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Negotiating Identity: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Postcolonial Themes in Pakistani Literature

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Abstract: This study critically examines the representation of identity and postcolonial themes in Pakistani literature through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Using Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA, the research explores selected texts by prominent Pakistani authors, including *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid, *Cracking India* by Bapsi Sidhwa, and *Burnt Shadows* by Kamila Shamsie. The study focuses on key postcolonial concepts such as cultural hybridity, identity crisis, power dynamics, and resistance against colonial legacies. The findings reveal that Pakistani literature employs specific linguistic strategies, including symbolism, multivocal discourse, and fragmented narratives, to articulate the struggles of identity negotiation in a postcolonial world. Through these texts, Pakistani authors challenge dominant colonial discourses, reclaim indigenous histories, and reflect on the sociopolitical transformations shaping modern Pakistan. The research underscores the role of literature as a powerful medium for asserting cultural identities, amplifying marginalized voices, and addressing the lingering effects of colonialism.

Keywords: Postcolonial Literature, Critical Discourse Analysis, Identity Negotiation, Cultural Hybridity



1. Introduction

Postcolonial literature serves as a powerful medium for writers from previously colonized nations to explore the lingering effects of colonial rule on their societies, cultures, and identities (Nayar, 2008). It provides a voice to the silenced, challenges dominant historical narratives, and critically engages with issues of identity negotiation, resistance, and power dynamics. In the case of Pakistani literature, particularly literature written in English, this role becomes even more significant. The complexities of Pakistan's colonial past, partition, and post-independence struggles have shaped a unique literary landscape that reflects socio-political anxieties and cultural reformation (Saeed, 2012). Pakistani literature operates within what Homi K. Bhabha terms the "Third Space"—a space of cultural and linguistic hybridity where conflicting identities and histories meet, merge, and evolve (Naik, 2019). This hybridity arises from the intersection of indigenous traditions, colonial legacies, and contemporary global influences. Authors like Mohsin Hamid, Bapsi Sidhwa, and Kamila Shamsie use their works to address themes such as identity crisis, cultural displacement, and resistance to hegemony. Their texts often serve as sites of negotiation where individuals grapple with their dual realities—being shaped by both colonial ideologies and local traditions (Thomas, 1994). In this context, Pakistani writers employ specific linguistic and narrative strategies to reclaim their voices and resist cultural domination. Through literature, they critique imperialism, highlight socio-political injustices, and explore the fragmentation of identity brought about by historical upheavals such as the British colonial rule and the 1947 partition. These narratives reflect how the nation and its people constantly renegotiate their place in a postcolonial world, balancing between cultural authenticity and modernity. This study applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a methodological framework to investigate how Pakistani authors engage with postcolonial themes. CDA (Pasha, 2022), developed by scholars such as Norman Fairclough, provides a critical lens to analyze the interplay between language, discourse, and power. Specifically, it examines how linguistic choices and narrative structures construct identities, challenge colonial discourses, and reflect deeper socio-political anxieties. By analyzing texts such as *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, *Cracking India*, and *Burnt Shadows* (Bisht, 2006), this research uncovers how Pakistani literature acts as a vehicle for negotiating identity, resisting cultural hegemony, and addressing the complex realities of postcolonial Pakistan.

The primary focus of this study is to:

- Explore the linguistic strategies employed by Pakistani authors to negotiate identity.
- Investigate how narrative discourses resist colonial ideologies and assert local histories.
- Reflect on the socio-political challenges embedded within postcolonial Pakistani literature.

Ultimately, this research highlights the significance of Pakistani literature as a discursive space where the struggles of identity, power, and cultural hybridity are brought to light, providing deeper insight into the evolving postcolonial consciousness of Pakistan and its people.



2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial theory critically examines the historical, cultural, and political impacts of colonialism on previously colonized societies (Ashcroft et al., 2013). Developed and popularized by influential scholars like Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, it interrogates the legacies of colonial rule, including cultural displacement, identity struggles, and the power dynamics embedded in dominant discourses.

Hybridity (Homi K. Bhabha)

Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity refers to the cultural blending or mixing that occurs when colonized and colonizer cultures interact. Hybridity disrupts notions of pure or fixed identities, producing something new that challenges cultural binaries. In postcolonial societies like Pakistan, hybridity manifests in language, traditions, and identities that reflect both indigenous culture and colonial influences (Sandhu & Higgins, 2016).

For example:

- The use of English language in Pakistani literature reflects a hybrid identity where local narratives are expressed using a colonial language.
- Characters in postcolonial texts often grapple with conflicting identities shaped by their cultural heritage and colonial experiences.

Bhabha argues that this hybrid space—what he calls the "Third Space"—is where resistance to colonial ideologies and the reformation of identity occur. It allows colonized people to redefine themselves, neither fully adopting the colonizer's identity nor completely abandoning their indigenous roots.

Orientalism (Edward Said)

Edward Said's concept of Orientalism critiques the way Western discourse constructs the "Orient" (Eastern societies) as exotic, inferior, and uncivilized to justify colonial domination (Warraq, 2010). In his groundbreaking book *Orientalism* (1978), Said argues that the West portrays the East as the "other," a homogeneous entity that is backward and irrational (Arafat & Awan).

Key points:

- Orientalism perpetuates stereotypes about Eastern cultures to maintain Western superiority.
- It constructs binaries such as "civilized West" vs. "uncivilized East", reinforcing colonial ideologies.

For instance, in Pakistani literature, writers often challenge Orientalist representations by subverting stereotypes and reclaiming their narratives. Through local voices and perspectives, they dismantle Western discourses that undermine their culture and identity.



Subaltern (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak)

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of the subaltern refers to marginalized groups in society who are denied access to dominant discourse and power (Spivak, 2023). Subalterns, such as the colonized, women, or the poor, are voiceless within systems controlled by the powerful elite.

Spivak famously questions, "*Can the subaltern speak?*", highlighting how colonial and patriarchal structures silence the voices of the marginalized. Even when subalterns speak, their voices are often mediated or distorted through dominant frameworks.

In Pakistani literature, authors like Bapsi Sidhwa and Kamila Shamsie give a platform to subaltern voices, such as women and oppressed groups, enabling them to articulate their experiences and resist erasure from history. By centering these voices, postcolonial writers challenge the hegemonic discourse and amplify the perspectives of the marginalized.

2.2 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a method for analyzing how language, power, and ideology are interconnected in texts (Ar, 2015). Developed by scholars like Norman Fairclough, CDA provides a systematic approach to uncovering how discourse shapes and reflects social realities, particularly in postcolonial contexts.

Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA consists of:

Text Analysis (Linguistic Features): This level focuses on the textual aspects of discourse, such as vocabulary, grammar, metaphors, and narrative style (Toolan, 2016). In postcolonial literature, linguistic choices—like code-switching between languages, use of local idioms, and symbolic imagery—reflect struggles of identity negotiation and cultural resistance.

1. **Discursive Practice (Production and Consumption of Texts):** This dimension examines how texts are produced, distributed, and consumed in society. It considers the role of authors, readers, and publishers in shaping discourse (Murray, 2018). For instance, Pakistani writers producing literature in English are influenced by both local and global audiences, creating discourses that navigate between two cultural contexts.

2. **Social Practice (Sociocultural Context):** At this level, texts are analyzed within their broader sociocultural and historical contexts (Kaplan & Grabe, 2002). It explores how discourse reinforces or challenges social structures and power relations. In Pakistani literature, this could include addressing the aftermath of colonialism, the Partition, gender inequalities, and class struggles.

By applying Fairclough's CDA model, this study systematically examines how Pakistani authors use discourse to:

- Critique colonial power structures.
- Navigate hybrid identities influenced by both indigenous and colonial cultures.
- Amplify marginalized voices and resist dominant ideologies.



3. Literature Review

Postcolonial literature has been widely recognized as a significant medium for exploring identity, resistance, and the effects of colonial rule (Jefferess, 2008). In the context of Pakistani literature, writers such as Mohsin Hamid, Bapsi Sidhwa, and Kamila Shamsie play a pivotal role in articulating themes related to identity formation, cultural hybridity, and power dynamics. This section examines previous research on these themes, highlighting their significance while identifying gaps in the application of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to Pakistani literature (Khan, 2023).

Identity Crisis: Conflicts Between Tradition and Modernity

The theme of identity crisis is central to postcolonial literature, reflecting the tension between traditional cultural values and modern influences brought about by colonial rule and globalization (Gikandi, 2001). Pakistani literature frequently portrays characters torn between:

1. Indigenous roots (tradition, local customs, and values).
2. Colonial legacies (Western education, ideologies, and languages).

For instance, in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the protagonist Changez experiences an identity conflict as he navigates life in the West while grappling with his Pakistani heritage (Ahmed, 2024). His journey reflects the psychological struggle of postcolonial subjects, who are often forced to reconcile two conflicting worlds. Similarly, Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* highlights the Partition as a site of identity fragmentation, where characters are forced to redefine themselves amidst political and cultural upheaval (Dabhi, 2017).

Scholars argue that these narratives mirror the collective experience of postcolonial nations, where identity becomes fluid and unstable due to historical trauma and ongoing cultural negotiations (Cooppan, 2009). However, existing studies often focus on thematic analysis rather than the linguistic strategies used to construct these conflicts, creating a research gap that this study aims to address.

Cultural Hybridity: Intersection of Indigenous and Colonial Cultures

Cultural hybridity, as defined by Homi K. Bhabha, refers to the blending of indigenous traditions and colonial influences, resulting in the creation of new cultural identities (Amoamo, 2011). This hybrid space challenges the binaries of colonizer/colonized and allows postcolonial subjects to redefine themselves.

Pakistani literature frequently explores this hybridity through language, settings, and character development. For example:

- Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* portrays characters whose identities are shaped by multiple cultural influences, including colonial histories, war, and migration.
- Writers often use code-switching (shifting between English and local languages) as a literary tool to reflect hybrid identities.

Cultural hybridity in Pakistani literature highlights the adaptive nature of postcolonial identities, showcasing how individuals resist cultural domination by embracing a mix of traditions and modernity



(Ahmed, 2024). However, while cultural hybridity has been explored thematically, its linguistic and discursive manifestations remain underexamined. Applying CDA can reveal how language itself becomes a site of resistance and negotiation in these texts.

Power and Resistance: Rejection of Colonial Narratives and Reassertion of Local Identities

Postcolonial literature often challenges colonial power structures by rejecting imperial narratives and asserting local histories, voices, and identities (Ashcroft et al., 2003). Pakistani writers reclaim their narratives through:

1. Subverting Orientalist stereotypes that portray Eastern societies as inferior or backward.
2. Giving voice to marginalized groups, such as women, minorities, and the subaltern.

For example:

- Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* critiques colonial and patriarchal systems, amplifying the experiences of women during the Partition.
- Mohsin Hamid deconstructs Western perceptions of terrorism and identity in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, offering a counter-narrative to dominant discourses.

Through their works, Pakistani authors resist cultural hegemony and assert their agency. By using literary devices such as symbolism, irony, and multivocal narratives, they challenge the lingering influence of colonial ideologies and reestablish local voices as central to their stories.

Research Gap: Need for Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

While previous studies have explored postcolonial themes such as identity crisis, cultural hybridity, and power dynamics in Pakistani literature, a detailed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) remains underexplored (Waibel, 2016). Most research focuses on thematic or narrative analyses without systematically examining:

1. The linguistic choices authors make to construct postcolonial identities.
2. How discourse reflects and challenges power relations in sociocultural contexts.

By applying Norman Fairclough's CDA framework, this study addresses this gap, offering a textual, discursive, and sociocultural analysis of Pakistani literature. CDA enables a deeper understanding of how language and discourse function as tools for:

- Negotiating identity.
- Resisting colonial and cultural domination.
- Reflecting socio-political anxieties.

4. Research Objectives

The study aims to:

1. Analyze how postcolonial themes are represented in selected Pakistani literary texts.

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2. Investigate the linguistic strategies used to negotiate identity and resist colonial ideologies.
 3. Examine the sociocultural implications of these discourses.

5. Methodology

5.1 Data Selection

The study focuses on selected works from Pakistani authors, including:

- "*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*" by Mohsin Hamid
- "*Cracking India*" by Bapsi Sidhwa
- "*Burnt Shadows*" by Kamila Shamsie

5.2 Analytical Framework

The analysis follows Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model to uncover:

- **Linguistic Features:** Lexical choices, metaphors, and narrative style.
- **Discursive Practices:** How texts reflect cultural hybridity and resistance.
- **Social Practices:** Contextual factors shaping identity negotiation.

6. Analysis and Discussion

6.1 Hybridity and Identity Crisis

In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Hamid highlights the **cultural hybridity** of the protagonist, Changez, who grapples with conflicting identities. Through the second-person narrative, Hamid creates an intimate yet fragmented discourse that reflects Changez's internal struggle between his Pakistani roots and Western ideals.

Example: "I lacked a stable core. I was not certain where I belonged."

The use of **ambiguous language** symbolizes the protagonist's fractured identity in a postcolonial world.

6.2 Power and Resistance

Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* portrays the violent partition of India and Pakistan through the lens of a young girl, Lenny. The text critiques the colonial **divide-and-rule policy** and exposes the lasting scars of imperialism.

Sidhwa employs vivid imagery and metaphors to resist colonial discourses and reclaim indigenous narratives.

Example: "The line that divides us was drawn with blood."

The text becomes a site of resistance where colonial legacies are questioned and local histories are reclaimed.



6.3 Reclaiming Indigenous Voices

In *Burnt Shadows*, Kamila Shamsie explores transnational identities and postcolonial trauma. By intertwining histories of colonialism, war, and migration, Shamsie highlights the resilience of subaltern voices.

Shamsie's use of **multivocality**—multiple perspectives within the narrative—challenges Eurocentric histories and reasserts marginalized experiences.

Example: "Our histories are not yours to erase."

The linguistic strategies reflect a collective reclaiming of cultural identity.

7. Findings

The analysis of Pakistani literature using Critical Discourse Analysis reveals that authors strategically employ linguistic and literary tools to negotiate postcolonial themes. These tools serve to reflect cultural hybridity, resist colonial legacies, and reconstruct fragmented identities. The following key findings emerge:

1. Ambiguous Narratives: Reflecting Identity Fragmentation

Ambiguity in narratives is a deliberate literary strategy that mirrors the fragmented and unstable nature of postcolonial identity. Pakistani authors often create characters and plots that blur clear boundaries between cultural, political, and personal identities. This technique reflects the psychological conflict faced by individuals torn between colonial influences and indigenous traditions.

For example:

- In **Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist***, the protagonist Changez's shifting perspective creates ambiguity about his loyalty to the West and his Pakistani roots. The narrative leaves readers questioning his intentions and identity, reflecting the fluid and unstable nature of postcolonial subjectivity.
- **Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*** employs an ambiguous timeline and perspective to connect characters across multiple historical events, showcasing how colonial histories continue to disrupt identities across generations.

By using ambiguous narratives, Pakistani writers highlight the internal conflicts of postcolonial individuals and the complexities of cultural hybridity. This strategy forces readers to engage with the uncertainty and complexity inherent in identity negotiation.

2. Symbolism and Metaphors: Critiquing Colonial Legacies

Pakistani literature frequently uses symbolism and metaphors to critique the lingering impacts of colonialism, such as cultural erasure, political domination, and social inequality. These literary devices allow writers to communicate deep-seated anxieties and resistance without directly confronting dominant ideologies.



Examples include:

- Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* uses the symbol of Partition (the literal division of land and people) to represent the fragmentation of identity and community caused by colonial interference. The broken relationships and violence symbolize the rupture of a once-shared cultural and historical past.
- In Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the twin towers of the World Trade Center symbolize Western power and its destruction, while the protagonist's beard becomes a metaphor for embracing a cultural identity often vilified by the West.
- Kamila Shamsie's repeated use of fire and shadows in *Burnt Shadows* symbolizes both the destruction caused by war and colonialism and the lingering trauma that shapes postcolonial subjects.

Symbolism and metaphors allow Pakistani writers to critique colonial legacies while also reflecting the emotional and psychological consequences of imperialism. These tools provide a subtle yet powerful discourse for resistance and identity reconstruction.

3. Multivocal Discourse: Amplifying Marginalized Voices

Multivocal discourse refers to the presence of **multiple voices** or perspectives within a text, particularly those of marginalized groups such as women, the subaltern, and cultural minorities. Pakistani literature often amplifies these voices to challenge dominant narratives and reclaim agency for historically silenced communities.

Key examples include:

- In **Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India***, the narrative is told through the lens of a child, Lenny, who observes the Partition's impact on women, servants, and minorities. This multivocal approach highlights the suffering and resilience of marginalized groups often overlooked in dominant historical accounts.
- **Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*** and *Burnt Shadows* incorporate the perspectives of individuals across cultures and generations, including women, migrants, and war survivors. By giving voice to these characters, Shamsie challenges the homogeneity of postcolonial discourse and foregrounds diverse experiences.
- In **Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West***, multivocality emerges through characters from different regions, reflecting the globalized nature of identity and displacement in postcolonial societies.

Multivocal discourse serves as a counter-hegemonic strategy, allowing marginalized voices to be heard, recognized, and valued. By integrating multiple perspectives, Pakistani literature resists the monolithic representations imposed by colonial ideologies and creates space for authentic, localized narratives.

Postcolonial Themes Addressed

The strategies of ambiguous narratives, symbolism/metaphors, and multivocal discourse collectively negotiate the following postcolonial themes:



1. **Cultural Hybridity:** Characters and narratives embody cultural hybridity, reflecting the fusion and tension between indigenous and colonial influences. The use of multiple languages, symbols, and fragmented identities underscores this theme.

2. **Resistance to Colonial Legacies:** Through subtle symbolism, counter-narratives, and marginalized perspectives, Pakistani literature critiques colonial ideologies and asserts local histories and identities.

Identity Reconstruction: By reflecting fragmented identities and presenting hybrid realities, authors explore the processes through which individuals and societies reconstruct their cultural

3. Personal identities in a postcolonial world.

8. Conclusion

Pakistani literature serves as a critical site for negotiating identity in a postcolonial context. Through linguistic and narrative strategies, authors resist colonial ideologies, reclaim indigenous voices, and articulate cultural anxieties. Applying CDA has revealed the complex interplay between language, power, and identity in Pakistani literary texts. Future research can expand on other postcolonial texts and explore comparative analyses across South Asian literature. By doing so, scholars can further uncover how literature shapes and challenges global narratives of identity and power.

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