

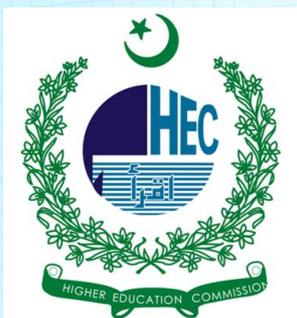
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**Language of Violence, Moral Collapse and Maternal Grief:
A Critical Content Analysis of Yousufzai's
*When The Heavens Split Asunder***



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Abstract

This paper examines the linguistic construction of violence, maternal grief, moral decay and institutional negligence in *When the Heavens Split Asunder* by Seemeen Khan Yousufzai through a qualitative-directed content analysis. Fairclough's three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis has been employed to explore the features of texts, discursive practices and socio-cultural contexts to examine the encoding of ideology, trauma, justice and failure by portraying two mothers who grieve the brutally murdered child while one of them fears the moral decline of her sons. Repetition, sensory narration, metaphoric uplift of nature, narrative pacing and changing focalization are some of the linguistic strategies identified in the analysis which transform the crime story into a moral and societal diversion. The findings reflect that the violence is not sole criminality but an intersection of recurrent maltreatment, bureaucratic interference and patriarchal subjugation. Therefore, the study enriches literary criticism through linguistic inquiry since it demonstrates how systematic content analysis can be applied to reveal ideological frameworks within modern Pakistani fiction.

Keywords: Maternal discourse, violence, ideology, narrative, critical discourse analysis

1. Background to the Study

The contemporary trends in the field of linguistics have broadened the scope of discourse analysis to include works of literature as promising ideological constructions (Toolan, 2018; Simpson, 2020). Fiction, rather than the activity of an imaginative storytelling, acts as a discourse that cogitates and produces social realities at the same time. Attitudes towards power, morality, trauma and society are encoded in subtle and systematic ways in linguistic choices in literary texts. In this paradigm, content analysis, especially through critical theoretical positioning, is an effective approach to the discovery of ways through which narratives influence the perceptions of readers about social issues.

When the Heavens Split Asunder (2023) is a highly emotional account of a gruesome killing of a toddler and the psychic path of two mothers, the lives of whom are

connected to this crime through an indirect relationship. The novel starts with graphic and repetitive account of how the child was tortured with constant recurrence of the cry which kept on being heard that he wanted his Mommy, and it is repeated throughout the first part of the novel. This story then swings between the grieving mother, the offenders, the mother of the offenders, the police and one witness who finds the corpse. This perspective transformation of the novel forms a discursive web whereby violence is not an activity of its own but an indication of some underlying societal and moral failure.

This complexity of the text makes it a perfect corpus to implement Critical Discourse Analysis in combination with qualitative directed content analysis, i.e. using Fairclough's three-dimensional model where discourse is interrogated at the text, discursive and social practices levels (Fairclough, 2015; Wodak and Meyer, 2016).

2. Problem Statement

In the Pakistani literary criticism, there is an inclination to interpret literary texts thematically and in terms of morality and symbolism at the cost of linguistic-based interpretation. *When the Heavens Split Asunder* (2023) is replete with repetition, metaphor, sequence of narration and patterns of lexicon encode ideology. There is a lack of systematic application of and integrated approach, CDA and content analysis frameworks, to modern Pakistani fiction to examine the maternal discourse, violence and trauma. CDA has been widely used in the analysis of political, media and institutional texts however, this study utilizes this integrated approach to identify linguistic processes that create the vulnerability and savagery and to examine how narrative's discourse criticizes the institutional and societal apathy through the ideological structures in *When the Heavens Split Asunder* (2023).

3. Research Questions

- (a) What are the linguistic processes that create the vulnerability and savagery through lexical choice, repetitive forms and imagery in *When the Heavens Split Asunder* (2023)?
- (b) What are the linguistic processes that create the vulnerability and savagery through lexical choice, repetitive forms and imagery in *When the Heavens Split Asunder* (2023)?
- (c) How does the narrative's discourse criticize the institutional and societal

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apathy through the ideological structures inherent in *When the Heavens Split Asunder* (2023)?

4. Research Objectives

(a) To identify the linguistic processes that create the vulnerability and savagery through lexical choice, repetitive forms and imagery in *When the Heavens Split Asunder* (2023).

(b) To explore the linguistic processes that create the vulnerability and savagery through lexical choice, repetitive forms and imagery in *When the Heavens Split Asunder* (2023)?

(c) To examine how the narrative's discourse criticizes the institutional and societal apathy through the ideological structures inherent in *When the Heavens Split Asunder* (2023)?

5. Literature Review

The application of content analysis in literary works has been on the rise, which is a sign of the growing overlap of linguistics and discourse analysis with literary criticism. Unlike the traditional literary analysis methods, which mainly focus on the theme and symbolism, the new discourse-oriented methods see literary texts as socially situated discourses that reflect and construct ideology (Toolan 2018; Simpson 2020). Through this paradigm, scholars are able to study the way power relations, moral placement, sequence of stories and the syntax of language are encoded in fiction through such linguistic aspects of repetition, metaphor, narrative sequencing and syntax. The novel was published in April, 2023 and very scarce research work has been produced on it; it reflects that the repression is not a personal failure but it has societal backing which has direct attribution to patriarchal codes of culture and honour (Rokhana, Rehman & Sethi, 2025).

The Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and especially the three-dimensional model by Fairclough (2015) perceives language as a social practice, which is, at the same time, institutional and ideological. Although the use of CDA in political and media discourses has been sufficiently extensive, the use of CDA in the literary fiction, particularly in South Asian settings is relatively less common. Literary linguistic scholars suggest that such narrative strategies as focalization, modality and pacing are not neutral stylistic features but an ideological tool that leads the readers to emotional

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and ethical orientation (Simpson 2020; Toolan 2018). Such observations justify the use of CDA and content analysis to novels to elicit the process of constructing social meaning.

According to Whitehead (2016) and Herman (2017), the narratives of trauma are subject to repetition, fragmentation and sensory description to rebuild psychological suffering among the readers. Repetition therefore acts as a linguistic reminder of pain that has not been resolved, and immerses the readers into the victim experience as embodied narration. Similarly, academic studies of violence in discourse have shown that texts often emerge not only about explicit acts of cruelty but also about institutional violence. As demonstrated by Žižek (2014) and Fowler (2013), language also makes such violence normal by minimizing and bureaucratizing it especially in institutional reactions.

Motherly conversation is a critical point in the literary depiction of traumas. Kaplan (2018) describes the concept of motherhood as a moral fulcrum in literature but the theory of post-memory, presented by Hirsch (2012), is a description of how maternal narratives help to pass trauma between generations. Feminist CDA (Lazar 2007) goes further to explain how the voices of women have been subordinated to the patriarchal framework particularly in discourses that deal with the domestic violence and social abandonment.

Qualitative-directed content analysis is a structured approach to the identification of these patterns methodologically. Elo and Kyngäs (2008), as well as Mayring (2014) believe that such a method balances the theoretical orientation with the richness of interpretation which makes it especially applicable to the analysis of multilayered literary works. Coding of such phenomena as repetition, metaphor and dialogue allows a researcher to uncover ideological meanings without distilling the texts into a form of purely quantitative data.

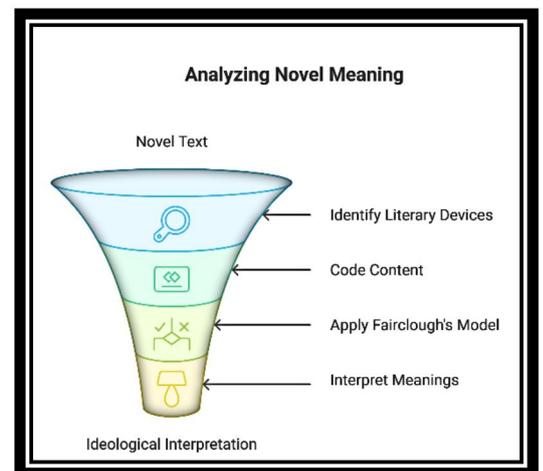
The focus of South Asian literary studies has been mostly on postcolonial themes instead of the discourse-based studies of violence and trauma (Ashcroft et al., 2013). The socio-cognitive model by Van Dijk (2014) also postulates that discourse influences the moral judgment of readers by structuring narratives and using lexical strategies. Irrespective of these developments, few studies have used such frameworks on Pakistani fiction. This gap highlights the importance of merging CDA and content

analysis to examine the way *When the Heavens Split Asunder* (2023) has depicted violence as a social and institutional failure.

On the whole, the content analysis provides a solid structure of the literary research, in which discourse, trauma, motherhood and ideology interplay and thus contribute to the interpretive and methodological aspects of the linguistics-driven literary criticism. Nevertheless, these developments notwithstanding, there is a dearth of research that has ably blended these models into the interpretation of novels in Pakistan that discuss violence and motherhood. It is at this interdisciplinary point that this current study is situated.

6. Methodology

The study utilizes qualitative-directed content analysis alongside a critical theoretical and analytical framework. Fairclough's three-dimensional model has been applied as the main analytical framework. The units of analysis include lexical repetitions, metaphorical structures, dialogue, narrative tempo and focalization transition. These aspects are first described at the textual level, interpreted at the discursive practice level and are finally placed in the wider context of the socio-cultural realities.



7. Analysis and Discussion

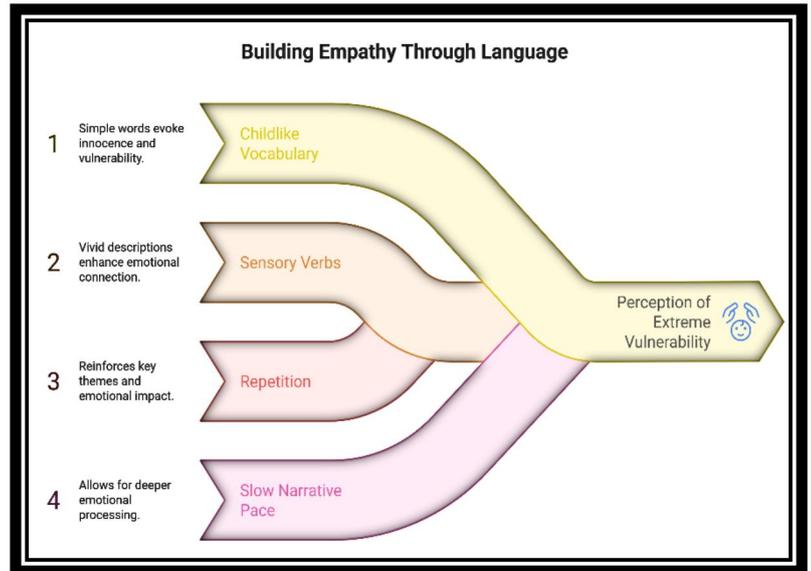
The analysis shows that this novel is powerful not only by the contents of the narration but also by the way in which the language creates the themes of vulnerability, cruelty, institutional apathy and maternal conscience on the textual, discursive and social levels.

7.1 Textual Level Analysis – Repetition, Sensory Language and Infantilization

The lexical repetition is very essential in the opening sequence of the novel:

“He wanted his Mommy. He wanted his Mommy.”

This is a recurring feature of the clause as the child experiences an increasing violence. The simplicity of the linguistic form of this sentence, which is reflected in monosyllabic lexemes and childlike diction, provides a sharp contrast to the terrifying violence presented in the context of the sentence. This kind of contrast increases the images of

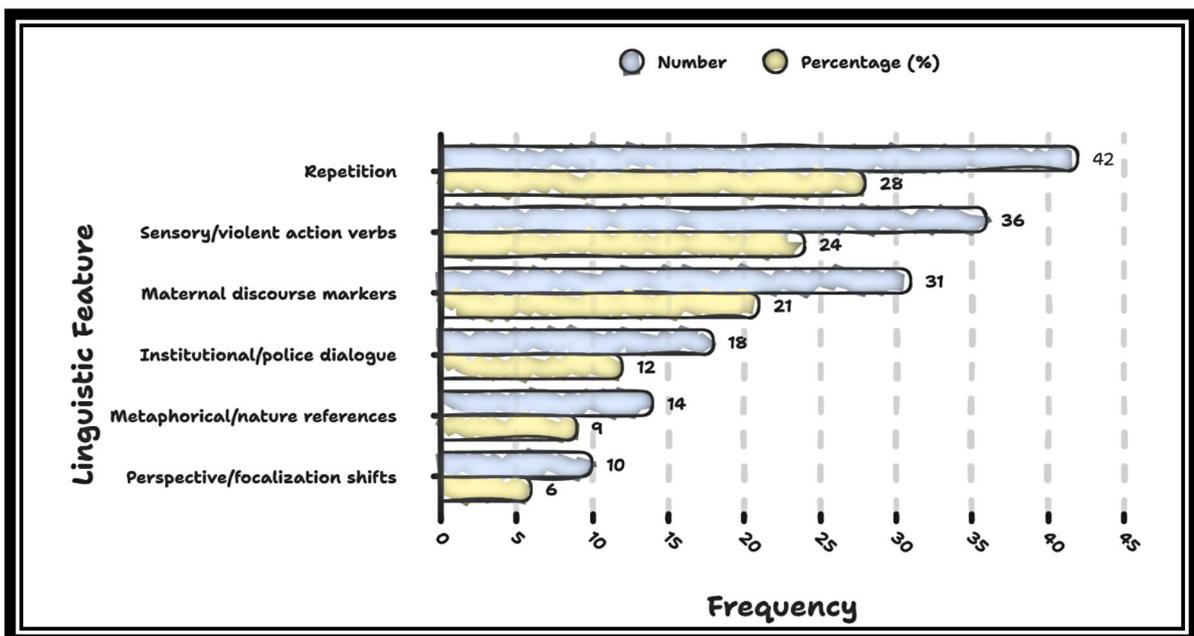


guiltlessness and powerlessness. Furthermore, the kind of repetition kinetically slows narrative temporality, thus forcing readers to pause on every occurrence of suffering instead of allowing the narrative to move towards rest.

Similarly, sensory verbs dominate the narration:

"They kicked him again... he howled... they laughed... they poured the cold liquid..."

The combination of action verbs without emotive comment causes the appearance of so-called embodied narration. The violence is perceived by the reader on corporeal sense as opposed to moral interpretive frameworks. The fact that there are no adjectives that would cause an evaluation makes the brutality all the more disturbing,



the narration makes an attempt to mirror the lack of emotional connection of the perpetrators.

There is a consistent reinforcement of infantilization referred through such descriptions:

“tiny fingers,” “little feet,” “weak cries”

Foreground of fragility is ensured through these lexical choices which has been helpful in maintaining readers’ attention and focus while the imagery of vulnerability is achieved.

7.2 Nature Metaphors and Cosmic Moral Witness

There are multiple instances in the novel that invoked nature silently holding a moral observatory over us:

“The Heavens grumbled as if they could not bear to watch.”

The metaphor takes the crime to another level – meta-human – beyond the wrongdoing that even disturbs the cosmic order. The description goes like this as the dead body is recovered:

“Even the wind seemed to whisper in mourning.”

This use of personification suggests about the moral failure of human while the nature’s response is empathic. The result creates a comparison between human moral collapse and natural morality.

Dimension	Target Content	Reference Text	Interpretation
Textual Level	Metaphors, repetition, verbs, words	Sensory Verb <i>He wanted his mommy.</i>	Construction of cruelty and vulnerability
Discursive Practice	Shift of perspective Who speaks?	Mother, police, perpetrators, witness	Responsibility diffusion
Social Practice	Ideology, Social meaning	Abusive history, apathy, police	Negligence, cyclic violence, patriarchy

Table 1: *Application of Fairclough’s 3D Model*

Linguistic Feature	Target Content	Function	Ideological Impact
Perspective	Multiple viewpoints	Layered narrative	Implicated society

Shifts

Police Dialogue	Could be fooling around.	Minimization	Official apathy
Metaphor of Nature	Heavens grumbled	Cosmic exposition	Elevation to universal injustice
Sensory Verbs	Howling, crushed, kicked	Embodiment of narration	Reader immersive trauma
Repetition	He wanted his mommy.	Intensifies emotions	Helplessness

Table 2: Content Analysis: Identification of Linguistic Features

7.3 Discursive Practice: Police Language and Bureaucratic Minimization

The discourse shifts with the intervention of the police as the suspicious cries are reported by the neighbors with the response:

“Kids fool around all the time. Don’t overthink it.”

Later, clear signs of disturbance are unearthed:

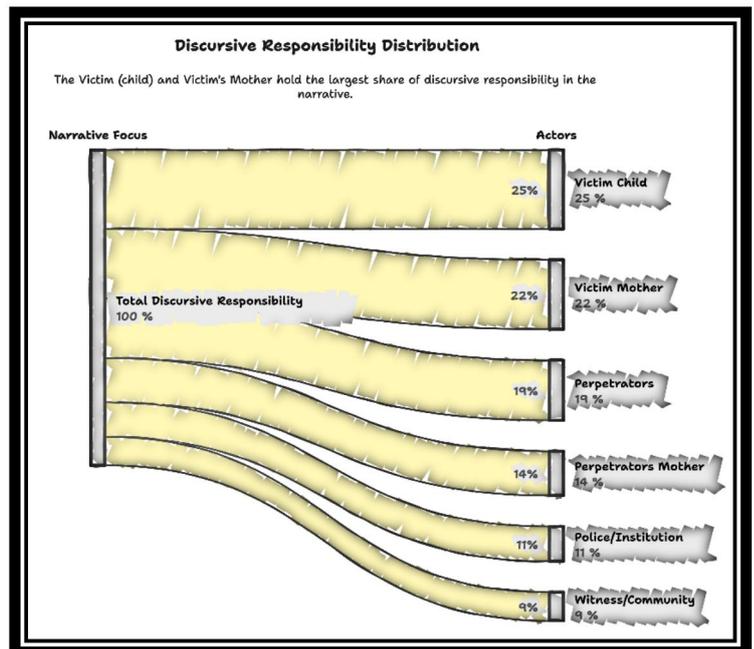
“Could be just boys messing about.”

These are statements that use linguistic minimization. The informal term ‘messing about’ and the modal auxiliary ‘could’ serve to downplay possible violence. This language is an example of institutional apathy, not in its literal sense, but through lexical decisions which are casual in nature.

Likewise, the newspaper article as reflected within the text declares:

“A tragic incident involving minors is under investigation.”

The use of phrase ‘tragic agency’ removes brutality and agency. The bureaucratic abstraction veils perpetrators – they disappear.



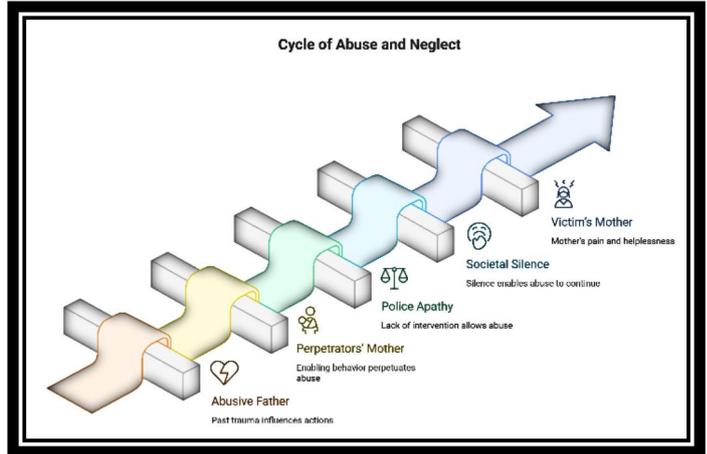
Feature	Maternal Discourse	Institutional Discourse
Tone	Personal, emotional	Bureaucratic, detached

Vocabulary	Expressive, repetitive	Factual, minimal
Response to Crime	Emotional, moral	Procedural
Impact on Reader	Empathy	Distanced

Table 5: Maternal vs. Institutional Discourse

7.4 Shifting Focalization and Diffusion of Responsibility

The narrative point of view switches back and forth between the grieving mother, the murderers, their mother and the observer and the police. This focalization change builds an accountability network. As an example, the casual laughter of the perpetrators in the process:



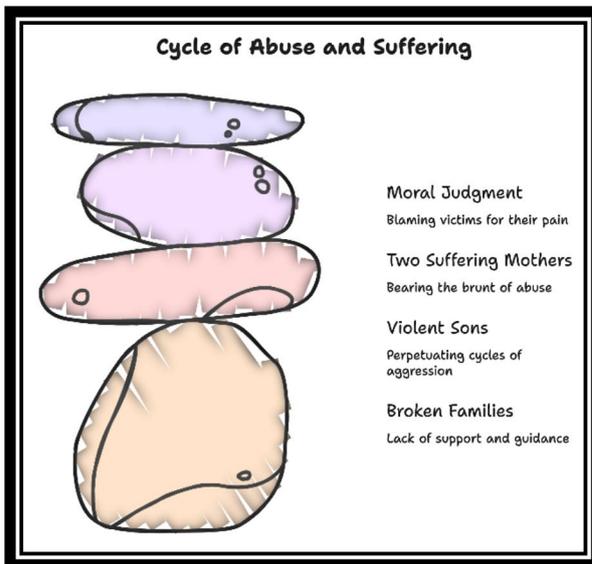
“They laughed louder each time he cried.”

It has been juxtaposed with mother’s reflection at the later stage:

“Had I not seen this cruelty in their father before?”

The conversation links extreme violence and domestic abuse linguistically. Mother

has realized the onset of cyclic violence which is an inherited behaviour.



7.5 Maternal Discourse as Moral Axis

There is emotional saturation in the language of aggrieved mother:

“My arms feel empty... my chest feels hollow.”

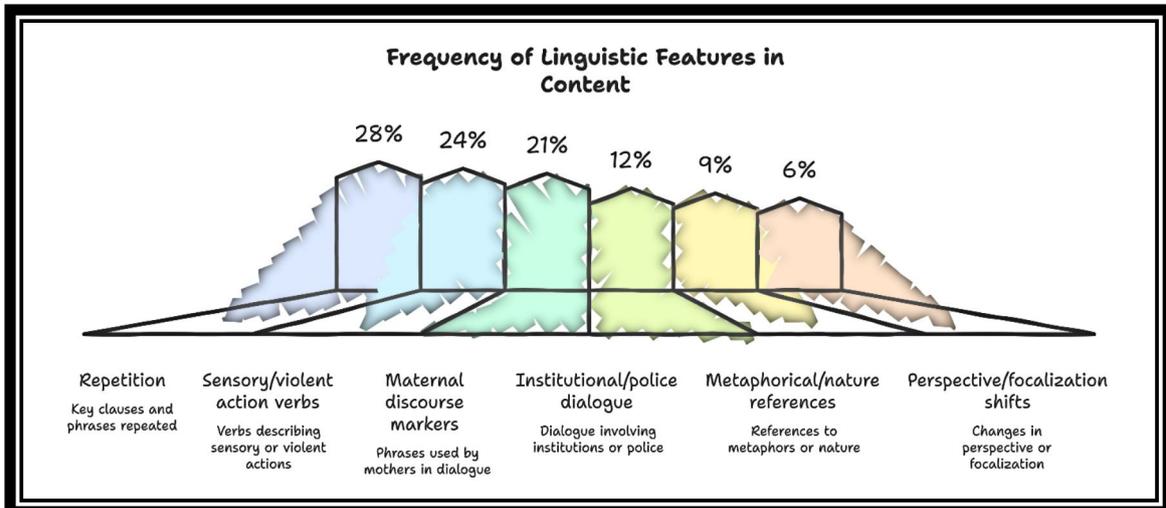
Here sections are filled with the repetitive metaphors of emptiness and

hollowness that, thus, connotes an irreversible loss.

The mother of the perpetrators, in her turn, expresses her speech in fearful and guilty terms:

“I feared this day would come... I saw shadows of their father in them.”

The conversation of the protagonist is self-critical and self-reflective. The novel portrays two motherly figures as the two moral centers, one is the embodiment of loss, and the other is the embodiment of realization.



7.6 Trauma: As Narrative Pacing Representation

The violent scenes are described in a slow and repetitive way, and the description of the institutional reactions is displayed in a fast and brief manner. Such asymmetry in time construction is similar to the experience of mental trauma. Thus, the reader is stimulated to dwell upon the emotional aspects of suffering, and rush through procedural portrayals, therefore, emphasizing the gap between the subjective emotional existence and administrative regulations.

7.8 Social Practice: Language Revealing Systemic Failure

These linguistic devices conceptualize the idea of violence as being a product of a group of patriarchal oppression, institutional apathy and social silence, as opposed to a singular event. Domination seems to be internalized by the perpetrators using an abusive paternal model. Police are portrayed as downplaying warning indicators. The crime is depersonalized by media. Only the voices of mothers bring out the moral seriousness of the event.

Therefore, discourse at the social level demonstrates the presence of systemic violence within families, the system of power and cultural silence.

8. Findings

- The discussion has shown that repetitive framing heightens emotion involvement and vulnerability is created.
- The crime is brought up to a moral and cosmic level through metaphorical

language.

- The apathy is revealed through institutional conversation.
- Mothers talk as moral conscience.
- Violence is explained as a result of abusive cycles and not individual deviance.
- Narrative pacing is similar to psychological trauma.

9. Conclusion

This paper demonstrates that *When the Heavens Split Asunder* (2023) is not just a crime story but a linguistic commentary of the rottenness in the society. Ideology has been encoded in the novel via repetitions, metaphor, focalization and in the structure of the narrative. Mothers' sorrow is a moral prism that decides on violence, and institutional disengagement is disclosed in language.

10. Delimitations

The paper concentrates solely on the linguistic content and lacks the reader reception as an element. The analysis of selected passages has been carried out as opposed to a comprehensive corpus study. The contexts of the interpretation fall within Pakistani socio-cultural setting.

11. Future Prospects

Future studies can use corpus linguistic methods to similar novels, compare CDA of trauma narratives or find out about multimodal adaptations of trauma texts in media and film.

12. Special Recognition to KP's Emerging Wordsmith

Seemeen Khan Yousufzai, teacher cum an emerging writer of Mardan, KPK, Pakistan is a genius. She amalgamates both social awareness and introspection in her writings. Since she was a teenager, with her childhood diaries and her M.Phil. in existential authenticity in artificial consciousness, her motivating life as the first resident English poet, essayist and novelist of KP, sparkles with such jewels as the catharsis *On the Wings of SKY*, the sturdy *A Sip of Moonlight* and the desperate *When the Heavens Split Asunder*. Her revolutionary words heal, attack and wake up. We are looking forward to her next masterpiece!

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