded to the modality of certainty, while the degree modifier ‘almost’ softens the expression. The clause “If the parking lot was legit” presupposes the requirement of transparency and official documentation for the legitimization of projects. And the phrase “official notices” presupposes that there has to be a formal legal communication before the action of eviction. The use of pronoun “I” has been recurrent on the part of the narrator which puts her as the active inquirer and information seeker in the discourse. And because of the use of pronoun “you” in “You would know, wouldn’t you?” the interpersonal communication is also provided through a direct address to “Tahir” that presents him as a presumed knower. The plaza authorities seem to be addressed in a collective manner through the pronoun “they” that constructs outgroup identity whereas the collective identity of the narrator and other members of the colony is created by the use of pronoun “us” which demonstrates they are all concerned for rights of Christian.

Discursive Analysis

The discourse of the novel produces the information through commercial actors, for example the group of majority people is represented as ‘plaza people.’ The discourse is shaped through unofficial communication channels, as the personal conversations is distributing the information in indirect reports instead of formal institutional communication. The discourse of this complex compound “If the parking lot was legit, they would have mentioned it on this,” highlights the superiority of written documentation over oral claims by conditioning the legitimization with written documentation. The conversational structure employed by Ahmed shows the unfolding of ideas in steps, first of all she makes a question about legitimacy that build interest in the event and then verify her suspect and after confirmation she accused the “Salatin group” for unofficial verification. This discourse escalation undermines the ultimate role of official groups in decisions finalizing, shows their authority and strengthen the suspect gradually to make it understandable. It describes the absence of official voice of authority and highlights that power is exercised indirectly. The plaza people claim to have all official rights but there is no obvious evidence from government that identifies them as the carrier of official orders. In the discourse of the novel, brooches are considered the source of institutional text, as the information coded on brooches is considered authentic information.

There is an obvious contradiction between the spoken claims of the plaza people and their written claims, that unveils an explicit deception of them, as they used to spread their own claims as official orders and threaten people of Christian colony ‘Yusufabad’. The narrator works in newspaper agency and wants to progress the authentic information, she called Tahir ‘the pastor’ to verify information as he is the one who would have interest in the whole issue as the narrator Hina mentioned when she talks to him “You would know, wouldn’t you?” and make him to realize his responsibilities. There is asymmetrical information as the plaza people are the planner of eviction, they know all about their strategy while colony people are receiving information from them and not have direct access to the information. On the base of their power, they identify themselves as the carrier of official orders and threaten the colony members for severe action and portraying Christian as the group of people who creates problem for legal activities.

Explanation

On the social level, the extract indicates the wider conflict between the institutional power and a

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socially vulnerable society. It discussed an environment where the availability of official information is questionable, and the lack of assurance itself is one of the signs of unequal power relations. The plaza officials are portrayed as having the power of decision making and the control of information, while residents of the colony as lacking the ability to communicate directly and rely on indirect communication and personal networks as the means of information on which their conditions of living rely on. This lack of balance is indicative of a broader social fact where marginalized groups tend to be excluded by the formal means of communication and they are only made aware of things through rumors or other informal communications. The transition to strong suspicion in the course of inquiry is also gradual and indicates the distrustful social environment. The authority is regarded as non-transparent or even exploitative by depiction of fact that the plaza people are lying which contradicts their claims of formal authority. This discussion makes suspicion of unequal power arrangements appear to be natural. The fact that “Tahir” should have information, depicts dependence on internal community leaders instead of institutional disclosures, which show that localities create alternative bases of powers when the formal structures are unavailable or untrustworthy.

This supports the view that power has capacity to act not just through direct control, but also by procedural legitimacy and authority that are regarded as non-transparent or even exploitative control. The extract is a precursor to possible dislocation in the broader ideological outlook in which eviction is so common that can occur without any warning. The debate, therefore, points out the eviction terror, in which economic or institutional needs may override the security of the less powerful communities. The sufferings of colony people are portrayed to reveal the choices made by other locations which shows that there are structural imbalances in the social and administrative order. In most cases, the extract demonstrates the role of the ordinary conversation in developing larger social realities and portraying imbalance in access to information, distrust in power, and uncertainty of communities in negotiating their lives in the power systems of the dominant institutions.

Excerpt 3

“Pastor, you're here, thank God. Someone coming out of the mosque slipped and fell into the water on the road,” the man said urgently. “He was very angry and collected other people around him They're all coming here, many people and all very angry. I'm afraid!”

Tahir swore under his breath and opened the door. “I'll go and talk to them; you all wait here.”

“No, Pastor, don't!” the man clutched at Tahir's shirt. “You of all people must not go out. They'll kill you!”

Textual Analysis

The lexical choices of this text and its construction reveal the group difference and arise the sense of fear and urgency. There is a repetition of emotionally charged lexical items in the text such as “afraid, angry, kill” that undermines the semantic field of danger and threat. The direct address “pastor” represents the religion as the primary source of identity instead of representing the personal identity of the person. The phrase “I'm afraid” is used as modal expression of feeling and is used to show the subjective attitude of the speaker to the situation. The approaching group is referred through the pronoun “they” instead of mentioning their name but the group is identifiable through the context as ‘plaza group’ that produces the sense of powerful collective actor. In the

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clause “They’ll kill you”, actor is the majority group “they” and the target of the threat is the religious minority person “you”. The modality of threat is highly coded in the sentence “They will kill you!” The modal auxiliary “will” used to show predictive certainty, with no hedging and mitigation, which builds violence as an imminent and inevitable occurrence. This extreme epistemic modality is one of the reasons that arise the feeling of absolute danger and strengthens the power of the collective majority. Power is used by means of agency limitation in the command “You must not go out” and the modal auxiliary “must” have deontic modality which implies the obligation and prohibition.

Discursive Analysis

The minority group identity is constructed through religious ideology by means of explicit religious nomination, especially the constant use of the word, ‘Pastor’ which is a religious nomination. This title prefigures “Tahir” not as an individual but as a spokesperson of a Christian community. His own name is used as a representative of religion, which further supports the aspect of individuality and minority status. Conversely, the majority group is built indirectly by institutional and collective reference especially in this clause “when someone comes out of the mosque”. The “mosque” is a symbolic religious institution; it has connected the arising conflict with a majority religious space. The frequent repetitions of the pronoun “they”, combined with such phrases as “many people”, make the majority group special and build collective identity that combined individuals into a single and even dangerous one. In the same way, the process of identity construction within the extract is based on religious labelling, institutional referencing, naming and collective pronoun. The minority identity is constructed as personalized and individualized by referring “Pastor” or “Tahir” individually while the majority one is collectivized through pronoun “they” producing an unequal social positioning of both religious groups. Using a number of correlated linguistic methods, the extract is built discursively to create power. There is also numerical power that is highlighted in the phrase which states “many people and all very angry”, in which the number of people is used as a measure of power and control. Second, repetition of “very angry” is used to enhance the emotional appeal and create the sense of danger and make anger collective and contagious.

The subjective modality is presented in the phrase “I am afraid!” and it is used to indicate the personal emotional assessment of the situation by the speaker. But this fear is not only an expression, it justifies the inhibition, it forms weakness and strengthens the inequality of forces between the groups. By expressing fear, the minority status is discursively positioned as threatened, and the violence that is expected to happen is naturalized into the narrative logic. Generally, the extract establishes a powerful discursive polarization of minority and the majority. The people who are linked to the ‘mosque’ are constructed as a collective group which is angry and threatening whereas the ‘Pastor’ is an individualized, vulnerable, and threatened identity. The discourse creates a binary opposition through religious labeling, institutional reference, modality, emotional intensification, transitivity patterns, and agency distribution in a systematic way that denotes unequal power relations and maintains the overriding thematic issues of the study about the discursive construction of social identities and power.

Explanation

On the interpretive analysis, the extract indicates the process through which discourse creates wider social meanings of religious capacity, power relations and minority vulnerability in a given socio-

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cultural environment. The communication in this extract is based on socially identifiable categories like Christian minority and Muslims majority, which trigger culturally preconceived notions of religious affiliation, power, and group delimitations. At the social level, the extract represents ideological constructions of majority-minority relations where the numerical dominance is correlated to the social power. The collective expression of the majority group by the use of pronouns like 'they' and by mentioning that 'many people' are doing it fits into the ideological square of Teun A. van Dijk (1998), where the out-group is frequently discussed in terms of the negative identity while in-group take the moral stance and assert positive identity. The minority character 'Tahir' is individualized and humanized in the sense that he is named, and directly addressed, whereas the mass of the majority is depicted as a mass that is emotionally homogenized. This representation creates unequal power relations where the power is created not by institutional legitimacy but by the collective emotionality and the numbers.

The discussion, therefore, reflects the social realities of the minorities who tend to be at a disadvantage in the social sphere being socially weak and usually forced to negotiate or restrain in order to survive. In addition, the extract shows how fear operates ideologically as a process of behavior control under unequal power relations. The recurring phrases of fear and warning make self-restraint normal, and the argument is that the minority only feels safe when it is less noticeable or unactive during times of communal tension. It coordinates with the idea by Fairclough (2003) who argues that through discourse, social inequalities tend to be naturalized through the provision of reasons. The extract is also indicative of a wider socio-political ideology on the subject of religious identity and the social space. The "mosque" is not only a spatial area but a symbolic one which is considered to be a common religious space and the church is a marker of the minority space. The "Pastor's" movement beyond the building is discursively positioned as a threat, which signifies power relations present within the public space and movement in it. Generally, on the interpretive and social levels, the extract illustrates that language creates and strengthens ideological meanings of religious difference, collective authority and minority insecurity. The discussion is not just an account of an event, but it also recreates social presumptions regarding power, fear and social hierarchy, thus presents wider tensions in the society, through the discourse of religion and politics.

Excerpt 4 :

"The man told him to get out and pray to our own God for help Tahir replied. "And, he said not to come worrying them with the problems of people who live in houses like these."

Textual Analysis

The use of the term "our own God" serves as a literal designation for the division of religious communities and creates a boundary line between religious communities. The collective ownership of religious identity is created through the possessive pronoun "our" that creates an implied exclusion of 'Tahir' from the religious group of the speaker. This brings about a clear in-group, out-group boundary. Directive discourse is found in the imperative form of the precept "get out and pray" which means the actions take place on the basis of authority and control. The clause is not characterized by any mitigation and politeness signs, which indicate high certainty and preeminence. On the same note, the term "not to come worrying them" creates the sense that the minority group is considered as illegitimate or burdensome. The adverbial clause "houses like

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these” brings in the socio-economic analysis, as the difference in classes and the minority group asserts privilege or the unwarranted status. Use of these language selections demonstrates that the discourse is a mixture of religious and social classification which build exclusion.

Discursive Analysis

On the discursive practice level, the extract represents the ways of generating and comprehending meaning, using the available discourses in the socio-cultural setting of the novel. This assertion is based on familiar religious rhetoric where communities are represented as autonomous units that possess unique religious identifications and liabilities. The term “our own God” assumes cultural familiarity that religious organizations are fragmented and the religious identity is the main determiner of social membership. The discussion also relies on the daily stories where minority interests are discussed as something outward to the interests of the rest of the society. Interpretatively, the extract undermines the religious discrimination and highlights communal differentiation in which religious identity emerges as a leading organizing principle between them. In the same way, the extract shows class discrimination which creates a boundary between poor people of Yusufabad colony and wealthy Plaza group people.

Explanation

On the social practice level, the extract is a measure of broader ideological structures that are based on religious dominance, exclusion and unequal social positioning. The distinction between the language of ‘us’ and ‘your’ asserts religious identity that helps in the establishment of the social order between the majority and the minority communities. The power is supported by discourse that makes the exclusion to be rational or natural, which legitimizes unequal access to a social recognition and compassion. This is in line with the understanding of Michel Foucault (1972) which describes discourse as a tool that operates power to establish inclusion and exclusion in social space. More so, the fact that the minority concerns are being framed as unwarranted can be seen as a result of ideological practices outlined by Teun A. van Dijk (1998), where the interests of dominant groups are reserved while the interests of out-groups are marginalized. Through this, the extract demonstrates the overall contribution of the everyday language in the reproduction of larger social inequalities and religious power imbalance.

Excerpt 5.

“That's black too, this whole twisted religiosity. It's blacker than anything else.”

Textual Analysis

The adjective ‘twisted’ in the term “twisted religiosity” depicts religion as being perverted and invalid that build clear position of evaluation. The use of negative metaphor “black” describes the darker side of religious immorality and the intensification that “it is blacker than anything else” in the comparative form emphasize the extremity of the perceived corruption. The demonstrative “this whole” captures the focus to a certain form of religiosity, and puts the criticism in a definite, recognizable theme. Lack of hedging or alleviation in the language carries an epistemic certainty, which states the judgment as being absolute and irrefutable.

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Discursive Analysis

At the level of discursive practice, the extract is based on socially recognized religious and moral discourses to create meaning. The concept of “twisted religiosity” assumes that the reader should know religiosity as morally relevant sphere, and faith may be legitimate or twisted. It is the moral analysis that ‘Sher’ uses this metaphor to set up morally charged scenario which places him as a morally critical spectator. The extract, enrolls interdiscursive aspects of religious, moral and evaluative discourse thereby enabling readers to perceive religiosity as a locus of ideological and social conflicts.

Explanation

The extract has broader ideological and power set ups at the social level. The criticism of twists in religion points out the fact that religion is sometimes used as a tool of social control and power which agrees with the idea of Michel Foucault (1972), that discourse creates power through the process of determining legitimate and illegitimate forms of knowledge and belief. The reasoning of “Tahir” has placed him in the role of an ethically conscious person who questions distorted religious authority and draws attention to the possible harm of its abuse. Moral hierarchies and social boundaries in the discourse create the invalidity of some religious practices and the legitimacy of others, which determines social inequalities and community conflicts. The extract through its portrayal of religious situation, recreates ideologies that challenge the established social power and exclusionary practices that uncover the convergence of religious discourse, authority, and social regulation in the narrative world of the novel.

Excerpt 6

“On the whole, they seemed to have read neither the arguments nor the timeline we presented, and if they did, they did not understand them, even though we presented all written matter in Urdu as well as English they obviously simply skimmed over it, if that. We knew none of it was easy to prove, but we saw no inclination to even try, and there were no senior officials, no powerful persons living at Yusufabad to provide an incentive.”

Textual Analysis

There are evaluative and judgmental words in the extract that highlight the idea of neglect and incompetence like “skimmed over it” and “no inclination to even try.” The use of terms such as “obviously” and “simply” is a way of making the criticism more critical, being sure that there is no effort or care being put in by authorities. The use of pronouns “they” and “we” represent a distinct separation of the actors: the officials or elite persons “they” and the representatives of the minority group or victims “we”. Asymmetry is stressed in this binary, in that one group is active in the decision-making, whereas the other group is marginalized, and struggling for justice. The syntax of the sentence is mostly complicated and there are embedded clauses in the forms of all written material in both the Urdu and English language, which gives a detailed thinking and an evidentiary impression. It is indicative of the fact that the narrator tries to put the grievance in a systematic way through justification of their claim which helps to increase the procedural rationality that is disregarded by the authorities. The phrase “they obviously simply skimmed over it” and “we saw no inclination to even try” shows high epistemic confidence, in which the inabilities of authority are proven with facts. The structural ineffectiveness is exaggerated with the repetition of the negation

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wording such as “no senior officials, no powerful persons”, etc., that display the lack of institutional support, emphasize structural ineffectiveness and support the evaluative tone of the extract.

Discursive Analysis

At the discursive practice level, the extract uses the institutional and bureaucratic discourse in generating meaning. It is assumed that the institutions should offer support to the oppressed community and that the written evidence should be heard through mutual social beliefs regarding the concept of fairness, responsibility, and procedural fairness. The recurring stress on the attempts to speak more than one language (Urdu and English) help to understand seriousness of situation. The discussion presents the actions of the officials as dismissive and creates a counter-discursive analysis of bureaucratic authority. The extract shows that powerful people can suppress the voices of inferior group of society even written evidence, can be overlooked when power dynamics facilitates one certain group.

Explanation

The extract at the level of social practice indicates the extended ideological and social organization in terms of institutional authority, power imbalance, and marginalization. This is because of the unwillingness of the officials to engage with evidence and initiate actions which shows how power is concentrated among the senior individuals and how the minority or less powerful ones are vulnerable. This is in line with the idea introduced by Michel Foucault (1997) that power is exercised in an invisible manner through institutional processes (Sargiacomo, 2009). The recurrent lack of senior officials and powerful persons depicts structural inequality where the unstated and un-authoritative group is marginalized systematically. Ideologically, the extract reminds us that bureaucracy can sanction exclusion and make neglect seems normal or unavoidable and represent social hierarchies embedded in institutional forms. Ideologically, the extract shows how bureaucratic speech may make exclusion normal, seem ordinary or as a matter of course, and how social inequalities are internalized in institutional set-ups. It proves that even formal or neutral spaces, e.g., the delivery of evidence, official documents, etc., are influenced by power relations contributing to the affirmation of bigger inequalities within society.

5. Discussion

This study has discussed the construction of power and the social identities in *The Parking Lot* in terms of Critical Discourse Analysis. The analysis shows that, power in the novel is not only symbolized by physical dominance but is formed discursively through language, institutional power, religious affiliation, and the ability to control the information. The majority is often portrayed as mass, emotionally homogenous, and numerically strong, conversely the characters in the minority are individualized, frail, and put in a defensive or reactive role. The results also indicate that the discourse of religion is an indicator of identity formation in which the labels of religion take over the identity of an individual and serve to strengthen social boundaries. At the same time, the institutional and bureaucratic discourse represents the sources of power imbalance that involve silence, sluggish reaction, and partial acceptance of the legitimacy. The failure to intervene officially and the regulation of information only enhance the marginalization of the minority communities. Overall, the novel illustrates the ways in which discourse presents an aspect of inequality in social relations by posing fear, exclusion and institutional neglect. The power

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between the dominant and the marginalized populations is deeply entrenched in the linguistic representation of their life. And, social identities are formed in a manner that perpetuates ideological boundaries between the dominant and marginalized groups.

6. Conclusion

The discussion indicates that *The Parking Lot* sets a discourse that reflects the religious and class discrimination present in the society and describes ideological implications of power dynamics. The mention of collective pronouns and emotional descriptive structures are used to identify the majority as strong and collectivized, while minority characters are viewed through the prism of fear, warning, and helplessness. In the framework of Michel Foucault (1972), power in the novel is not only executed through explicit coercion but through the discursive practices, which define the legitimacy, knowledge and authority. The existence of institutional silence, the bureaucratic neglect, and control of official information prove that power functions invisibly within the systems of control that decides who is heard and whose concerns are to be ignored. The discussion about official documentation and officiality define that institutional structures are places where power is indirectly practiced. Also, the analysis proves the Norman Fairclough (2003) ideology, who believes that discourse mirrors and reproduces social inequalities. Ideological naturalization of unequal relations is also promoted by the normalization of fear, anticipation of minorities being submissive, and labeling exclusion as a sensible reaction. Religious discourse especially becomes one of the primary means of forming some social boundaries and identity is formed through opposition, not coexistence.

The fact that power is multidimensional in the novel is also discussed as it comes out in various places such as numeric hegemony, emotional mobilization, religious power, and institutional control of the information. Political power does not just exist as form of governance but also as administrative practices and economic interests that determine urban space and displacement. The narrative demonstrates that there are other discursive sites on which the marginalized groups are attempting to negotiate power, namely the normal conversations, gossip, and informal communication forms. In this way, the novel is resonating with the wider socio-cultural realities, where discourse plays a significant role in determining the notions of legitimacy, belonging, and social stratification. The findings contribute to the prevailing knowledge about Critical Discourse Analysis since they reveal how the literary discourse could reveal the confrontations of ideologies underlying the social and religious relations.

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