

A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF WEALTH POWER IN HASHIM NADEEM'S NOVEL PREE-ZAD

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Abstract

This paper offers a critical discursive analysis of wealth power in Hashim Nadeem's novel Pree-Zad (2014), drawing on Fairclough's (1989, 1992) conception of power in and behind discourse. The novel, later adapted into a Hum TV drama serial of the same name, portrays a social world in which economic power is routinely converted into social, legal, and interpersonal dominance. This study focuses on the character Seath Behroz Karim, a wealthy landowner whose speech repeatedly enacts and legitimizes forms of control over economically weaker characters. Using Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model (TDM) of critical discourse analysis (CDA), three purposively selected extracts of Seath Behroz Karim's dialogue are examined at the levels of text (description), discursive practice (interpretation), and social practice (explanation). The analysis shows that lexical choice, modality, and directive speech acts work together to construct wealth as a source of near-total social immunity, while poverty is discursively constructed as a condition of vulnerability and voicelessness. The paper concludes that Pree-Zad functions as a literary index of broader patterns of class-based impunity in Pakistani society, and it discusses the implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

Keywords: *Seath Behroz Karim; Wealth Power ; Critical Discourse Analysis; Three-Dimensional Model; Pree-Zad*

1. Introduction

This paper examines the discourse of power and wealth of Hashim Nadeem's novel, Pree-Zad, and the central character, Seath Behroz Karim, a power-hungry and wealthier-than-average landowner who exploits his position for both legal and illegal purposes. The second character portrayed in the novel, Pree-Zad, experiences an alternate state throughout the novel, starting from poverty and ending with material wealth. In this path, the novel's main concern of the connection among affluence, standing and individual agency in a modern Pakistani society becomes prominent. Nadeem's narrative depicts a world where power is virtually an essential prerequisite to existence without hindrance. One theme which is recurred throughout the text is the use of language to assert power: those who have wealth and status use dismissive, coercive or contemptuous language toward those who are economically disadvantaged. When analyzed through a discursive lens, Pree-Zad is a literary reflection of inequalities that have been long documented by critical discourse analysts: the power of the rich to be heard, of the poor to be believed, and of the law and the social system to serve the interests of the rich.

This study is based on the Three-Dimensional Model of critical discourse analysis by Fairclough (1989, 1992) which focuses on the language of Seath Behroz Karim as a form of "power in discourse" and "power behind discourse". According to Lukes (1974) as cited in Haugaard (2002: 45), power is exercised in a relationally manner; A exercises power over B when A affects B in a way that is not in B's interest. Lukes' interests are determined by various "moral and political positions. A "relational" definition of the novel in the world of the novel is useful for explaining why a socially and economically weaker character (B) in conflict with a wealthy character (A) remains systematically disadvantaged: the asymmetry of wealth

reflects an asymmetry of consequence. The analysis that follows outlines the linguistic elaboration and social naturalization of such an hegemonic pattern in the text. The fact that Pree-Zad is a popular rather than experimental or highbrow piece of fiction makes it a valuable text for this type of study. The discursive patterns it creates are not only relevant to a specialist literary readership, but are also spread through a television adaptation of the text which is read by a wider audience, and consumed by a broad range of Pakistani culture consumers.

The reviewers of Nadeem's novels have also pointed out his singular tendency to make questions of wealth and status the core of his novels, rather than limiting them to this particular novel (Daily Times, 2019). This discourse analysis is therefore not confined to literary criticism per se; it is relevant to the social because it provides a glimpse into the discursive patterns of a wide audience who experience them as a mundane aspect of a gripping narrative, rather than as a field of critical investigation. This just happens to be what critical discourse analysis—this method—is meant to make visible.

1.2. Discourse: A Conceptual Note

This paper is situated within the critical linguistic tradition and discourse is considered as language use that exceeds its propositional meaning. Discursive analysis thus focuses on the social action of a text, and not just on its content. Parker (1992) points to dominance and power as two main organizing concerns of discourse, suggesting that language use is never neutral, but it is always intertwined in positioning of speakers in relation to each other. In the same way, Halliday (1978) considers discourse as a way of social engagement achieved through the grammatical and lexical choices, rather than as a formal system of the language. Fairclough (1989) broadens this conception and views discourse as a structural and functional process, as a "social process. Fairclough's view on discourse is not just a reflection of society, but discourse is also an agent of social change, perpetuating or undermining social relations. Because the language used by the wealthy man Seath Behroz Karim is not just a reflection of his wealth and status, but actually a way to reenact and uphold his wealth and status, the analysis that follows takes a dual perspective as both a product and a producer of social structure.

1.3. Research Questions

RQ1: How is the discourse of power constructed and legitimized in the speech of economically dominant characters in Pree-Zad?

RQ2: In what ways does the novel's discourse represent indifference toward the wellbeing of economically weaker characters as a function of wealth?

RQ3: How does discourse surrounding law and authority in the novel reflect perceptions of legal impunity among the wealthy in Pakistani society?

1.4. Significance of the Study

This research foregrounds how the discourse of wealth power operates in a widely circulated contemporary Pakistani novel and its televised adaptation, offering a case study in how literary discourse can encode and normalize class-based inequality. Discursive analysis of the wealth-power relationship in Pree-Zad suggests that within the world the novel constructs, material advantage functions as an almost totalizing social resource: for characters who possess it, action is rendered possible and consequence-free; for characters who lack it, even minor missteps can be discursively reframed as grounds for blame or punishment. By examining this pattern closely at the level of language, the study aims to contribute to a broader understanding of how inequality between social classes is constructed, sustained, and made to seem natural through everyday discourse, both within fiction and, by extension, in the social contexts fiction draws upon.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Power as a Sociological Concept

Giddens (1984) defines power as the ability to produce desired results; power is a resource which actors use to achieve their objective in a social structure. Wealth in the novel is not just a means of livelihood; it is a capacity, and Giddens's formulation, which makes wealth a general-purpose capacity, provides an explanation for this. A definition more related, but more explicitly relational is by Weber (1978) (quoted by Kohler n.d.) who defines power as the likelihood that in a social relationship an actor can act in such a manner that another actor will want him to, and will not prevent him from doing so. The relationship that is enacted between Seath Behroz Karim and the economically weaker parties he encounters is the one that brings up the issue of resistance; as Weber said, "power is what it is, because it is resisted, or by someone."

2.2 Power, Domination, and Discourse

Van Dijk (2008) theorizes wealth and power in terms of control and domination, describing how power can operate cognitively as well as materially, shaping what a subordinated group is able to think, say, or claim. Van Dijk (2001) further identifies multiple bases on which power is exercised: coercive power grounded in force, as in the case of the military or violent individuals; economic power grounded in wealth; and persuasive power grounded in knowledge, expertise, or institutional authority, as with parents, professors, or journalists. This typology is directly relevant to Pree-Zad, in which Seath Behroz Karim's dominance draws primarily on economic power but is reinforced through implicit and explicit threats that shade into coercive power.

Weiss and Wodak (2003) examine power as it is enacted through discourse across the social hierarchy, arguing that discourse functions as both a vehicle for and a record of differential power relations. Meyer (2009) defines power succinctly as an asymmetric relationship among social actors occupying different social positions, and further conceptualizes it as the possibility of enacting one's own will against the will or interests of others. Wodak and Meyer (2009) outline several concrete modes through which power is implemented, including physical force and violence, control through threats or promises, authority attached to institutional roles, and control over material and technical resources such as production, transport, and weapons. Each of these modes finds an echo in the novel: Seath Behroz Karim's authority draws simultaneously on economic control, implicit threat, and inherited social status.

2.3 Agency, Structure, and the Discourse of Wealth

Farfan and Holzschneider (2011) distinguish between subjectivist approaches to power, which locate it primarily at the level of individual agency and capacity, and structural approaches, which attend to power as embedded in institutions and systems. Applied to Pree-Zad, this distinction is useful: while the novel dramatizes power largely through the agency of a single character, the analysis in this paper treats Seath Behroz Karim's individual dominance as an index of a broader structural pattern rather than as an isolated case of personal villainy.

Weber (1978) further argues that power is not reducible to an individual's ability to impose their will on others; it is, more generally, an individual or collective capacity to achieve desired or intended goals. Fairclough (1989) situates this capacity explicitly within discourse, arguing that power in discourse concerns the way relations of power are exercised and enacted through language itself. For Fairclough, power in or behind discourse is inherently unstable: it can be won or lost by an individual or group at any point through social struggle. He further argues that power in discourse centrally involves powerful participants controlling and constraining the contributions of less powerful participants — a dynamic that is directly visible in each of the three extracts analyzed below, in which Seath Behroz Karim's speech consistently forecloses the possibility of response from his addressees.

Read together, this body of literature suggests that literary discourse is a particularly productive site for CDA precisely because novelists construct dialogue that readers are invited to accept

as psychologically and socially plausible. When a character's speech repeatedly enacts dominance without narrative correction or consequence, the text risks naturalizing that dominance as an unremarkable feature of the social world it depicts, rather than presenting it as a phenomenon open to critique. This is the ideological function that the present study interrogates: not simply whether Seath Behroz Karim is powerful, but how the grammar and structure of his speech make that power appear self-evident and unchallengeable, both to the characters who hear it and to the readers who encounter it.

2.4 Recent Applications of CDA to Pakistani and South Asian Fiction and Media

Fairclough's model, and the broader CDA tradition it belongs to, has continued to develop since the foundational texts reviewed above, and the model itself has been revised and re-issued in more recent editions (Fairclough, 2015). Within the specific context of Pakistani media and literature, a growing body of recent scholarship has applied CDA to precisely the kind of popular cultural text examined in this paper. Iqbal, Azhar, and Shah (2020) apply Fairclough's model to a Pakistani television talk show, finding that unequal turn-taking between host and guests functions as a discursive marker of unequal power, with the host's institutional position within the media translating directly into control over the discourse itself. Tahir, Shah, and Yasir (2021) undertake a closely related study, examining a Pakistani television drama to trace how class distinction and bureaucratic power are dramatized through discourse, concluding that popular drama functions as a site where entrenched social inequality is both represented and, to some extent, reproduced for a mass audience. Naeem and Zaidi (2024) extend this line of inquiry using Van Dijk's socio-cognitive model to examine power imbalance across several Pakistani Urdu dramas, arguing that Pakistani television discourse frequently functions as a tool that reinforces existing hierarchies rather than challenging them. Abid, Siddique, and Ahmad (2024) offer a complementary corpus-based analysis of gender-inflected discourse markers in Pakistani drama serials, demonstrating that lexical choice patterns differ systematically along lines of social positioning within these serials, a finding consistent with the lexical asymmetries identified in the present analysis of Seath Behroz Karim's speech.

Beyond television discourse specifically, Perveen (2015) applies CDA to an academic online discussion board at a Pakistani university, finding that institutional power differentials between instructors and students are reproduced discursively even in a nominally open communicative space, reinforcing the broader claim that unequal power is rarely absent from Pakistani institutional discourse regardless of setting. In the domain of prose fiction specifically, Malik, Murtaza, and Shah (2014) apply CDA to Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, examining how the novel's language constructs ethnic and social hierarchy within Afghan society; their finding that specific linguistic devices are marshaled to naturalize an unequal social order for the reader closely parallels the discursive strategies identified in the present analysis of Pree-Zad, suggesting that this pattern is not unique to a single novel or national context but recurs across South Asian popular fiction dealing with themes of social hierarchy.

Taken together, this recent literature indicates two things relevant to the present study. First, Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model, though originally developed in the late 1980s, remains an actively used and productive framework in contemporary Pakistani discourse scholarship, applied across genres ranging from talk shows and dramas to academic discussion boards. Second, existing Pakistani-context CDA research has concentrated heavily on broadcast and institutional discourse, with comparatively less attention paid to the discourse of popular prose fiction specifically. This paper's focus on a novel, rather than its televised adaptation or a non-fictional discourse setting, addresses a comparatively underexplored site within this growing literature.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative discourse-analytic design, examining lines drawn from the novel *Pree-Zad* that foreground the operation of power. The central aim is to analyze the dialogue of the character Seath Behroz Karim in order to uncover the discursive strategies and underlying social meanings that structure his use of wealth and status. Within the narrative, excessive wealth and the power it confers repeatedly direct the character toward morally consequential action — whether right or wrong — without meaningful external constraint; the analysis treats this narrative pattern as a literary index of a broader social reality.

Following Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model, the analysis proceeds through three interrelated dimensions of the object under study, which may include verbal, visual, or combined verbal-visual texts. Each dimension calls for a distinct analytical procedure: (1) text analysis, concerned with description; (2) discursive practice analysis, concerned with interpretation; and (3) social practice analysis, concerned with explanation. In this study, the object of analysis is verbal: three extracts of reported dialogue drawn from the novel.

3.1 Corpus and Data Selection

The primary data for this study consist of dialogue attributed to Seath Behroz Karim across three episodes in the novel in which the operation of wealth-based power is especially pronounced: a workplace confrontation involving dismissal and threat, an exchange concerning life-and-death authority, and a reflective statement on personal worth and social status. These three extracts were purposively selected, rather than randomly sampled, on the grounds that qualitative CDA prioritizes analytic depth over statistical breadth: a small, carefully chosen set of extracts allows for the kind of close, multi-layered linguistic analysis the Three-Dimensional Model requires, in line with established practice in CDA-based literary studies. The extracts were selected because each foregrounds a distinct facet of power identified in the literature review above — coercive/economic power, life-and-death authority, and status-based self-legitimation — allowing the analysis to illustrate the range, rather than only the repetition, of Seath Behroz Karim's discursive dominance.

Selection proceeded in two stages. First, the novel was read in full to identify all passages in which Seath Behroz Karim's dialogue explicitly invoked wealth, status, threat, or authority over another character. This initial pool comprised a substantially larger number of candidate passages than could be feasibly subjected to full three-dimensional analysis within the scope of a single paper. Second, from this pool, three extracts were selected on the criterion of analytic distinctiveness: each had to foreground a facet of power not already fully represented by the other selected extracts, so that the final sample would illustrate the breadth of Seath Behroz Karim's discursive repertoire rather than three near-identical instances of the same pattern. This two-stage procedure is consistent with purposive sampling as practiced in qualitative discourse studies, where representativeness is understood in terms of conceptual range rather than statistical frequency, and it also reflects the emphasis that discourse-historical approaches to CDA place on selecting data capable of illuminating a phenomenon's different facets rather than merely its frequency of occurrence (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016).

4. Theoretical Framework

Critical discourse analysis provides a well-established method for analyzing how text encodes and reproduces social power relations, and this study follows Fairclough's (1989, 1992, 2015) Three-Dimensional Model, an approach widely applied in CDA-based studies of literary and journalistic texts concerned with power and social hierarchy. In the first dimension, text analysis, selected lines from the novel are examined for their grammatical and lexical composition. In the second dimension, discursive (processing) analysis, the study interprets the hidden or implied meaning conveyed by the author through these lines, considering how the text positions the reader in relation to the speaker and addressee. In the third dimension, social analysis, the study considers how the language relates to, and is shaped by, wider social

conditions, examining the effect the lines are likely to have on readers and the understanding a Pakistani readership is likely to draw from them.

5. Analysis

5.1 Extract 1

"No one has told you that no one has beaten Malik Bahrooz like this till date. I will fire you at this time. Get out of here, come tomorrow and take a month's salary."

Text analysis (description). The exchange is narrated in an informal register appropriate to an unequal, confrontational encounter between two male characters. The extract comprises three declarative sentences carrying relational, grammatical, and experiential meaning. The first sentence is compound, its two clauses joined by the logical connector *that*. The second sentence is a simple declarative built around the repeated verb *fire*, a repetition that intensifies the force of the threat. The proper noun *Malik Bahrooz* functions as the grammatical subject of the first clause, positioning him as a figure whose status has apparently been violated by an unnamed act of disrespect. The remaining clauses are issued as directives — *Get out of here, come tomorrow* — a sequence of bare imperatives that grammatically encodes an asymmetry of authority: the speaker gives orders and the addressee is afforded no linguistic space to respond. Discursive practice (interpretation). Beneath the surface threat, the extract implies that a person of low status who challenges a wealthy or powerful figure will face swift and disproportionate consequence, regardless of the underlying justice of the original complaint. The compression of the sentence — threat, dismissal, instruction to collect pay and leave — enacts a kind of discursive efficiency that mirrors the speaker's social efficiency: he need not explain, negotiate, or justify his decision. The withholding of any reported speech from the addressee reinforces this asymmetry at the level of narrative structure, not merely content: the reader hears only the powerful voice.

Social practice (explanation). Read against the social context the novel constructs, this extract dramatizes a widely recognized feature of hierarchical societies: institutional and interpersonal deference tends to flow toward wealth regardless of the substantive merits of a dispute. The line suggests that redress for the economically weak is, at best, monetary and temporary (a month's salary) rather than restorative. This is consistent with the broader pattern identified in the literature review, in which economic power operates as a general-purpose resource capable of overriding claims grounded in fairness or procedure.

5.2 Extract 2

"Bahrooz Karim asked me in a whisper. Tell me if there is any last wish? There are only a few breaths left of you."

Text analysis (description). The extract comprises three sentences performing three distinct speech functions. The first sentence is a simple declarative reporting the manner of utterance (in a whisper), a manner adverbial that lends the scene a tone of intimacy inverted into menace. The second sentence is interrogative, a question that superficially offers the addressee a choice (any last wish) while substantively confirming that no real choice exists. The third sentence functions as a warning, its declarative form belying its performative force as a threat. Two proper nouns anchor the exchange: *Bahrooz Karim*, the speaker, and the implied addressee, *Paree-Zad*.

Discursive practice (interpretation). The whispered delivery is significant: whispering is conventionally associated with confidentiality or tenderness, and its deployment here in a context of mortal threat produces a jarring effect that intensifies, rather than softens, the menace of the utterance. The offer of a "last wish" performs a hollow courtesy — a linguistic gesture toward civility that in fact underscores the totality of the speaker's control over the addressee's fate. The line positions *Seath Behroz Karim* as possessing an authority typically reserved for

the state (the power to decide life and death), a positioning the text uses to suggest that his private wealth functions, within the world of the novel, as a substitute for public legal authority. Social practice (explanation). This extract most directly encodes the novel's broader claim that wealth secures impunity: the narrative surrounding this line establishes that Seath Behroz Karim is never brought to legal account for violence connected to his household, including the death of his wife. Van Dijk's (2001) coercive basis of power and economic basis of power converge in this figure, who is able to draw on both threat and wealth interchangeably. More broadly, the extract resonates with a pattern documented in public discourse across many contexts, in which prominent and wealthy individuals are perceived — accurately or not — to be able to resolve legal difficulties involving family members through the private application of money and influence, a perception the novel dramatizes rather than straightforwardly endorses.

5.3 Extract 3

"The personality of a man is not complete with his face. All these are the deprivation of the lower middle class; the man is complete with wealth, power, and status."

Text analysis (description). The extract is built from three clauses with distinct grammatical functions. In the first clause, his is a possessive pronoun referring to man, and personality functions as the clause's abstract noun subject. The phrase lower middle class functions as a noun phrase, the head noun class pre-modified by the adjectives lower and middle, identifying a social category rather than describing an action, and should not be read as an adverbial despite its position in the sentence. The final sentence coordinates two clauses: power and status forms part of a noun phrase functioning as a complement, while the man is complete with wealth stands as the independent clause carrying the sentence's main assertion.

Discursive practice (interpretation). Spoken by Seath Behroz Karim, the line explicitly devalues physical appearance as a marker of worth and replaces it with material and social markers — wealth, power, and status. The phrase "deprivation of the lower middle class" performs a subtle discursive move: it reframes a concern with physical appearance not as an aesthetic preference but as a marker of economic deprivation, implying that only those who lack wealth need concern themselves with how they look, because they lack the more decisive currency of status. This rhetorical move naturalizes wealth as the primary axis of social evaluation and casts alternative value systems as symptomatic of poverty rather than as legitimate on their own terms.

Social practice (explanation). This extract most explicitly articulates the ideological core of the novel's discourse of wealth-power: that social recognition, attractiveness, and personal completeness are, within this social world, functions of material status rather than intrinsic qualities. Read alongside Meyer's (2009) definition of power as an asymmetric relationship between differently positioned social actors, this line can be understood as a direct verbal performance of that asymmetry — the speaker positions himself as the arbiter of what constitutes a "complete" personality, a judgment available only to those who, like him, already possess wealth, power, and status.

6. Findings and Discussion

Taken together, the three extracts demonstrate a consistent discursive pattern: wealth is constructed, at every linguistic level examined, as a resource that both enables assertive, unaccountable speech and forecloses the possibility of meaningful response from economically weaker addressees. This pattern directly addresses the study's three research questions.

In relation to RQ1 — how power is constructed and legitimized in the speech of economically dominant characters — the analysis shows that legitimization operates through grammatical form as much as through content. Bare imperatives (Extract 1), rhetorical questions that presuppose their own answer (Extract 2), and generalized declarative claims about the nature

of personal worth (Extract 3) each allow Seath Behroz Karim to speak in a mode that requires no justification and admits no rebuttal. Power, in other words, is legitimized less by argument than by the sheer grammatical confidence with which it is asserted.

In relation to RQ2 — how the discourse represents indifference toward the wellbeing of economically weaker characters — the analysis finds that such indifference is rarely stated outright but is instead encoded through omission: in each extract, the addressee's perspective, response, or interior state is systematically absent from the reported dialogue. This structural silencing performs, at the level of narrative form, the very marginalization the extracts describe at the level of content.

In relation to RQ3 — how discourse surrounding law and authority reflects perceptions of impunity — Extract 2 in particular suggests that, within the world of the novel, private wealth is discursively positioned as a substitute for public legal authority. The absence of any reported legal consequence for Seath Behroz Karim's actions elsewhere in the narrative reinforces this reading, suggesting that the novel constructs impunity not as an isolated failure of law enforcement but as a structural feature of a social order in which wealth and legal accountability are, for some actors, mutually exclusive.

These findings are broadly consistent with the theoretical positions reviewed in Section 5: Van Dijk's (2001) typology of coercive, economic, and persuasive power; Fairclough's (1989) claim that power in discourse involves powerful participants constraining the contributions of the less powerful; and Meyer's (2009) framing of power as an asymmetric relationship between differently positioned social actors. The novel's discourse can therefore be read not simply as a portrait of one villainous character, but as a literary dramatization of a wider social pattern in which economic capital converts, with relatively little friction, into social, interpersonal, and quasi-legal authority.

These findings also carry implications beyond the immediate reading of *Pree-Zad*. If popular fiction routinely constructs wealth-based dominance through grammatical patterns that foreclose response — bare imperatives, rhetorically closed questions, and unchallenged generalizations about worth — then such fiction may contribute, in a small but cumulative way, to normalizing the very inequalities it appears to critique. A novel can simultaneously expose injustice at the level of plot (Seath Behroz Karim is, on one reading, presented as morally compromised) while reproducing the linguistic conditions of that injustice at the level of discourse, by never granting subordinate characters a comparably forceful voice. This tension between critique and reproduction is a recurring finding in CDA-based literary scholarship and appears clearly in the extracts examined here, suggesting that readers and educators engaging with *Pree-Zad* might productively attend not only to what the novel says about power, but to how its dialogue is grammatically structured to perform power.

This tension also resonates closely with recent CDA scholarship on Pakistani media discourse more broadly. Just as Tahir, Shah, and Yasir (2021) find that Pakistani television drama both represents and reproduces class-based inequality for a mass audience, and Naeem and Zaidi (2024) find that Pakistani Urdu dramas frequently function as a tool reinforcing existing social hierarchies rather than challenging them, the present analysis suggests that *Pree-Zad*'s prose discourse performs a similar dual function: dramatizing injustice as a plot element while linguistically reproducing the very asymmetries of voice that constitute that injustice. This convergence across genres — talk shows (Iqbal, Azhar, & Shah, 2020), television drama (Tahir, Shah, & Yasir, 2021; Naeem & Zaidi, 2024), drama serials (Abid, Siddique, & Ahmad, 2024), and now popular prose fiction — suggests that the discursive naturalization of wealth-based power is not confined to any single Pakistani media form, but recurs as a broader pattern across the country's popular cultural output. The comparison with Malik, Murtaza, and Shah's (2014) analysis of ethnic and social hierarchy in *The Kite Runner* further suggests that this

pattern of discursively naturalized inequality is not specific to Pakistani fiction alone, but is a recurring feature of how popular South Asian prose fiction constructs social hierarchy more generally.

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Extract 2

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