

## Gender Discourses in Ali's *Twilight in Delhi*: A Hallidayan Perspective

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### Abstract

*This paper explores the influence of gender roles on power relations between men and women in Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi*. Using Halliday's systemic functional linguistics, the paper examines how language shapes social realities. By analyzing linguistic choices such as existential, mental, and material processes, the study reveals how societal hierarchies, particularly related to gender, are embedded in character discourses. Interactions, especially between characters like Begum Nihal and Begum Waheed, highlight gender- and class-based power imbalances. The study finds that *Twilight in Delhi* uses language to reflect societal hierarchies, particularly highlighting the pressures faced by women in a patriarchal setting. Dialogues among characters, especially Begum Nihal and Begum Waheed, reveal subtle attempts by women to assert influence within male-dominated structures. The study also finds out the women's limited intervention and deep-rooted expectations of obedience within both family and society.*

**Key words:** Gender roles, Power structures, *Twilight in Delhi*, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Societal Hierarchies

### Background of the Study

*Twilight in Delhi* paints a vivid picture of pre-partition India, exploring the complexities of societal structures, gender norms, and power dynamics. Set in a decaying aristocratic society, the novel reflects the strict patriarchal norms that shape family and social relationships. Gender and power relations are central to the narrative, vividly depicted through the characters' dialogues and interactions. Language serves as a vital medium for representing these relations, and analyzing it through the lens of functional grammar allows for a deeper understanding of how power and gender are negotiated throughout the text.

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) developed by M.A.K. Halliday, provides an insightful way to analyze how language constructs social reality. SFL emphasizes how linguistic choices convey interpersonal relationships, meanings, and the structures of texts. In *Twilight in Delhi*, these linguistic choices reflect entrenched power hierarchies, particularly between male and female characters, making it an ideal candidate for functional grammar analysis.

### Statement of the Problem

The issue at the core of this paper is the intricate relationship between gender and power as portrayed through linguistic structures in Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi*. The novel depicts a patriarchal society where power relations are heavily influenced by gender roles, and the interactions between characters highlight these underlying forces. The challenge lies in understanding how language, particularly the specific linguistic choices made by characters, reflects and reinforces these gendered power structures. In view of this context, the paper seeks to investigate how gender and power relations manifest in Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* through functional grammar. The linguistic processes present in character dialogues are analyzed by identifying the gendered relations and the power imbalances, mood and modality choices.

### Significance and Rationale of the Paper

By merging literature with linguistics, this research highlights how the linguistic structures in *Twilight in Delhi* mirror broader societal issues, particularly the dynamics of gender and power. Using functional grammar, we reveal how language not only reinforces patriarchal dominance but also explores the social realities that female characters confront. This paper contributes to gender studies and postcolonial literature, underscoring the importance of language in shaping societal norms and power relations in colonial India.

### Literature Review

This literature review focuses on applying Halliday's (1978) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework with particular attention to Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* (1940) that serves as a compelling case paper for exploring how characters' language mirrors the broader social hierarchies of gender and authority. The analysis of *Twilight in Delhi* allows for a deeper understanding of how colonialism exacerbated traditional gender roles, creating a more complex picture of power relations.

A theoretical literature review is essential for this paper, focusing on Halliday's (1978) framework for analyzing language functions, particularly concerning processes and participant roles. Numerous studies have employed Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to explore power relations, authority, and subjugation within literary texts. As Butt et al. (2000) assert, "Systemic Functional Linguistics provides tools for analyzing how language constructs social reality, making it invaluable for understanding the dynamics of power in literature." This body of research is crucial for unpacking gender dynamics in works like *Twilight in Delhi* (Ali, 1940), where the domestic sphere often reflects larger societal structures.

Chen (2019) argues for integrating SFL in analyzing literary dialects to unveil the intricate relationship between language, power, and identity. This approach enriches our understanding of specific texts while broadening the scope of critical discourse analysis in literary studies. Key insights include how literary dialects, as markers of identity, convey characters' backgrounds and social contexts. The use of dialect can highlight social hierarchies and power dynamics, revealing underlying tensions in the narrative. The paper emphasizes the role of transitivity in analyzing dialect, indicating varying levels of agency and power among characters. For instance, characters using dialect may be portrayed with diminished agency, reflecting their marginalized status within the story.

Research on South Asian literature, particularly within colonial and postcolonial contexts, demonstrates the deep intertwining of power dynamics with colonial history and paternalistic authority. Said (1978) posits that "colonial discourse established a framework that not only justified colonial rule but also reinforced existing gender hierarchies," a point particularly relevant in *Twilight in Delhi*. The colonial backdrop complicates authority portrayals, highlighting how colonialism exacerbates existing gender and social hierarchies. Hussain (1991) emphasizes that "the intersection of colonialism and patriarchy in South Asian literature illuminates the complexities of power and gender relations," reflecting the tension experienced by female characters in the text.

Employing SFL in this context allows for a nuanced understanding of women's subjugation and the projection of dominance by male characters. As Butt et al. (2000) explain, "the analysis of mood and modality in narrative can reveal the underlying power dynamics and character relationships." This analytical approach offers insight into the subtleties of gender oppression and the societal norms that uphold male authority.

### Studies on *Twilight in Delhi*

Recent studies related to *Twilight in Delhi* further enrich this discourse. Hussain (2021) examines the reflection of colonial power structures and British imperialism's impact on Delhi's socio-political dynamics, emphasizing the patriarchal structures within the narrative. Rahman (2022) analyzes gender representation in the novel, focusing on female characters' navigation and resistance against patriarchal authority through a feminist lens. Chen (2019) applies SFL to highlight how dialect and language choices reflect social identities and power relations, emphasizing the significance of transitivity in understanding character agency. Malik (2020) discusses cultural identity representation in the novel, exploring how colonial and indigenous cultures intersect and inform power dynamics. Ahmad (2023) examines the lingering effects of colonialism on identities in a postcolonial context, addressing themes of loss, nostalgia, and identity struggles.

### **Theoretical Framework: Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)**

Using Halliday's SFL framework provides a structured approach to analyzing linguistic features in *Twilight in Delhi*, particularly regarding power dynamics and authority. Halliday identifies three metafunctions of language: ideational, interpersonal, and textual, each contributing to meaning construction in context.

Ideational Function represents how language depicts the world. In *Twilight in Delhi*, transitivity processes (material, mental, relational) reveal power dynamics, with characters described through relational processes indicating authority and those in material processes shown as active or passive participants (Halliday, 1985; Butt et al., 2000).

Interpersonal Function focuses on interaction and relationships. Analyzing mood (declarative, interrogative, imperative) and modality highlights authority and subjugation among characters. For instance, imperative sentences suggest dominance, while interrogatives can indicate attempts to assert power within social hierarchies (Eggins, 1994; Martin, 1992).

Textual Function addresses the organization of information in discourse. Examining thematic structure in *Twilight in Delhi* illustrates how narratives construct power, especially regarding patriarchal themes and societal expectations. Cohesion and coherence shape perceptions of character identities and relationships (Halliday & Hasan, 1976).

Applying Halliday's SFL framework allows for a nuanced analysis of language, power, and identity interplay in *Twilight in Delhi*. This method enriches literary analysis and expands critical discourse studies by systematically exploring how linguistic choices reflect and reinforce social structures (Hussain, 2021; Rahman, 2022). Overall, this framework not only enhances our understanding of *Twilight in Delhi* but also serves as a valuable tool for examining other literary works concerning power relations.

### **Methodology**

To conduct a qualitative analysis of *Twilight in Delhi*, the paper uses Catherine Belsey's model of textual analysis, grounded in poststructuralism, emphasizing that texts do not have a single meanings. Instead, meaning is created through the interaction between the reader and the text. She also suggests that meaning is socially constructed and often reflects dominant power structures (Belsey, 2002). This method allows us to explore both the text's intricacies and the perspectives of readers or scholars engaged with it. In line with this approach, the primary data collection involves close reading of *Twilight in Delhi*, focusing on Halliday's SFL framework. Using this framework, we analyze the language of the text to uncover how different characters are represented through various processes (material, mental, relational) (Halliday, 1985). This analysis illustrates the power relations and social hierarchies portrayed in the novel, investigating

mood within dialogues to discern interpersonal relationships among characters and their assertions of power.

### **Data analysis of *Twilight in Delhi* (1940)**

Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), developed by linguist M.A.K. Halliday, examines how people use language to perform various social roles, communicate ideas, express emotions, and establish interpersonal relationships, and how meaning is constructed through the relationships between characters, actions, and their context. In *Twilight in Delhi*, the dialogues and interactions among characters, particularly those surrounding gender and power dynamics, reveal deep social and familial hierarchies. Here's an exploration based on Halliday's framework:

#### **1. Existential and Mental Processes**

The sentence "Three wrinkles had formed on Begum Nihal's brow" illustrates an existential process. These wrinkles symbolize the social pressures and inequalities that shape her emotional landscape, representing her awareness of the complex social fabric surrounding her, especially concerning class and caste. This theme continues through the mental processes of cognition, as Begum Nihal and other female characters reflect on these societal issues, exposing their internalized acceptance of inequality.

For instance, in her dialogue with Begum Waheed, Begum Nihal articulates her understanding of Asghar's critical situation with statements like "I must take your father's consent" (Ali, 2007, p. 55). This dialogue reveals a clear awareness of male dominance in family decision-making, showcasing how social norms dictate women's behavior towards obedience and submission to patriarchal authority.

#### **2. Declarative Mood and Social Dynamics**

The declarative mood utilized by both Begum Nihal and Begum Waheed highlights the tension and power structure within their interactions. For example, Begum Nihal's sarcastic remark, "Then will he bring a fairy from the Caucasus?" (Ali, 2007, p. 56), reflects her frustration and critical stance towards Asghar's actions. The sarcasm becomes a tool to express her dissatisfaction with societal expectations imposed on women.

Moreover, phrases like "looked at her mother anxiously," "said with anger," and "annoyed with her daughter" (Ali, 2007, p. 58) underscore the shifting emotions and power dynamics at play. These exchanges highlight the underlying tension that arises from male dominance within the family structure.

#### **3. Patriarchal Power and Modality**

The dialogues involving Mir Nihal reveal the overwhelming presence of patriarchal authority. For instance, the statement, "If your father only comes to hear of this, he will eat him up alive" (Ali, 2007, p. 59), encapsulates the fear surrounding male authority and the consequences of defiance. The material processes here depict actions taken in anticipation of male reactions, such as Begum Waheed's trepidation about Asghar's intentions leading to severe repercussions.

The modality of certainty expressed by Begum Nihal, such as in "He will begin to shout" (Ali, 2007, p. 64), further emphasizes the dominance of male authority. The verb "know" in "You know your father's temper" suggests a habitual understanding of Mir Nihal's behavior, indicating that these power dynamics are entrenched in the family's daily life.

#### **4. Judgment and Social Expectations**

Begum Nihal's statement, "He must be mad to think of it" (Ali, 2007, p. 63), reflects her judgment modality, indicating disbelief at Asghar's actions. This further reinforces the theme of patriarchal control, as she aligns herself with Mir Nihal's authority, despite her frustrations. In this way, female characters like Begum Nihal become enforcers of patriarchal values, perpetuating the same power structures that oppress them.

In the phrase "He must be mad," the mental process indicates her cognition and judgment about Asghar's decision, illustrating how she internalizes the patriarchal norms that influence her perspective.

### 5. Social Power in Dialogue and Directives

The clause "I will disown him" (Ali, 2007, p. 68) exemplifies the use of material processes to assert control. Such imperative statements further reinforce the power dynamics within the family, with Mir Nihal maintaining ultimate decision-making authority. The women's fear of his temper and their navigation within their limited power illustrate the gender imbalance present. Begum Nihal's repetitive assertion, "I shall have nothing to do with him," signifies how her decisions hinge on the patriarchal figure's approval or disapproval.

### 6. Power Imbalance and Gendered Language

In the phrase, "If he marries Mirza Shahbaz's daughter, I will disown him" (Ali, 2007, p. 68), the material processes like "disown" and "have nothing to do with him" highlight how power is exercised through language. Although Begum Nihal appears to assert control, her words are heavily influenced by the male-dominated decision-making structure within the family. Her power remains contingent upon Mir Nihal's approval, reflecting a significant gender disparity.

By examining the dialogues and processes in *Twilight in Delhi* through Halliday's functional grammar theory, we uncover the intricate ways in which gender and power relations are embedded within family interactions. The existential, mental, and material processes, alongside modality and declarative mood, illustrate the female characters' struggles against subjugation in a patriarchal society. The language they use reveals their internal conflicts with male dominance and their attempts to assert limited control within the constraints of societal expectations.

### Discussion

The discourse analysis of selected passages from Ali's novel uncovers significant themes related to social inequality, patriarchal dominance, and emotional tensions among characters. The imagery of "Three wrinkles had formed on Begum Nihal's brow" symbolizes the societal burdens women endure in a patriarchal framework, reflecting their awareness of caste and class hierarchies.

Begum Nihal's declaration, "I must take your father's consent," signifies the internalization of male authority in family decision-making, shedding light on the weight of patriarchal norms (Ali, 2007). The interactions between Begum Nihal and Begum Waheed illustrate their strained relationship, marked by annoyance and anger.

The fear of Mir Nihal's reaction, as shown in the phrase "he will eat him up alive," highlights the pervasive threat of violence that underscores their dialogue and reinforces patriarchal dominance within the family (Ali, 2007).

Begum Waheed's acknowledgment of the challenges in confronting Mir Nihal emphasizes the emotional stakes involved. Her remark, "It is easy to say a thing, but it's difficult to do it," underscores their learned helplessness within the patriarchal structure, indicating a keen awareness of their limited agency.

Begum Nihal's assertion, "If he marries Mirza Shahbaz's daughter I will disown him," reflects her struggle against societal norms, representing a form of defiance against Mir Nihal's authority. However, this defiance is complicated by fears of familial loss, illustrating the complex loyalties in a patriarchal context.

Begum Nihal's rhetorical question, "What do you know of my grief?" reveals her isolation and the unrecognized suffering endured by women in patriarchal societies. This emotional disconnection underscores the challenges women face in asserting their needs amidst societal expectations.

Through existential, mental, and emotional processes, the characters navigate their constrained roles, revealing the impacts of social inequality and gender dynamics on their lives. This analysis highlights the intricate relationships shaped by personal emotions and societal constraints, illuminating the challenges women confront in their quest for agency and understanding.

### Conclusion

Analyzing *Twilight in Delhi* through Halliday's Functional Grammar Theory uncovers how dialogues among characters, especially those addressing gender and power relations, expose entrenched social and familial hierarchies. The existential processes, particularly evident in Begum Nihal's physical representation of social stress (the wrinkles on her brow), reveal her awareness of societal inequalities concerning class and caste. The dialogues reflect the internalization of male authority and the emotional strains felt by female characters, underscoring the patriarchal dynamics that shape their actions and thoughts.

### Findings

The study reveals that in *Twilight in Delhi*, Ahmed Ali uses language to depict societal hierarchies and gender power dynamics, with existential and mental processes symbolizing the pressures faced by women in a patriarchal society. Dialogues, especially those involving Begum Nihal and Begum Waheed, convey the subtle ways women attempt to assert influence, despite the constraints imposed by male authority. Through material processes and male-centric language, the novel highlights women's limited agency and the entrenched expectations of obedience and submission within family and society.

The discourse analysis of *Twilight in Delhi* illustrates the complex relationship between language, gender, and power. The characters navigate a patriarchal landscape, where their dialogues reveal internal struggles and the constraints imposed by societal expectations. This analysis highlights how these dynamics perpetuate social inequalities, emphasizing the emotional toll on female characters as they seek agency within a repressive framework. Overall, this paper underscores the significance of language in reflecting and perpetuating power imbalances within familial and social structures. This framework enhances our understanding of the text, demonstrating how Halliday's theory elucidates the complex interactions of gender and power within literary narratives.

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