

## Critical Discourse Analysis of “The Spirit of the West”

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**Abstract:** *This paper focuses at Critical Discourse Analysis of the essay written by Muhammad Asad. The researcher has tried to explore the experiential values, relational values and expressive values of the discourse through use of personal pronouns, vocabulary choices and textual structures made by the writer to express his ideology and influence his reader.*

**Key words:** *CDA, 3D Model, Experiential values, Relational values, Expressive values.*

### Introduction

Muhammad Asad, was born to Jewish parents in 1900. In 1922 he went to Middle East, got a chance to observe the Arabs that how religion influence their lives and thinking process. He detected internal harmony of in the minds and souls of the Muslims, which would lacked amongst the people of Europe and America. In 1926, he embraced Islam, that finally changed his life, it inspired him of writing texts in conveying certain messages to his readers. The essay “The Spirit of the West” has been taken from his book “Islam at cross roads”, which had been written, when the colonial powers had controlled the Islamic world politically, economically and intellectually. In this essay, “The spirit of the West”, he has made a comparison of Western concept of progress and development with that of Islamic.

The text appears as a site for struggle between Western society and Christian church on one hand, and Western materialism and Islamic spiritualism on the other. The researcher attempts to explain the dialectic relationship between discourse and society, by pointing out how discourse shapes reality, how the ideology of the writer reflected in text through vocabulary choices, and what linguistic patterns have been used to construct the image of the west.

### Research Questions:

- 1- What linguistic patterns have been used to construct the image of the west?
- 2- How is the ideology of the writer reflected in text, through vocabulary choices?

### Research objectives:

1- To explore the linguistic patterns used to construct the image of the west?

2- To analyze how the ideology of the writer is reflected in the text through vocabulary choices?

#### Significance of the study

This research paper contributes to the previous knowledge by focusing and analyzing the text on bases of vocabulary choices. It examines how certain linguistics patterns help the text producer to present his ideology, construct images and identities. It also investigates how persuasive power of language works to influence minds.

#### Research Methodology

Fairclough's 3D model has been applied for Critical discourse analysis of this study. It consist of text analysis, that is description, Discourse as a text, constructs reality through the use of the linguistics items, the critical analysis of linguistic feature of the text, such as the vocabulary, grammar, and text structure, helps to reveal the hidden meanings of discourse.

Discursive practice, that is production, consumption, and reproduction of the text, interpretation, the third dimension is Social practice that is Explanation , it is concerned with power relations. It includes the exploration of the ways in which discourses operate in society. In context of power relations, discourse can be seen as dealing with the ideology of domination/ subordination and also challenging it. Focal point of discourse as social practice is to construct and reshape the society, by introducing some ideology to society, which is expressed in the discourse.

#### Data

The data has been chosen from the book of Muhmmad Asad, "Islam at cross roads". The researcher has selected only one chapter of the book. Fairclough's 3D model has been applied for Critical discourse analysis.

#### Ontological and Epistemological position

The researcher works in the constructivist paradigm, the ontological position is that reality is constructed through discourse, and epistemological position is that the construction of the reality is based on inner experience rather than facts.

#### Literature Review

Halliday believes that language is social phenomena, presented human experiences, constructs reality. Language and society are interdependent.

Critical discourse analysis as a methodology has taken ideas not only from Holliday's Systemic functional grammar, but also made use of other branches of linguistics; Pragmatics, discourse analysis, text linguistics, conversation analysis and Stylistics. CDA has potential to surface the hidden power elements and unequal power relations. Language is CDA is a tool to evaluate value judgment and investigate power inequality in relations. It is an interaction between linguistics analysis and social practice. Discourse shapes the social reality and shaped by social practice. It is critical because it exposes the contribution of discursive practice in the construction of social identities and unequal power relations.

Fairclough's three dimensional model is valuable in this regard, it provides a framework for discourse analysis, it advocates that text cannot be comprehend without references to other texts and social context. It is based on text, discursive practice and social practice, he pointed out three dimensions of critical discourse analysis that are; text analysis (description), processing analysis (interpretation) and social analysis (explanation). Fairclough's approach is interdisciplinary perspective, which is synthesis of textual and social analysis. Critical discourse analysis, on one hand, discursive practice construct social reality and relations, on the other hand it promotes the interest of certain groups.

The first dimension of analysis is the study of text; at vocabulary , grammar and structure, the second dimension is analysis of the discursive practice; it investigates how the text is produce, consume and reproduce, and the third dimensions is social practice; it analyses how discourse construct social world, systems of knowledge and beliefs, and power relations.

Context is important to understand the use of language; it appears in many forms and works at different levels, from small level of a word to the massive level of worldwide human communication. Contextualization makes all human utterances relevant, the identities of People can shifted from friendly to power authoritative. One needs to understand how language fits in their everyday life, how a mismatch between words and situation can affect the situation.

Contextualization is two way process, it is not only writer who creates context, reader or decoder also participates in the process. Bakhtin meanings are constructed when two minds are at work. Bakhtin called it "responsive understanding". Fairclough believed that the M.R of writer affects the M.R of reader and a third M.R is being created. When we read a text, we re-contextualize, it adds, omits or changes what we already knew.

Intertextuality is important tool of CDA. Intertextuality means that how a text tie with other texts or previous events, and how material from other discourses use in language can affect that text, consequently how it construct social world identities and relations. Intertextuality mentioned the influence of text and history on each other. In *manifest intertextuality*, other texts are overtly mentioned and cited to reemphasize the speaker or writer s ideology and point of view (Louise

J.Phillipos et al P.g 74-75)Critical discourse analysis( CDA) is critical , because it aims to reveal the hidden relations between language, power, and ideology (Fairclough,1989: 5)

Gramsci advocate two different forms of political control: domination, which referred to physical force used by armed forces and hegemony which referred to ideological control, by consent. He believed that no regime or powerful group could sustain only through armed forces, ultimately it needs legitimacy and public support to sustain. It could be acquire through hegemony; asset of norms or beliefs that is widely circulated in every walk of life by socialization, in such a way, that people internalized these beliefs and they becomes part of their 'common sense', So that the philosophy, culture and morality comes to appear as the natural order of things. People identify their welfare with them , rather than resist them.

Critical Discourse Analysis of “The Spirit of the West”.

The title of the essay is of considerable significance. Spiritualism is one of the important subjects of this article. The choice of one specific word leads to abandon the whole series of the related words, by this procedure the text attain its discrete meanings. It gives the reader some cues about the contents and subjects of the text. In the opening lines of the article, Muhmmad Asad, has foregrounded the philosophy of modern West by explaining its real purpose that is related to material side of life rather than the spiritual or moral one. The writer has chosen subjective modalities, used the pronoun “we” inclusive that of reader and writer, making an implicit authority claim, suggests a relation of solidarity between him and his readers. He has used this pronoun “we”, more than ten times in this, this reduction proposes the unity of writer and his target readers. He has used “them” for the modern West. Apparently, the thesis develops on the idea of “we” versus “them”, “Islam” versus “Western civilization” or “Islam” versus “the others”, but on deeper level, the writer is trying to restore the strength of the great culture, which is struggling for its identity. He provides a foundation for argument that whether the Islamic world has anything to gain from the Western world or not.

He has formulated the arguments while using the adverbs like ‘simply’, ‘certainly’, ‘strongly’, ‘decidedly’, their definitive connotation reveal the faith of the writer about his ideology. The use of auxiliary verbs; ‘must’, ‘had to’, ‘should’ while explaining spiritual aspects of life in Islam, reflects his unyielding conviction, as well as his implicit authority and power towards his target readers, which turns relational modality into ideological interest.(The spirit of the west,P. 31) The use of connector ‘therefore’, ‘thus’(ibid,P.32) reveals the logical tone of the writer, how he constructs an argument and draws a logical conclusion out of it to justify his claim. The writer has used grammatical questions modes twice (ibid,P.36,47), he has raised questions, stirred curiosity, addressed his readers, asked for the information or action from the position of power.

The writer has used certain sentences in the essay, (ibid,P.34,39,40,43,) in which agency seems to be present, but the analysis of the text at deeper level, reveals that the agency is unclear and

vague, for example he has pointed out on (ibid,34)that the Islamic Empire was enclosed by some 'inimical powers', but it is not clear which were the powers? Similarly, He has written about 'political struggle between interested groups', (ibid,P.40) but the writer has failed to identify and mention the groups categorically. Although, he has used repeatedly used pronoun "we", but the overall structure of the essay is objective. The writer has presented his ideology embedded in discourse, in an objective manner, no mention of individuals.

The mode of the text is declarative which constructs the influential position of the writer, indicates his confidence and authority about his statements. It presents his sound reasoning, and argument that attempts to convince the reader. The expressive modality, the writer's evaluation of reality is conclusive. He is using persuasive power of language to convince his readers.

Context is important to understand the use of language, it appears in many forms and works at different levels, from small level of a word to the massive level of worldwide human communication. Contextualization makes all human utterances relevant, the identities of People can shifted from friendly to power authoritative. One needs to understand how language fits in their everyday life, how a mismatch between words and situation can affect the situation. Muhmmad Asad was a converted Muslim,so in this context, it is interesting to see that how as an insider, he knows and highlights the weakness of modern West and how he raises the questions about the meaning and purpose of life for the modern European. His MR helps to assume the reality of Western advancement and growth. This text has challenged the common sense assumptions of the West at situational, moral and social levels. Being a member of Western community, the writer has first-hand knowledge about western culture and society. His assumptions regarding to social identities and unequal power relations, which are included in his MR, influence his discourse and add to his struggle to transform these power relations, which are perceived ideologically.

In order to make the readers understand the Western philosophy, he has incorporated a form of intertextuality; manifest intertextuality. He has overtly referred to Roman civilizations as being intrinsically responsible for Western materialism. He has also compared the decay of Roman civilization with that Ottoman Empire, the strength of Chinese Empire with that of Islamic Empire. These examples are possible interpretations in relation to Western philosophy and their impact on the lives of the Occidental people. He has also compared the materialistic and anti-religious approach of Soviet Russia with modern West and identified their common tragic flaw. Social structure of Western civilization has contributed in construction of his MR, which in return, is now working to change that structure. The construction of Western image is result of social struggle, which in return shapes the discourse. The writer has used his MR in a 'normative' way to persuade his reader and contributed to transform unequal power relations between Western and Islamic civilization.

During excavation of Western history, the writer has constructed the image of Church as a negative force and brought forth the power relations between Church and Western modern man, the oppression of church and denial of natural human needs, mental stagnation, intellectual suppression, hindering the spiritual path. The anthropomorphic idea of God presented by Church, finally separates Western man from Church as an institution, leads him to materialism and utilitarian morality.

The expressive values of the text highlights the unequal power relations between Christian church and individual, it has shaped Church as oppressive religious force which had enslaved European intellect for a long period of time and denied the basic human rights. The selection of words is ideologically significant, the image of Christian church has been constructed as an aggressive, gloomy uncouth, cruel entity, embodying the contempt of human nature and neglecting human desires, irreligious in its very essence. The Arabs had brought new culture and knowledge to Europe, which enabled the Europeans to fight against Church.

He has used figurative language in the text. In context of Roman influence on Western civilization, he has considered former as root or basics of the later. While explaining the ignorance of Romans about religion he called Roman gods as 'colourless ghosts', and 'pale imitation of Greek mythology' (ibid,p 35) this vocabulary choice indicates lack of spiritual values and the nominal role of religion in everyday life. Therefore, he has concluded that modern Western man practically excluded religion. Here, he has overtly described the power struggle between modern mind of West and traditional Christian views.

He has created a glorified image of Islam as the greatest spiritual and social force that human race has ever experienced. The target readers of the article are those Muslims who still want to follow the path of Holy Prophet, he intellectually try to convince the common Muslim to return to the path of Holy Prophet, not to impress from the apparent material progress of the West. Apparently has tried to remind his readers the history of Islamic culture when it was at its apex, but when the reference to Crusades (ibid,p 39) alludes to their military might as well. He has created the magnificent picture of Islamic civilization before his readers to remind them that once they had created completely new scientific realm and lead the world in East as well as in the West, all it was done due to following of principles of Islam. He has presented his ideology that West is devoid of spiritualism and moral values, it equates development with economic development, material comfort and collective wellbeing.

He has twice used first person narrative 'I', while concluding the reasons of Western materialism which again suggests his superiority of knowledge over the thesis, provided by his MR because he is a converted Muslim and member of Western community. Being an insider and confidant of western civilization, he has diagnosed the ailment of the West. The phrases "no doubt", "undoubtedly", "indeed" has been frequently used throughout the essay, the repetition of these

phrases is significant. It is an attempt to internalize and naturalize the constructed images of Islam and West to consider them as 'reality', to assume that the ideology of Muhammad Asad is based on truth which is beyond doubts. It also signifies that writer has firm faith in his stance and ideology. The frequent use of words like 'spirit/spiritualism' and 'progress' reinforce the focal point of his ideological thesis that in contrary to Western understandings, the real progress is related to spiritual growth.

The West has evolved a hegemonic philosophy, its material achievements and values have *internalized* by the people as the only way to run the society and consequently it become "common sense". They equate their material collective development with real human progress beings and help to maintain the *status quo* rather than revolting. This is the terrain of struggle, it does not make sense of any struggle if people even don't want to resist. Here the writer is contesting that commonsense, he has presented his ideology to counter the ideology of the West. It means that ideologies include social conflicts between different groups. He has warped up the essay by asserting that the two set of beliefs and values are incompatible as they have different ideologies.

The reader can map out the parallel construction of two different social worlds. The writer has compared and contrasted the spiritual and material aspects of the two civilizations. The text works as a site for struggle between Western society and Christian church on one hand, and Western materialism and Islamic spiritualism on the other hand. The writer has successfully marginalized the materialism of West, by constructing positive image of Islamic civilization. The choice of vocabulary, the use of adjectives, in the text constructs a negative image of Western society and culture, who has lost "the purpose and meaning of life" long time back, believed only in collective material progress, identified it with moral progress, as they do not believe in spiritual aspect of human beings.

### ISLAM versus WEST/OTHERS

Spiritual considerations	Practical utility
Basis of human nature	Dynamic evolution
Based on transcendental conception	Without attributing to life a moral reality
Soul as a reality	Development of scientific thought
Spiritual endeavors	Practical achievements
Transcendental moral law	Material knowledge
Consider human being as spiritual being	Consider human being as biological entity
Solid foundation	No such spiritual element
Unbroken political existence	Broke down rapidly
A band of steel around	Exploitation of other nations
Grand social structure	Better living for privileged group

Sublime religion	“Roman justice” for Romans alone
Sublime religious truth	Materialistic conception of life
Arabs as immense stimulus to European thought	Foreign to all spiritual value
Tremendous influence	Utterly utilitarian
Fresh life	Anti-religious
Rejuvenating current	Leaves transcendental ethics
Wonderful spectacle	Inability to grasp totality of life
Grand social structure	Importance to empirical science
Brilliant intellectual achievements	Relations in tangible way
Refined progress	Purely utilitarian
Full of passionate life	Moral postulates
In Possession of cultural treasures	Irreligious
Created ...new scientific world	Material development
Developed avenues of research	Oppressed by religious system
New intellectual light	Worldly knowledge
Sprang up	Improvement of earthly life
Grew to its fullness	Disastrous supremacy of church
Political maturity	Degenerated into political struggle
Inner strength	Mental acrobatics
Social soundness	Incomprehensible dogmas
	Unscrupulous support for power
	Oppressed masses
	Grave failing
	Hollow assertions
	Dead hand of theology of middle ages
	Religious vacuum
	Champion of anti -religious in principle and action
	Away from natural truths of life
	Cold-blooded sanction of every exploitation
	Superficial half knowledge
	Intellectual bondage
	Gloomy conception of human existence



## Conclusion

In the given essay, the writer has implied utmost desire to captivate the attention of his readers towards his ideology. His ideology is reflected through his choice of vocabulary and textual structure. He has constructed a negative image of West, compared it with the exuberance and vitality of Islamic civilization and exert the power of discourse to persuaded his readers to move towards Islam.

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