

Challenging Oppressive Norms to Reclaim Agency: A Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis of Mastur's *The Women's Courtyard* and *A Promised Land*

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Abstract

*The study attempts to investigate the complex interplay of gender and power dynamics in Khadija Mastur's novels *The Women's Courtyard* (2018) and *A Promised Land* (2019), translated into English by Daisy Rockwell. The study examines how female characters, through linguistic choices, negotiate and resist oppressive norms of society by challenging conventional gender roles, reclaiming agency, and negotiating their positions during the partition era. Lazar's Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis was used as a lens to unveil gender-based power relationships within Mastur's novels. To analyze lexical and grammatical choices, Fairclough's three-dimensional model was used to uncover how language legitimizes, sustains, and resists patriarchy that systemically affects the very fabric of society. The three dimensions of this model focus on the functions of language, the production and interpretation of discourse, and the social practices that influence the discourse. The findings of this study highlight that through the use of different lexical choices such as verbs, phrases, metaphors, and symbols, Mastur has depicted the struggle of her female characters living in a patriarchal system to challenge and negotiate societal norms and reclaim their agency.*

Keywords: FCDA, gender inequality, power dynamics, linguistic strategies, etc.

Introduction:

The partition of the sub-continent is considered one of the most significant events in world history. It caused the division of the Indian subcontinent and the emergence of two separate countries Pakistan and India. The partition headed to massive population displacements, with

millions of people evacuated from their homes and forced to migrate across the newly drawn boundaries. They also witnessed their challenges, struggles, and bloodshed (Henderson, 1953). In the era of partition, women, especially, faced a lot of difficulties through rape and abduction. A large number of women were sexually assaulted, tortured, gang raped, and murdered during the partition. Anjali Datta (2006) describes that women were the main target of violence and torture in the era of partition as she states, “Amidst communal turmoil, women were targeted as the chief victims of humiliation at the hands of the men of rival communities”. They also faced a lot of difficulties and struggled to survive in male-dominated societies after the partition, highlighting their mistreatment as inferior beings in the Indian subcontinent. This unforgettable historical moment of partition has been talked about by many writers, including Bapsi Sidhwa in ‘Ice Candy Man’ (1989), Khushwant Singh’s ‘Train to Pakistan (1956), and Manohar Malgaonkar’s ‘A Bend in the Ganges (1964). Khadija Mastur has also witnessed this historical moment, and she has described her experiences and observations very skillfully in her writings.

Khadija Mastur (1927-1982) is a renowned Pakistani Urdu writer who witnessed the whole era of partition by herself and felt the difficulties and struggles of the migrants because she also migrated to Lahore after the partition of the Indian subcontinent. She won the Adamjee Literary Prize for her most famous novel, “Aangan (1962)”. Her works not only explore the evolving sociopolitical environment of Pakistan but also delve deeply into the inner lives of her female characters, exposing their challenges, desires, and silent yet persistent acts of defiance in a completely patriarchal society. Patriarchy is a system of unequal power distribution within the society through which men hold all the powers and females are considered inferior. Women are suppressed and subjugated by men in the traditional patriarchal system (Imran, 2019).

Khadija Mastur's literary legacy transcends linguistic barriers through the translated versions of her works. “The Women’s Courtyard (2018)” originally published in Urdu as “Aangan” (1962) is considered to be one of the most incredible works of literature by its readers. It is a literary

masterpiece and was translated into English by an American translator, Daisy Rockwell, in 2018 under the title of “The Women’s Courtyard.” The novel reflects the inner lives of women within the confines of their courtyards in the patriarchal society during the era of partition. Rockwell (2018) describes that “In ‘The Women’s Courtyard,’ Mastur paints a detailed and unforgiving portrait of the role that women play in perpetuating the rigid bonds of patriarchy and class hierarchy.” The novel depicts the battles and challenges women faced during partition, both internally and externally. Swamy (2019) describes the novel as an indictment of a patriarchal system as much as it is a comment on the fragmenting of nations. The whole novel revolves around the moral growth and transformation of the protagonist, Aliya, who is confined within the four walls of the courtyard but still wishes to be an independent girl, surpassing societal limitations. The story also includes other interesting characters, such as Chammi, who is more adventurous than Aliya. Unlike Aliya, she had close relations with men. She opposed her marriage once she found the differences with her husband and returned to her family, where she found happiness. Therefore, the entire novel centers on the lives and experiences of women, highlighting the power dynamics and gender inequality prevalent in the society. As Khan (2019, p. 250) says, ‘The existing power structure perpetuates the oppression of women.’”

“A Promised Land (2019)” is also a translated version of Mastur’s novel that highlights the social and political transformations in the era of post-partition. The novel was originally published in Urdu in 1983 under the title of “Zameen” and was later translated into English by Daisy Rockwell in 2019. It sheds light on the political and social circumstances that emerged in the aftermath of the partition and its impact on the lives of the people. The novel emphasizes how political oppression and aggression affected women's lives, who were subjected to the repressive mechanisms of power (Akbar, 2019). The character of Sajidah is highlighted throughout the novel. She goes through harassment and physical abuse; therefore, she prefers to marry an unwanted man just to get a shelter/home to be protected from the outside men of society after marriage. As Nazim’s mother said to Sajidah: “You are alone, and the world is full of evil” (Mastur, 2019, p.63). The other character of the novel, Taji, is rescued from the refugee camp, and she also faces sexual challenges and becomes sexual property at the hands of her saviors. The girls are shown as a playful thing of the powerful. They are used by the men, and no

one cares about their agony and pain. As Kazim raped and sexually harassed Taji, and he said: “If I hadn’t made use of Taji, then someone else would have” (Mastur, 2019, p.141). So, the female voices in the book are dominated and have limited voices before the men of society.

Mastur is a skilled writer who portrays the inner lives of her female characters through mesmerizing and gripping storylines and highlights the narratives of power dynamics and gender representation through her writings. She also represents how her female characters resist, subvert, and challenge the normative behaviors of patriarchal society. Rockwell has used contemporary language to translate Mastur’s works and portray the deeply ingrained meanings of her works. She has also highlighted how Mastur has shown power imbalances and gender inequalities during the era of partition through the use of language in her writings. As Fairclough notes, language is a medium through which power can be exerted, providing a way to practice power and coercion in any society (Fairclough, 2015). This study aims to deeply explore the narratives of power dynamics and gender representations within these texts by focusing on the linguistic choices and strategies used by the author to highlight these social and political issues.

Research Objectives:

This study aims to:

- analyze how the dominant power structures and hierarchies are depicted through linguistic choices in Khadija Mastur’s novels, particularly those that focus on gender roles and relationships.
- investigate the female characters’ negotiation and resistance towards traditional gender roles, patriarchy, and societal expectations.
- examine the linguistic strategies used by the author to promote feminist awareness, assert agency, and challenge power dynamics.

Research Questions:

- How do linguistic choices in Khadija Mastur’s novels highlight and reflect dominant power structures and hierarchies, with a specific focus on gender roles and relationships?

- How do the female characters in Khadija Mastur's novels navigate and challenge the traditional gender roles, patriarchy, and societal pressures, demonstrating their agency and resilience against societal expectations?

Literature Review:

Partition of the subcontinent is considered one of the most horrific and catastrophic events in the history of Pakistan. In 1947, the independence of Pakistan came with a price. During the partition, hundreds of thousands of people were killed while millions were rendered homeless. Sarma (2016) describes Siddharta Deb in his novel, "The Point of Return (2002)," sheds light on the enduring impact of partition, a significant historical event that resulted in widespread displacement and identity crises for affected communities.' The narrative delves into the traumatic experiences faced by marginalized groups, highlighting the lasting repercussions of their oppression. Partition, as depicted in the novel, continues to haunt those who were once oppressed, illustrating how its legacy reverberates through generations.

During the partition period, women experienced a greater degree of disruption compared to men, stemming from both internal and external sources. A large number of women were tortured, abducted, gang raped, and killed by the opponents. In the largest migration of people in history, violence against women became the norm. In her seminal work, "The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India" (2013), Butalia (2013) extensively documents the harrowing accounts of sexual assault and violence endured by women during the partition period. She reveals the staggering scale of atrocities, noting that "nearly a hundred thousand women were believed to have been abducted, raped, sometimes sold into prostitution, and sometimes forcibly married" (p.14). A large number of women were abducted, raped and killed during the time of partition. Brownmiller, in her book, "Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape (1993)", explicates the egregious nature of rape, asserting that it "is nothing more than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear."

Various writers have illuminated the pervasive themes of gender and power differentials within their works, often spotlighting the entrenched disparities within patriarchal societies where men wield dominant authority while women are relegated to subordinate roles (Sidhwa et al., etc.).

Through their narratives, these writers offer poignant reflections on issues such as violence, the subjugation of women, and the intricate power dynamics that shape societal structures. Madhavan (2006) examined gender imbalances, sexuality, and violence against women in the Indian subcontinent. She also shows how the violence and sexuality of women symbolically represent the power in the arrangement of gender relations within both the Hindu and Islamic communities of India. “This power also includes the authority over women’s bodies and sexuality exercised through, “traditions [which] inform and control women’s lives from birth to death” (Katrak, 2006).

Men are always preferred and favored in patriarchal structures. They hold all the major positions and authorities within the society, while females are ignored and weakened by such social structures and male superiority. According to Carole Pateman (1988), “The patriarchal construction of the difference between masculinity and femininity is the political difference between freedom and subjection”. Therefore, the women were the main victims during the whole period of partition to exert power over opposite parties. Mahal (2023, p.231) describes; ‘True to its name, Ice Candy Man (1988) makes an honest effort to center the anguish of its female protagonists. All the women in this story are victims of the male-dominated, fundamentalist society created by the novelist's realistic portrayal of the female characters.

The Feminist Movement emerged as a response to male dominance and aimed to achieve gender equality. It can be defined as a “campaign against the political and social inequalities between men and women and the form of academic work which studies and critiques gender inequality” (Longhurst et al., 2017, p.15). Feminism spreads awareness of gender equality and women’s rights. It also motivated the women to raise their voices against patriarchal systems and fight for their rights. Mehmood et al. (2021) describe the effect of feminism on women as ‘they are all aware of themselves and are eager to demand more than their due share. They have been enlightened to get their rights against patriarchy by none other than the feminism theory.’ Many writers including Khadija Mastur worked on the gender and power dynamics and criticized the gender imbalances within the society through their empowered female characters. Rockwell (2018) describes; In ‘The Women’s Courtyard’, ‘Aliya is not a prisoner in the courtyard, in that she attends school outside of the house....spends a year in Aligarh getting a teaching

degree....works outside the house a teacher.’ Thus, Mastur has depicted strong protagonist to promote women empowerment and individuality.

Language contributes meaningfully to the formation of gender identities by shaping the discourses surrounding gender, which are commonly regarded as social practices. Demos & Segal (2001, p.112) state, ‘construction of gender is not a biological phenomenon, like sex may be, but is a socially constructed phenomenon’. This shows that the gender roles, behaviors and identities are not determined by biology, but rather they are influenced by the societal norms and expectations. Therefore, societies negotiate and reinforce the notions of masculinity, femininity and gender roles by examining the diverse gendered discourses.

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis by Lazar combines feminist studies and Critical Discourse Analysis to critically evaluate the relation between gender and notions of power and ideology. It is “concerned with demystifying the interrelationships of gender, power and ideology in discourse” (Lazar, 2005). Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis highlights how the power is exerted, maintained and negotiated within any society by focusing on the linguistic and discursive construction of gender within specific texts and contexts.

Fairclough (1992) introduced the idea that power operates through discourse. He presented a model consisting of three fundamental components: the text, the discursive practices, and the sociocultural practices. Through this framework, he asserted that language is inherently intertwined with social dynamics, acting as both a reflection and a mechanism of power relations within a given context. “Language provides ways to practice power and coercion in any society” (Fairclough, 2015). Fairclough suggested that in order to gain a deeper and critical understanding of how language works in society, it is crucial to analyze and explain the political, economic, and social factors that shape the formation of texts. As Fairclough (1998) stated; "theorization and description of the political, economic and social processes and structures responsible for the production of such texts" are crucial for developing a critical understanding of discourse (Fairclough 1998, 94).

A comprehensive examination of existing literature highlights a recurrent theme of the portrayal of women's suffering and oppression within Pakistani fiction. Many researchers have persistently

analyzed these texts, aiming to investigate the themes of female oppression, marginalization, and patriarchal dominance. However, there remains a notable gap in scholarly research because minimal attention has been given to analyzing the linguistic strategies employed by the authors to depict these themes effectively. Therefore, the current research seeks to address this gap by exploring the intricate and complex linguistic techniques employed by the author to portray the structures of gender and power dynamics.

Research Design:

This study is deductive and qualitative in nature. Data has been collected through the method of purposive sampling. The text of the novels “The Women’s Courtyard (2018)” and “A Promised Land (2019)” has been used as source for data collection. Other literary critiques, feminist theories, relevant scholarly articles and reviews are also consulted to get in-depth understanding of the context. Relevant passages depicting gender and power narratives are extracted from the text on the basis of purposive sampling. The extracted passages are analyzed through Lazar’s lens of ‘Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis’ to highlight the representation of gender and power dynamics through the use of language. Two relevant principles of FCDA; ‘complexity of gender and power relations’ and ‘discourse in (de)construction of gender’ has been used to analyze the text. They highlight the complex relations of gender and power within the society, role of ideology and discourse in the construction or deconstruction of the gender within the society and also the impact of prevalent practices on the future activities of the people within the society. Fairclough’s three-dimensional model has been used as a theoretical framework to analyze the linguistic strategies used by the author in these novels. It helps to analyze the linguistic strategies used by the authors in these novels. It consists of three stages i.e. description, interpretation and explanation which are based on textual analysis, processing analysis and sociocultural analysis respectively.

Analysis/ Findings

1. Partition and Women’s Sufferings

During the Partition era, females faced political turmoil and violence. They were kidnapped, raped and killed by men from the opposite communities. Their bodies were also used by

offenders to prove their dominance and control over the women of the community. Mastur also highlights women's trauma and worsening conditions in her novel to highlight gender-based violence within patriarchal communities during the Partition period. As in her novel “A Promised Land (2019)”, she describes girls as “the most valuable looted goods” when a boy assures a father who is looking for his daughter:

“Baba! Who is the daughter you cry for? That was no daughter, Baba! That was the most valuable of looted goods. Your screaming won’t bring her back. Your voice cannot reach her” (Mastur, 2019, p. 12).

Description (Textual Analysis)

The above passage is a dialogue between the female protagonist and her father, which highlights the intensity of the emotional and psychological pain she endured. The lexical choice “looted goods” depicts the trauma of undergoing suffering and being reduced to a commodity based on the treatment she was subjected to. The word “Baba” was repeatedly used to highlight the vulnerability and helplessness of a girl who experienced emotional agony. Using the verbs “cry” and “scream” underscores the character’s frustration. The powerlessness is also discursively constructed through “your voice cannot reach her,” emphasizing her inability to protect her from predatory men.

Interpretation and Explanation

The intertextual references within the text link it to the events of partition. The use of the term “looted goods” provides an intertextual reference to the conflict and the division of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, when women were abducted, raped, and murdered by men of opposite communities. It enriches the interpretation of the passage by stressing the characters' real-life experiences in a historical era of division and conflict. The interdiscursivity of the text links it to wider discourses of gender, power, and violence, particularly in contexts of war and displacement. By emphasizing that girls are seen as “the most valuable looted goods,” it demonstrates discourses of gendered violence and the exploitation of women. Sociocultural

analysis of the text situates it within broader social and cultural stigmas of gendered violence and power dynamics in patriarchal societies during times of war and displacement.

2. Early Marriage of Girls in Patriarchal Society:

In male-oriented societies, early marriage of the girls is very communal practice. They are not asked for their permission before fixing their marriage. As in the novel “The Women’s Courtyard (2018)”, Kusum talks about her early marriage in the;

“I was fourteen or fifteen year old at that time; I’d been married only three months”
(Mastur, p. 26).

Description (Textual Analysis)

The text includes Kusum’s statement in which she talks about her early marriage at the age of fourteen or fifteen. The author has used the past verbal phrase “I’d been married” to show that the marriage of Kusum had already occurred at the age of fourteen or fifteen years, so it depicts a past event or action. The use of the pronoun “I” gives a tone of personalization to the statement. The terms “fourteen or fifteen” portray the young or early age of Kusum when she was married. The statement has been divided into two parts to clearly depict the relation between early marriage and sufferings of women, as in the first part Kusum talks about her marriage and in the second part of statement she talks about the total period of her marriage indirectly pointing towards the death of her husband and ending of her marriage.

Interpretation and Explanation

The statement portrays the common discourse practice of the early marriage of girls within patriarchal societies. It also highlights the deeper and ingrained meaning of such practices and their effect on the lives of girls. Kusum’s statement highlights the common practice and act of early marriage of girls and also reflects their sufferings and struggles after the marriage. The interdiscursivity of the text relates it to the broader discourses of child marriage and women suppression within the patriarchal discourses and cultures of the societies during the era of partition. The deeper explanation of the text also relates it to the broader social and cultural

discourses of child marriage, gender and power dynamics within a patriarchal society. It also reveals the social structures and patriarchal norms that make certain expectations and practices to be followed by the women/girls of the society.

3. Mistreatment of Widows in Patriarchal society:

Widows face a lot of discrimination and mistreatment within various cultures throughout the world. They are regarded as a sign of bad luck and people try to avoid them by keeping themselves away from them. They feel marginalized and ostracized within society, which also affects their mental health and quality of life within the patriarchal systems. In her novel “The Women’s Courtyard (2018)”, Mastur has significantly illustrated the feelings and emotions of the widows by depicting the emotions of Kusum as a widow. As she states:

“When people learnt I was a widow, they all avoided me” (Mastur, p.26).

She also describes her feelings at the occasion of Holi;

“How I wish I could really play with the colors, Aunty, and wear a colorful sari, it’s such hard work to restrain myself” (Mastur, p.44).

Description (Textual Analysis)

These statements highlight Kusum’s emotions and feelings as a widow in a culturally patriarchal society. The use of the personal pronoun “I” in both statements highlights the personal association and personal experiences of Kusum as a widow. The term “avoided” suggests the social exclusion of widows from the society. The other term, “restraint,” also highlights a sense of restriction and ban on certain actions of widows. The phrases “I wish” and “I could really play” depict the frustration and longing desires of Kusum to play Holi but she is not allowed to celebrate the festivals as normal people of the society. The terms “color” and “colorful” show the intensity of her emotions and desires to play with colors and to wear a colorful sari on the festival of Holi. Therefore, both statements highlight the inner feelings and emotions of Kusum to spend a normal life and to celebrate festivals as a normal person.

Interpretation and Explanation

Both statements highlight the social discrimination and ignorance faced by the widows within a patriarchal society during the era of partition. The first statement highlights the ingrained social and cultural beliefs that associate widowhood with impurity and bad luck. The second statement highlights Kusum's yearnings and desire to play Holi and wear a colorful sari that is prohibited for widows within a patriarchal society. The interdiscursivity of the text also relates it to the wider discourses of downgrading and segregation of women as widows. Kusum facing the traditional ostracism as a widow highlights the suppression of women within the society and indirectly focuses on the male dominance and control over the society. It also highlights the broader discourses of the society focusing on the marginalization and isolation of widows which also influence the use of language to critically challenge the patriarchal norms and to work for the more just and equal society for the widows as well.

4. Silenced Voices of Women

Women have been the major victims throughout the era of partition. They faced marginalization and their voices were silenced and subjugated within the patriarchal societies during the times of partition. Khadija Mastur also highlights the repressed voices of women through her work. As she represents the character 'Chammi' in her novel "The Women's Courtyard (2018)", whose marriage is secretly prearranged by the elders of the family without her knowledge. But when she learnt about her marriage, she walked into her room with her head down. Her aunt said:

"Girls, no matter how mischievous, truly are the cows of God; you may drive them where you want, but they won't say a word" observed aunty, wiping her tears away (Mastur, p.187).

Description (Textual Analysis)

This statement highlights the silenced voices of women in a male-oriented society. The phrase "truly are the cows of God," uses the word "are" to directly associate the girls with cows. The noun "cow" is used to symbolize compliance and submission, highlighting that girls are passive and subservient individuals. The use of the modal verb "may" in the phrase "you may drive them where you want" indicates the authorization or control granted to men to govern and direct the actions and behaviors of girls. Girls' comparison with the cows is also a symbolic device to

indicate their dehumanization and objectification within the patriarchal social cultures that diminishes their status from a respectable member of the family to a domestic animal directed by the powerful authorities of the patriarchal family. The use of transitive verb “want” in the sentence “where you want” symbolizes the authority and control over women's lives and choices, emphasizing the systemic coercion and suppression of women in patriarchal cultures. Therefore, the textual analysis of the statement completely reveals that how Mastur has portrayed the themes of suppression and subjugation through her writings.

Interpretation and Explanation

The statement highlights the discourse practices of power imbalances and gender inequality within patriarchal cultures. In this statement the girls are equated to ‘cows,’ which also symbolizes the normalization of the patriarchal approaches towards female suppression. The text is interdiscursively relevant to the wider discourses of patriarchal differences within the society. It also reflects the discourses of gender, power and religion to convey the superiority of male within the society and to exert their control over females. The socio-cultural analysis of the statement also reveals the deeper meanings of the event by relating it to the broader social and cultural practices and their influence on the attitudes and behaviors of people. By depicting such treatment of women, the statement also highlights the social and cultural ideologies of people that are built through the broader socio-cultural norms and traditions within the patriarchal society.

5. Domestic Violence on Women in Patriarchal Society

Domestic violence was one of the major issues in the patriarchal societies during the era of partition. Khadija Mastur has highlighted the themes of domestic violence through her writings to portray the sufferings of women living in patriarchal societies. In her novel “A Promised Land (2019)”, she shows the domestic violence on the character Lali by her husband Zamindar Sahib. As she writes:

“The Zamindar Sahib would periodically recall the forty acres of land that Lali’s father had promised him for her dowry, but never given him. Then he would take out all his

anger on Lali and beat her to a pulp....she'd examine the fresh blue bruises on her body and weep and curse her father”(Mastur, p.119).

Description (Textual Analysis)

This statement highlights the theme of domestic violence perpetrated by the Zamindar sahib against her wife, Lali. The use of lexical choices such as “beat,” “examine,” “weep,” and “curse” highlights the nature of abuse undergone in this event. The verbal phrase “beat her to a pulp” shows the intensity and severity of the abuse and violence inflicted upon Lali. The use of verb “Beat,” directly highlights the violence and brutality of Zamindar sahib upon Lali. Other verbs/actions such as “weeping” and “cursing” portray Lali’s emotional response towards the violence and abuse which also highlights the psychological impact of abuse and violence on the lives of victims/survivors. In this statement the use of phrase “fresh blue bruises” represents the physical pain and injuries faced by Lali. The term “dowry” works as a metaphor for the commodification of women within patriarchal societies, also highlighting the ways in which women’s bodies and autonomy are treated as property to be exchanged between men. Therefore, the overall statement highlights the harshness and severity of the pain and violence faced by women within the male dominant societies.

Interpretation and Explanation

The statement highlights the extents of domestic violence inflicted upon Lali by her husband, Zamindar Sahib. It shows the systems and cultures of patriarchal societies where women’s actions and bodies are controlled by the men of their house just like Zamindar Sahib who holds all the power over Lali. It also highlights the pain and psychological trauma faced by Lali due to the domestic violence by her husband. The intertextuality of the text also relates it to the treatment/punishment of Salma Aunty by her mother in the novel “The Women’s Courtyard (2018)” by Khadija Mastur, as she also describes the term “beat her to a pulp” “fresh blue bruises” to highlight the violence inflicted upon Salma Aunty for talking to an outside man. Interdiscursivity of the text also relates it to the broader discourses of gender inequality, domestic violence and treatment of women within patriarchal societies. The sociocultural analysis of the text also places it within the broader social and cultural inequalities and power

imbalances within the patriarchal societies. It highlights the broader cultural expectations and norms that prioritize the male authority and control, relegating women to subordinated roles and subjecting them to violence as a means of maintaining dominance.

6. Women's Resistance of Patriarchal Norms

In Mastur's novels, women face restrictions and limitations executed by traditional gender norms. However, they exhibit resilience and agency through their resistance and opposition towards patriarchy. The character of Aliya in the novel "The Women's Courtyard (2018)" exhibits agency and freedom in the face of resistance towards social expectations and constraints. Regardless of the patriarchal norms that dictate her community, she refuses to follow those traditional gender roles to proclaim her own individuality and autonomy by chasing her desire to education and personal growth. The following lines highlight her spirit of self-determination in taking back her agency:

1. *"Go on, cry about everything, fight over everything, I'll just run away from home, Aliya thought to herself with the wisdom of an elder"* (Mastur, p.34).
2. *"Even if ten Jameels came along, do you think I'd let them ruin me?"* (Mastur, p.84).
3. *"Nobody can push me around, I'm not Tehmina!"* (Mastur, p.115).

Description (Textual Analysis)

These statements depict Aliya's negotiation towards traditional patriarchal norms and cultures, by revealing her autonomous decision to take back her power through action. In her first statement, she talks to herself and hints about her future actions. As she says "I'll run away from home," this statement designates her future plans to proclaim agency by running away from home. The use of different verbs such as "cry", "fight" and "runaway" express her inner feelings and desire to escape from these cultural constraints. The verbal phrase "run away from home" also works as a metaphoric statement that underlines Aliya's longing to escape the domineering and oppressive dynamics and traditions of society to achieve self-independence and self-determination. The second statement emphasizes Aliya's determination to defend her-self from the oppressive men who control and undermine women's self-sufficiency within the patriarchal

society. The use of interrogative sentence within the statement i.e. "Do you think I'd let them ruin me?" indicates Aliya's self-assurance and freedom in refusing to be mistreated or oppressed by the men. In this statement, the name "Jameel" serves as a symbolic figure of males representing patriarchal domination or social pressure that strives to control and diminish women's autonomy in society. Aliya's denial to Jameel denotes her sovereignty and opposition to the patriarchal forces and social pressures that seek to control her self-will or power. In the third statement Aliya declares her agency and autonomy by saying that, "Nobody can push me around." She doesn't allow any outside power to control over her life. She also states that, "I'm not Tehmina", which contrasts her personality with her sister Tehmina to show her difference and dissimilarity with her sister who was bound by the restrictions of patriarchy. The use to the personal pronoun "I" emphasizes her individuality and denial towards societal expectations and boundaries of patriarchal systems. Therefore, all the statements portray Aliya's denial towards the social restrictions and also highlight her self-determination to proclaim agency and independence from these patriarchal systems.

Interpretation and Explanation

These statements highlight the self-determination and autonomy of Aliya's character, who rejects all the traditional gender norms and expectations of the male dominance that hinder the personal growth and self-confidence of the females within the patriarchal societies. She rejects all the social Norms and culture that confine the women within the four-walls of the house. In this way, she also refuses to become the victim of such patriarchal Norms and instead she affirms her agency and self-confidence. Her desire to escape from the house also represents the escape from patriarchal boundaries and cultures to make her own path. Her dissimilarity with her sister Tehmina also shows her denial towards the traditional patriarchal norms. The text is interdiscursively related to the broader discourses of women empowerment and gender equality within the society. It also highlights the broader socio-cultural discourses of gender and power dynamics within the society.

7. Sajidah's Self-Confidence and Encouragement

The whole novel “A Promised Land (2019)” highlights the struggles and challenges faced by women during the era of partition, but the protagonist of the novel, Sajidah, is portrayed as a symbol of resilience and agency amidst the societal constraints. Despite the surrounding gender norms and power dynamics within the society, Sajidah shows her self-confidence and determination to defy the patriarchal expectations. The character development of Sajidah throughout the novel highlights her autonomy and resistance towards the traditional gender roles and suppression of women within a patriarchal society. As she states in the novel:

“Don’t you worry about me, I can take care of myself,” she stated with great confidence”
(Mastur, p.34).

“She encouraged herself with the thought that she was Sajidah, and that no one could turn her into a Taji” (Mastur, p.45).

“I’m going. I’m definitely going,” she declared, pushing back her chair loudly” (Mastur, p.63).

Description (Textual Analysis)

The first statement highlights Sajidah’s agency and self-assertiveness by focusing on her determination and autonomy within the novel. The phrasal verb “take care” shows the context of protection and care by portraying agency and self-confidence, as in the phrase, “can take care of myself,” she asserts her agency and autonomy. The use of the modal verb “can” also highlights the capability of Sajidah. The other verbal phrase “don’t worry about me” shows the concern but also focuses on the assertive nature of Sajidah. In the second statement, Sajidah calms herself by assuring her self-independence and her difference from the other character Taji who fall-a-prey to rape and mistreatment. The verbal phrase “she encouraged herself” shows the self-assurance and encouragement of Sajidah also describing her self-identity. The other verbal phrase “no one could turn her into a Taji” also shows her self-assurance and resistance towards the societal pressures. The third statement is structured into two declarative sentences with the repetition of the personal pronouns such as “I’m” to emphasize the self-autonomy of Sajidah. The use of lexical choices such as “definitely” shows the firmness and authenticity within the statement.

The use of verbal phrase “I’m going” represents the commitment of the statement, while the other verbal phrase “I’m definitely going” represents the emphasis and conviction within the statement. Therefore, the whole statement portrays Sajidah’s desires to claim her agency and to make her own path by rejecting the societal obstacles and cultural norms of patriarchal systems.

Interpretation and Explanation

These statements highlight the resistance towards patriarchal norms to claim the self-agency within a patriarchal system. The character of Sajidah is shown as a symbol of women empowerment and agency who rejects all the societal norms of male dominance to claim her autonomy and agency within the patriarchal society. The text is interdiscursively related to the broader discourses of gender equality and women empowerment within the society. The assertiveness and self-assurance of Sajidah represent a denial towards patriarchal cultures by emphasizing the importance of female agency within the society. The socio-cultural analysis of the text relates it to the broader social and cultural practices of patriarchy and male dominance. It also links it with the broader concepts of gender inequality and the struggles for female empowerment within the society. These societal norms and gender inequality also influence the use of language within certain texts that portray the themes of gender inequality and power imbalances within the society. Hence, through the socio-cultural analysis, the texts highlights Mastur’s constant struggle for gender equality and the importance of self-autonomy of women within the patriarchal societies.

Discussion/ Results:

In this research, text was analyzed by using Fairclough’s three-dimensional model to highlight the linguistic strategies used by the author to portray the gender and power dynamics within the patriarchal society during the era of partition. Lazar’s (2005, 2007, and 2014) framework of FCDA is used as a lens to analyze the gender and power narratives within Khadija Mastur’s novels. *“FCDA is a perspective that seeks to examine the complex, subtle, and sometimes not so subtle ways in which frequently taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and power asymmetries get discursively produced, sustained, negotiated, and contested in specific communities and discourse contexts”* (Lazar, 2005). From the five principles of FCDA, the third and fourth

principles, i.e., “Complexity of Gender and Power Relations” and “Discourse in the (De) Construction of Gender” are of vital importance for this research. The principle of FCDA “Complexity of Gender and Power Relations,” focuses on how the power is exerted, maintained, and resisted through a variety of modalities, extents, and degrees of explicitness from context to context. It also highlights the gender asymmetry within society by focusing on the social practices, physical violence against women and girls, and sexual harassment, etc. The other principle of FCDA, “Discourse in the (De) Construction of Gender,” focuses on how the social discourse helps to construct or deconstruct gender by focusing on the gendered and power relationships within the society.

In both her novels, Khadija Mastur has highlighted the power imbalances and gender inequality within society during the era of partition. She has portrayed the challenges and sufferings faced by women in the times of partition. The complexity of gender and power relations is described through the theme of domestic violence upon women within the patriarchal societies such as in the novel “A Promised Land (2019)” violence inflicted upon Lali by her husband highlights the gender inequality within the society. The dominant figures like “Zamindar Sahib” in “A Promised Land (2019)” exert authority and control over the lives of women, i.e., Lali. The texts also highlight the complex relationship of gender and power relations in the treatment of widows within patriarchal societies. The widows are ostracized and isolated within the patriarchal societies. The theme of early marriage also represents the complexity of gender and power relations within patriarchal societies. It also highlights the ways through which patriarchal societies hinder the women’s agency and self-autonomy. Mastur also portrayed the girls as “looted goods” during the era of partition which represents the ways through which women’s bodies are exploited and objectified by the powerful male figures of the society. The women or girls are also represented as “playthings” of the powerful in Mastur’s novel “A Promised Land (2019)”, thus it also shows the exploitation of women at the hands of dominant figures of the society i.e., men. Therefore, the themes such as domestic violence, silencing of women, isolation of widows, rape, abduction of girls, early marriage of girls, and women as ‘looted goods’ or ‘playthings’, etc. highlight the complexity of gender and power relations within the patriarchal societies during the era of partition as highlighted through Mastur’s novels.

FCDA also helps to highlight the discourse in the (de)construction of gender. Mastur shows the construction and deconstruction of gender through the compliance and resistance of her characters' towards traditional gender norms and cultures. She has shown her characters to follow and adhere to the social and patriarchal structures which highlight the construction of gender identities through the various social and cultural discourses within the society. The characters; 'Lali' in the novel "A Promised Land (2019)" is shown as bearing the domestic violence that is considered acceptable within the patriarchal societies, while her husband "Zamindar Sahib" is represented as the traditional authoritative figure who exerts power over Lali. In this event, both the characters, i.e., 'Lali' and 'Zamindar Sahib' are shown as adhered to the existing power structures within the patriarchal society. So, the language and discourse are constructing the gender within the patriarchal contexts. But it also focuses on the role of discourse in the deconstruction of gender, so Mastur's writings also show the deconstruction of gender by highlighting the different experiences of the characters. In her novels, the protagonists "Aliya" and "Sajidah" are shown as determined and autonomous figure because they break the societal norms to assert their agency. Aliya gets a higher education and does a job that shows her defiance of the traditional gender roles and stereotypes of the patriarchal society, while Sajidah is shown as a strong and independent who pursues her education and does a job to run the expenses of her family. Therefore, by depicting the resistance of characters towards the ingrained social practices and the dominant power structures that form the identities, Mastur describes that discourse and language also help to deconstruct gender as well.

Ghosh and Deka (2023) also conducted a research on Mastur's novels "The Women's Courtyard (2018)" and "A Promised Land (2019) to highlight the violence and suppression faced by the women during the time of partition. They also analyzed the experiences of women, both as survivors of partition and patriarchal trauma but the study did not analyze the language choices used by the author to portray the struggles of women. In this way, the current study is different from the previous study conducted by Ghosh & Deka, because it analyzed the use of linguistic choices such as grammar, metaphors, lexical items etc. to portray the challenges and struggles of women in resisting the patriarchal norms and reclaiming their agency.

Rajakumar (2008) also conducted a research on Khadija Mastur's works to highlight the male perspectives of female partition experiences. He did a thematic analysis to highlight the harsh realities and ill-treatment of women during the era of partition. The study has focused on the portrayal of female challenges and male perspectives to depict the themes of rape, abduction and violence, but there is limited focus towards the language used to portray these harsh realities. Therefore, the current study expanded the understanding of themes related to women suppression, negotiation and resistance towards societal norms, by using the lens of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis and also used Fairclough's three-dimensional model to analyze the

Therefore, the present study fills the gap by analyzing the use of linguistic choices in Khadija Mastur's novels to portray the themes of patriarchy, gender and power, and to highlight the women's resistance towards these social structures.

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