Language as a Discursive Practice: A Study of Scarlett Thomas' Novel

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Language in use is not a neutral phenomenon. It is always contextual and perspectival. Language, as a discursive practice, is a historically and culturally mediated phenomenon, which is constitutive of as well as constituted by institutions and social structures existing at a larger scale. This paper is a theoretical study of language as a discursive practice with application on text of a novel "The End of Mr. Y" (2007) by Scarlett Thomas, using Critical Discourse Analysis as a method of analysis and interpretation. This investigation, under the perspective of *Poststructuralism,* suggests that language users remain in struggle to control the situation through their self-assumed legitimized discursive language use. It also appears that the meanings, language users seek to express, themselves struggle with one another in the construction of identities and relations.

Introduction

How do truth and reality get constructed in language use? How does language help users get free from cultural restrictions and create identities? What patterns of language are used, how, by whom and for what specific purpose? Guided by these research questions, this paper explores a novel (The End of Mr. Y by Scarlett Thomas, 2007) by placing it in its socio-cultural contexts, which involve in words of Fairclough (1989), situational, institutional and societal aspects. These questions are raised in the beginning because of their remarkable significance in language use in the text of the novel. The text selected for this study is assumed as a discourse presented from a specific perspective influenced as it is by the processes of social interaction. It is also assumed that this discourse is produced not only under the influence of certain social structures; rather it is produced also to counter the determining effects of those structures. It concerns with the constitutive effect of discourse upon identities and power relations with this perception that there is a dialectical relationship between the text (discourse) and the larger scale contexts. Though this intimate relationship exists between the discourse and the society given; however, this study primarily explores discourse not society; therefore, focuses on how the linguistic features function through the social relations. Influence of a society on the discourse is viewed as constraining and constitutive, as Foucault (1972) calls discursive practice/discourse a highly regulated grouping of sentences. In this regard, he says that "Truth (discourse) is of the world; it is produced there by

virtue of multiple constraints . . . Each society has its regime of truth, its general politics of truth: that is the type of discourses it harbours and causes to function as true" (cited in Mills, 1997, p. 18).

Foucault talks more explicitly that a discourse does not exist in a definable form rather it is constructed. Every society has its own discourse, hence its own concepts of truth. It also indicates that societies impose limits on discourses; therefore, they are organized around practices of exclusion and inclusion based on beliefs, values and social categorizations. As these constraints influence the language use, therefore the focus of this paper, as Griffin (2005) contends, is upon patterns in language use and patterns of language use as they occur in the text of the novel. This analysis of discourse enters into the investigation of dialectical relationship between the text and larger scale contexts which function in the form of institutions, socio-cultural practices, norms, belief systems and values, etc. The significance of this paper lies in the investigation of language use as affected by power struggle on the one hand, and also in knowing and developing understanding that how gender issues play their fundamental role in discursive strategies of language in the text of the novel. Though this study has the potential to be expanded to any large scale research, I have delimited it to the analysis and interpretation of one novel only because of spatial constraints.

About the Text

The text of the novel is assumed as a discourse, which is constituted of specific patterns of language use, patterns in language use, social positions of the participants (characters) as subjects and

objects and above all the superimposed meanings of the text producer for the purpose of creating situated meanings for the reader. 'The End of Mr. Y' is a novel full of exceptionally distinct phenomena like faith, science, nature of being and language and very nature of life and death. A parallel mention of religion and science runs through this novel as the author is much influenced by the scientific ideas. Main character in the novel is a young lady, Ariel Manto whose journey in **"Troposphere"** is, perhaps, the result of influence of these scientific ideas. This novel is basically a thought experiment wherein Ariel Manto, attempts to know and understand limits of consciousness and knowledge in all its dimensions. The author is very critical of every phenomenon. Even the conventions of genre are flouted as there is hardly any unified plot. Vocabulary of science and mathematics is incorporated to challenge the literary jargon. She brings philosophical discussion into literature and a young girl of postmodern age, Ariel Manto, challenges the authority of patriarchy, Church/God and asserts her existence as the creator of things through her own thought/language. Thomas believes that language is a trap particularly when you try to find meanings. Ariel Manto in the novel is a free woman to make and break her own worlds through language. A woman expresses her experiences in her own language and the way she likes challenging all conventions of patriarchy.

Literature Review

This paper adds to the range of research related to discourses which often base on, in words of Fairclough, "opaque relationship of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and

processes" (cited in Atkins, 1996). Other few significant researchers who carried out relatively similar small-scale researches on linguistic aspects include Caldas-Coulthard (abuse of political and institutional power, 1996), Krishnamurthy (racial inequality, 1996), Atkins (abuse of political power and social inequality, 2002) and Lehtonen (gender discrimination in children fantasy novels, 2007). I would refer to only the last two researchers for this literature review. First, Atkins (2000), analyzed a letter to expatriates from the Rt. Hon. Sir Norman Fowler MP (Chairman of the governing Conservative Party) which was written in 1994 to gain votes from expatriates and dissuade them (readers) from voting the other party. Focusing upon the opaque forms of "politically tainted language," Atkins attempts to highlight how individuals in power attempt to influence attitudes and expectations of the common people and further social inequalities. Using Fairclough's (1989) interpretative framework, Atkins brings out the *experiential, relational* and *expressive* values that vocabulary and grammatical features carry. He calls language a very dangerous and sinister tool because of its hidden political agenda. Atkins mainly concentrates on those linguistic features (verbs, nouns, modals, syntactic forms, etc.) which involve implicit processes, agency, objectives and mystified time and participants. Such words include *'socialism, income tax rates, strikes, privatization, inflation, etc.* He also highlights that many contentious and ideologically contestable issues are presented in the form of facts just to create the desired perception in the readers. Second, Lehtonen (2007) takes a critical view of institutionally constrained form of language used in children's fantasy fiction. For this, Lehtonen adopts a combined approach including narrative theory and feminist critical discourse

analysis. Fiction under study is "The Time of the Ghost" by Diana Wynne Jones (1981) written in the Britain of 1980s; though it is a fantasy fiction for children, but for Lehtonen there are specific patterns of language use which deal discursively with female agency and empowerment under the impact of *second wave feminism*. To highlight the discursive use of language, Lehtonen focuses on investigating (a) processes of selection or presence in terms what is included and what is excluded, what is stated and what is implied focusing on not only the girl protagonist but other gendered discourses and the power relations between them; (b) different voices constructing gendered discourses like the narrator's focused area and the narrative processes and what is said and how it is said including allegorical and metaphorical aspects, lexical choices and syntactic structures; and (c) intertextual elements which come in support to enrich the discursive practices of the text.

An interesting aspect of Atkins' analysis is that it touches upon almost all aspects of language as demanded by ten analytical questions of Interpretative Framework of Fairclough and attempts to explore the influencing power of language used discursively through euphemisms like *please, privatisation and nationalisation;* metaphors like *the sick man of Europe,* and declarative and imperative sentences, etc. It is a brief analysis with this insight that it can be enhanced to a larger scale research paper. Similarly, Lehtonen's paper provides an insight that a novel may be a mere entertainment for the kids but under its discursive strategies, a researcher can explore surprising relationship between language, ideology, society and gender. A brief analysis of this research is useful for my study

because of its methodological closeness and use of analytical framework suggested by Fairclough.

Analytical Perspective and Significant Aspects of this Study

Drawing upon the insight of political and constitutive character of language, it is imperative to adopt an analytical perspective which focuses on stripping rational, universal and causal explanations and claims to authorities made through discursive and linguistic patterns. The concept of language as a discursive practice takes, according to Clifford (quoted in Alvesson & Scoldberg, 2000), investigation into the metaphorical, contextual, rhetorical, institutional, political and historical aspects of language. In view of this ephemeral and compromised character of language, I bring *Poststructuralism* as my analytical perspective. *Poststructuralism* views language playing its role with multiple meanings beyond its individual sentences and pure linguistic features as it is discussed in literature review section that language functions through its effects created by implicit and explicit relationships of language, ideology, power, society, gender etc. Language is not an objective and neutral phenomenon rather a negotiated, constitutive and discursive practice. As Mills (1997) argues, "A discourse is a set of sanctioned statements which have some institutionalized force, which means that they have a profound influence on the way that individuals act and think". With this understanding of discourse, Mills puts the whole onus of shaping of human behavior upon language use. Greene (1994) also contends that our social events and actions are constructed through language symbols. Thus, in a novel text, language functions through its contextual and negotiated forms. Similarly, Sartre argues (quoted in

Greene 1994 p. 211) against the existence of meanings when he says that "the literary object realised through language, is never given in language". Thus realization of the world is through linguistic constructions based on contextual constituents not through linguistic representations.

Michael Foucault (1972) is very specific about language as a multi-meaning phenomenon constrained only by social orders which function in the forms of rules, social practices, family traditions, institutional laws, etc. He calls language a highly regulated form of communication. Its representations are not neutral and real rather relational, contextual, regulated and discursive. Major factor affecting the language use is the issue of power – its presence as well as absence. These analytical views of poststructuralist theorists provide the insight that as language is not a transparent means to represent reality, so there is no objective way or *real* methodology to analyze a language, rather there is need to understand both in their social and political contexts.

Different Aspects of Language as a Discursive Practice

Language as a discursive practice functions in diverse forms and each form confirms its poststructuralist characteristic openly against any homogeneity, coherence and linearity. Some of those aspects are as under.

Issue of Voice in a Discourse

It is a leading question in the study of discourses that what is the significance of presence or absence of a particular voice. It invites

to explore the kind of relationship an author represents in a discourse on one hand, and the relationship s/he wants to establish between discourse and its reader, on the other hand. Moreover, it may reflect author's personal experiences as Deborah Britzman claims (quoted in Pinar, 1997, p. 83), "Voice suggests relationship with others, with own experiences, understanding of a social process". Investigation of voice in a discourse is valuable because it gives new meanings to a discourse; it breaks silence for those who are marginalized. Janet L. Miller (quoted in Pinar, 1997) argues that women's own voice expresses their own experiences which are denied or not fully given voice in discourses influenced by patriarchal forces. Moreover, there is not only one voice in a discourse. There are multiple voices, which in words of Bakhin (Holquist, 1997) makes it dialogical, and in words of Fairclough, (2003), interdiscursive. Its implications suggest that analysis of a discourse is not linear and transparent, rather critical and growing in meaning because of the discursive nature of language.

Discourse and Identity

Like 'voice', representation of different identities is also important and question how identities take shape in a discourse. They are constructed discursively, usually, basing on binary oppositions and represented as common phenomena. They are represented as subjects and objects by positioning them into social practices and asserting who has the right as speaking and knowledgeable subject, and who is the incompetent and speechless object. Even in institutional parameters, Pinar argues, "language belongs to the symbolic order, the structure and content of the regimes of reason in which we dwell". So it is our usual habit that we take things for

granted. Similarly, Boler (1999) also talks about the identities associated with emotional contents but for her, emotions are not unchangeable given phenomenon rather socially constructed through language. Introducing binary oppositions like rational/emotional, logical/capricious, hardworking/lethargic, etc., powerful regimes attempt to construct identities to control the less powerful.

Discourse and Power

Kincheloe (1997) is very critical of power assumptions embedded in discourses. He perceives that language does not reflect reality rather it creates reality and truth. Basing on this thesis, he argues that language does not reflect power relations, rather it constitutes those relations. Similarly, Foucault (in Mills, 1997) contends that we are created through our discourses. Those who are in power create new discourses and perpetuate them through a systematic use of language. However, their discursive measures appear when there are counter discourses, because it is important to understand who controls a discourse, and who speaks and writes for whom. The aspects of syntactic and lexical forms of language production, distribution, access and influence are significant in the analysis of power in discourses.

Discourse and Representation

Discourses function within the socio-cultural and institutional parameters. An attempt is made through definitive vocabulary and exclusive ideological stances that this **is** reality. This has been the favorite claim of structuralist/modernist language use. However, poststructuralist theorists like Derrida (in Delta, 2002), Kincheloe

(1997), Foucault (1972), and Kristeva (2000) have a different view of language representations in social environment. For them, language is inherently pluralistic, hence unable to represent reality in its concrete form. As socio-cultural events, customs, beliefs, ideologies, etc., are not static rather ever subject to change, so language is potentially a multi-meaning phenomenon, characteristically, more fictive and constitutive in its use rather than real.

Meaningfulness of Language

Like representation, meaningfulness of language is a well contested issue in the debate of the discursive aspect of language. Poststructuralist theory contends that language is not representative and depictive, rather dialogical and constitutive. Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) argue about this aspect of language when they say that "The problem of 'representation' (meaningfulness) moves to the centre stage. Language is considered to be ambivalent, evasive, metaphorical and constitutive, rather than unequivocal, literal and depictive" (p. 151). Foucault (1972) also calls all language accounts as invested. Thus, meaningfulness of language is not inherent rather discursive.

Methodology

This paper is going to analyze the selected passages of a novel, 'The End of Mr Y' with the view that language is a discursive practice which concerns about specific meanings in a specific context under the analytical perspective of Poststructuralism. Poststructuralism takes language as a multi-meaning phenomenon and not a real, representative and objective data as perceived in

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structuralism and empiricism. The method of analysis is from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with its main focus upon language use (discourse) and how it is related to the contextualized social practices and power relations. Context is significant because, according to Griffin (2005), discourses "have meaning, force, and effect within a social context". Without context, a discourse will be a mere isolated piece of linguistic features which may have attraction for a pure linguist but not for a qualitative inquirer. Both Wodak and Fairclough (as quoted in Young & Harrison, 2004) also contend that context has a crucial bearing upon analysis of language use because of the basic intentions like "CDA addresses social problems, power relations are discursive, discourse constitutes society and culture, the link between text and society is mediated and discourse is a form of social action, etc". By providing guidelines for the investigation of these aspects of language, CDA develops an understanding about specific hidden social structures and institutional rules which govern patterns of language use in a discourse. Fairclough (1989) has elaborated upon various analytical aspects of CDA; therefore his suggested analytical framework with its analytical ten questions is being utilized for analyzing the following aspects of language use:

i.   Three key aspects of a discourse, as highlighted by Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000), are language, gender and power. CDA focuses on who (gender) speaks what, under what circumstances (power) and for whom, etc.

ii.   Analysis of language is not confined to linguistic features only; rather it leads to analysis of social practices and cultural values as well. As Fairclough (2003) argues that Social

Analysis and Textual Analysis are the essential features of discourse analysis. Therefore, the analysis of language use grows within and from social analysis.

iii.   Use of language in discourse is affected by social constraints and not by grammatical rules. Grammatical rules become subservient to social rules which Fairclough (2003), in the light of Foucault, calls as 'order of discourse'. As suggested by poststructuralism, language is analyzed how it *is* used not how it *should* be used guided by correct grammatical rules.

iv.   Language is not only a discursive practice, it is interdiscursive. A discourse in its language use does not sail smoothly within a single subject/discipline. Its language use is interdisciplinary which constructs 'realities' discursively to strengthen certain realities and weaken others, and also to create new and confuse others, etc.

v.   CDA also helps investigate representation of implicit and explicit ideologies which happen through the ways of ideologically contested words, metaphorical language use, agency and use of personal pronouns.

vi.   Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) describe few assumptions about language, which are the focus of CDA in an analysis of discourse, and these are:

● Language is used for a variety of functions and consequences.

● Language is both constructed and constructive.

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- Same phenomenon can be described in different ways in different contexts.

- The constructive and flexible ways in which language is used should themselves be a central subject of study.

These assumptions provide insights about various functions of language which make it firstly, discursive and secondly, they also indicate towards those guidelines useful for methodological purposes.

Limitations of CDA

As there are positive points about CDA, few limitations are also pointed out. However, these limitations do not weaken or complicate the usefulness of CDA as method of analysis of language. These limitations are:

i. Hutchby and Woodfit (quoted in Bartlett, 2004) criticize the lack of attention of CDA to the "more basic sense of context . . . sequential context of talk in which utterances are produced".

ii. Widdowson (quoted in Bartlett, 2004) criticizes the application part of CDA that "the procedure is to fix on some particular linguistic features . . . and assign it ideological significance without regard to how it might be understood in the normal indexical process of reading".

iii. Eggins (quoted in Bartlett, 2004) criticizes CDA "for its failure to provide an analysis in terms that can be quantified and contrasted with other texts and so be given a value".

The objections concerning CDA are the very essence from which it begins. It always emphasizes upon connection between language and social structures which form the context. First, Fairclough (2003) contends that the whole process involved in the production of a discourse is context which is the focal point of CDA. Griffin (2005) also speaks about this aspect of CDA that the knowledge it produces is,

> [A]n understanding of the implicit rules and norms that govern language use in a specific context in order to make explicit the ideological assumptions that govern that use and by making the latter explicit, to point to possibilities of resistance, or other ways of reading.

In reply to the First and Second objections, Griffin makes it clear that there is no deliberate attempt of forcing a relationship between linguistic features and ideologies. Ideological structures being context are there to govern and shape specific discourses to which CDA pays due attention. Third objection is of the scientific nature. Producing knowledge which can be quantified and contrasted is the domain of pure sciences, which is not possible in language studies. Against this positivistic criteria, Griffin (2005) suggests while referring to research methods used in English Studies, that to evaluate a good research we need to depend upon the criteria of such as *plausibility* (how persuasive a set of findings to given community of readers?), *reflexivity* (how much awareness of the particularities of the research process and its impacts on the findings are articulated by the author?) and *comprehensiveness* (how extensive and exhaustive was the research conducted?). Being a different area, its research outcomes cannot be quantified and measured because the data it deals with is of

diversified nature. It offers many readings, many possibilities, hence many findings.

Analysis and Interpretative Framework

For this analysis and interpretation, the procedures adopted are taken from the interpretative framework of Fairclough who elaborates it in his book, Language and Power (1989, p. 110). Concerning this framework, first, he suggests three levels of discourse that is, Context, Interaction and Text. Then he recommends three stages of CDA that is, Description, Interpretation and Explanation. After this, Fairclough recommends a list of ten questions as under.

A.   Vocabulary

1.   What experiential (how text producer's experience of the natural/social world effects and is represented in a text) values do words have?

What classification schemes are drawn upon?

Are there words which are ideologically contested?

Is there rewording or over-wording?

what ideologically significant meaning relations (synonymy, hyponymy, antonymy) are there between words?

2.   What relational (perceived relationship between producer of the text and its recipient or an enacted relationship in a discourse) values do words have?

Are there euphemistic expressions?

Are there markedly formal or informal words?

3. What expressive (text producer's evaluation of the bit of the 'reality' concerning subject position and social reality) values do words have?

4. What metaphors are used?

B. Grammar

5. What experiential values do grammatical features have?

What types of process and participant predominate?

Is agency unclear?

Are processes, what they seem?

Are nominalizations used?

Are sentences active or passive?

Are sentences positive or negative?

6. What relational values do grammatical features have?

What modes (declarative, grammatical question, imperative) are used?

Are there important features of relational modality?

Are the pronouns *we* and *you* used, and if so, how?

7. What expressive values do grammatical features have?

Are there important features of expressive modality?

8. How are (simple) sentences linked together?

What logical connectors are used?

Are complex sentences charaterised by coordination or subordination?

What means are used for referring inside and outside the text?

C.   Textual Structures

9. What interactional conventions are used?

Are there ways in which one participant controls the turns of others?

10. What larger scale structures does the text have?

One important aspect about this procedure, in Fairclough's (1989) words, is that "the procedure should not be taken as a holy writ – it is a guide, not a blueprint. A reader (having detailed background knowledge of language) may find it in need of supplementation" (p. 110). Therefore, keeping in view the requirement of this study, I have made slight adjustments though without any major change in the given procedural framework.

The suitability of this framework to the present study becomes clearer if it is viewed in the light of what Griffin (2005)

suggests about CDA having two components. One is the investigation of "patterns in language use". By patterns in language use, she means the use of especially personal pronouns – 'I, we' – in order to assess the authority of status of the user. It indicates the relation between language and the position of the user. This is the very essence of discursive practice that is, the social use of language. The second component is, "patterns of language use as activity or process". It indicates how much verbal space a speaker occupies, turn taking patterns and who enjoys the relative power over whom and why, etc.

Analysis and Interpretation

I take three passages only from Thomas' novel, 'The End of Mr. Y', to analyze that how language is used discursively. Apparently, this novel is a thought experiment aimed to understand what goes on in the minds of people. However, its text appears as female resistance through its main character, Ariel Manto, to overpowering patriarchal forces, which appear in the forms of *valid* and *scientific* knowledge, religious teachings and authority, male domination in various fields of life and culturally imposed restrictions especially upon women, etc. It is imperative to clarify that the linguistic issues raised in ten analytical questions of the Interpretative Framework of Fairclough do not occur in the novel text under study separately. Rather, they overlap and are interwoven in the text and will be made distinctive through analysis and interpretation. Here follows the analysis and interpretation of the text.

Language and Identity

Ariel is set to know the limits of knowledge/consciousness. Her desire for knowledge is quite intense and she is least bothered even if she dies in her attempt to fulfill her desire. She is reading the book 'The End of Mr. Y'. There is a page missing that contains some recipe which Mr. Y experimented by using a potion. Mr. Y used it to surf the mind of his opponent who was also his neighbor. But here Ariel is not interested to use that potion for mere knowing the mind/thinking of her any opponent, but she wants to visit minds of all people just to know what they think. It is her desire to know all. She expresses her intense desire:

(1)   There's a feeling inside me like the potential nuclear fission of every atom in my body: a chain reaction of energy that could take me to the limits of everything. I almost desire some kind of violence: to live, to die, just for the experience of It . . . I want to die with everyone: the ultimate bonding experience; the flash at the end of the world. Me becoming you; you becoming we; we becoming for ever. A collapsing wave function of violence (p. 84).

This passage is significant in view of the relational value of words (Questions 2, 3, 4 of the Framework), and experiential and expressive values of grammatical features (Questions 5, 6 & 7) and the question asked initially that how truth and reality get constructed in a language use. Moreover, it is also important in view of the Question 10 of the Framework about the larger scale structures. In the context of 21st century feminist theory (Bryson, 1992), this language

use seems an attempt to give a new shape to the roles of woman. Feminist theory is the main larger scale structure visible in this text. This theory in 21st century has challenged even the focus of feminist movement itself which has shown more concern for the white women only in the previous decades. Here focus of language use is on new roles for women which are far ahead from the mere struggle against economic inequality.

Choice of vocabulary signals an attempt to represent woman in a distinctive relational value. Her identity is constructed in a significantly different way than that of man-made language/world on one hand and on the other hand a woman's role is represented different from woman's traditional roles of a mother, a wife or a professional. It takes a woman to a pedestal which is higher to that position possibly considered by patriarchy. The use of science vocabulary, **"nuclear fission"**, **"atom"**, **"chain reaction"**, **"energy"** all reveals a distinguished identity of woman which perhaps transcends the limits set by the man-made language/world like Tennyson's 'Isabel' (1830):

> Revered Isabel, the crown and head,
> The stately flower of female fortitude,
> Of perfect wifehood and pure lowlihood.

Tennyson's word scheme represents woman as somebody dependent upon man: **"The stately flower"**, **"female fortitude"**, **"perfect wifehood"**, **"pure lowlihood"**. Both Thomas's and Tennyson's use of vocabulary constructs a different kind of woman and one can see the sharp contrast which Thomas creates against traditional representation of women.

Similarly the subject position of Ariel as a speaker also indicates that it is a woman's voice revealing her own feelings. The subject position of Ariel and the declarative mode **"There's a feeling inside me"** indicates that she (woman) is a possessor/able to possess this power of the **"self"**. She uses the word **"potential"** which indicates creative ability of this power in women and this power **"could take me to the limits of everything"**. This use of language is not a mere desire for emancipation from patriarchal forces but this language use itself is a negation of all kinds of restrictions imposed by family, religion, society, language, etc. Nelly Furman (1985) presents Levi Strauss's view about woman when he says, "Her experience of life is contingent upon her psychological make-up, her individual circumstances, as well as **society's expectations** and **limitations** linked to **age**, **sex**, **creed** and so on" (p. 61).

But Thomas constructs a woman who looks beyond these restrictions of psychology, society, age, sex, creed, etc. She expresses her desire to finish the difference of **"he/she"**, **"I"**, **"we" and "you"**. She negates the authority of these language constructions which hide her unlimited **"potential nuclear fission"** and represent her as a delicate object. Thomas desires to **"Me becoming you; you becoming we, we becoming for ever." "We becoming for ever"**. It seems to be an attempt for egalitarian goals which eliminates all gender differences.

It also seems that Thomas has gone to these limits to represent women under the influence of feminism in 21st century (Question 10 of the Framework). Bryson (1992) quoting Lynne Segal argues that: "Feminism needs not to choose between modern and postmodern

goals and methods, and that its objectives can be both to work to improve the lives of women and to reinvent meanings of womanhood" (p. 246). He further argues,

> She (Segal) refuses to reduce woman's oppression to socio-economic causes and solutions, and argues that if we're to begin to understand the multi-layered complexity of gender issues, we must draw on more than one theoretical approach or academic discipline (p. 246).

The words used in the passage express (Question 3) that the text producer is intensely aware of the oppressed position of women in the social environment she lives in. Women are assumed by the milieu to be given a delicate body hence unable to perform valuable tasks which can give them credit in the world of so called valiant men. It also reflects that women have been told by patriarchal forces that they are unable to involve themselves in those tasks which need violent action or energetic movement. They have not been allowed to speak themselves about the potential power of their bodies and the intense feeling of energy they are carrying with them. They have ever been given identity by the man made discourses. Against such kind of environment, the author discursively constructs a different woman by associating her with the most powerful matter available in the world. Thomas' view of reality is different. Her evaluation expresses a woman in very aggressive mood, perhaps she was never allowed to express herself about what she feels about her physical and mental faculties. It is noticeable that through synonymous science words the author has attempted to create ideologically significant meaning relations like "**nuclear fission**", "**atom**", "**energy**", "**flash**", "**wave function**" etc. Through this evaluation of female existence the author attempts to shatter the male domination. Collocation of "**potential**"

with "**nuclear fission**" and its association with female body suggests the unrealized possibility, the tremendous energy and exceptionally energetic body of woman which has been discursively projected weak and worth for delicate tasks only by the patriarchy. Similar words like "**feeling**", "**desire**", "**want**" and "**everything**", "**everyone**", "**forever**" express an impact that women are able to think and act beyond the visible limits.

Though the whole language, according to Nietszche, (quoted in Medina, 2005) is metaphorical allowing multiple interpretations, however, Thomas seems to be more straightforward in presenting woman distinctively than metaphorical (Question 4). From the above referred vocabulary, it is visible that Thomas wants to present a woman who is perceived as a recognized person, who is not paled in the presence of patriarchal forces. This aspect becomes further clear in the analysis of grammatical features concerning experiential value (Question 5) which illuminates that Ariel presents information about herself in an unquestionable and declarative mode that appears to be factual and true and not metaphorical. Agency is very clear and there is no ambiguity about it. The repeated use of "*I*" adds to the force of meaningful language use. Frequent use of personal pronoun like "*I*", "*me*", "*my*", etc., suggest the presence of womanly body at the centre stage. Ariel uses positive sentences and in a direct way asserts her presence. She does not use metaphorical language like "valiant" or "noble" rather she is straightforward to express her daring existence that "**I want to die**", "**I almost desire some kind of violence**". The experiential value lies in its declarative mode and Ariel presents her personal feelings as a kind of irreversible fact.

However, a reader can question the authenticity of these truth claims because after all these authentic claims are a discursive attempt and their factual position can be further argued.

So, Thomas attempts to free women from the object position defined by the patriarchy and places them in a position defined by them and from where they can voice their concerns of life as they perceive appropriate.

Challenge to taken-for-granted Systems

Bulk of the text consists of the narrator's (Ariel) questions about patriarchal issues which create hurdles for women. During her thought experiment she visits a library and reads about religion but she is quite perturbed upon the 'fact' that only men are the spiritual leaders and not women. She criticizes Roman Catholicism. She reads a story in some magazine that Pope John Paul II visited some town and nuns cooked for him. At this she says:

(2)   *Surely religious leaders are supposed to be somehow wiser, than the rest of us? But I realized then that there was nothing special about this system at all, nothing that made it more profound and extraordinary than the rest of society. If someone who had given up his whole life to thinking about goodness and rightness and truth still expected nuns to cook him his fish fingers (because after all, nuns haven't got anything else better to do, and none of them are ever going to be priests or become the Pope, because women aren't good enough for that), then something was very wrong. How could he have missed the bit about everyone being equal in the eyes*

of God? . . . I am a woman, and after a lifetime of experiment
I know I am capable of everything men can do, except things
that specifically require a penis . . . So what does religion
know about me that I'm missing? Am I worth less in an a
priori sense? . . . Why is religion so disappointing? . . . Are
we the thoughts of God? (pp. 362-63).

This passage is important in view of Relational and
Expressive values of grammatical features and how sentences are
linked together (Questions 6, 7 & 8 of the Framework), and
ideologically significant meaning relations between words (Question
1 of the Framework). Moreover, it reveals that how the author uses
the narrator to challenge the man-made boundaries for women. It
significantly attempts to expose identity which is usually associated
with the church/religion. Thomas also attempts to influence the
presupposed female reader through a discursively created identity of
woman against unjustly taken for granted religious norms. This is one
of the many ways a writer attempts to use her discourse to affect an
identity. Her resistance appears mainly through the narrator as
Lincoln & Denzin (1994) argue that "The author may write through a
narrator, directly as a character . . . or through multiple characters or
one character may speak in many voices, or the writer may come in
and then go out of the text" (p. 618).

Relational value lies in constructing a conflicting relationship
between religion/religious authority and women and it also emerges
from the vocabulary used as Thomas gives the common sense view of
pope using "**surely**". Then she attempts to focalize it by using "**but**"
and "**nothing**" challenging the meaning relations of the words

"Pope" and **"nun"**. Thomas challenges this hierarchical power structure wherein pope (male) is taken as an ultimate religious authority and nun (female) is a mere part of that order. In this hierarchy, she is treated as a subhuman and exploited in the name of obedience. Therefore, taken for granted, nun is supposed to cook for Pope and in that structure she can never think to become Pope. Thomas challenges the authority of church/pope/religion by exposing the discrepancy and hypocrisy. She challenges the discourse of church which is based on such language and social meanings associated to it like **"goodness and rightness and truth"**. As this discourse of church is associated with meanings which accord inferior position to women which becomes cause of their oppression and exploitation, therefore, Thomas rejects it by exposing its exploitative authority and bringing her experience of life opposite to it. And here lies the expressive value – the modality of writer's evaluation of the truth.

Thomas' evaluation of this 'identity and truth' associated with church is presented in categorical language – in present tense, and no intermediate modals are used which leave space for any probability. Ariel asserts **"I am a woman"**. To emphasize upon her identity as a woman she avoids use of any elision like **"I'm"**. Then to convince the reader about her potential ability she says, **"after a lifetime of experiment I know I am capable of everything man can do."** By using words **"capable"** and **"everything"** she expands her abilities of doing things, including performing of Pope's duties, to indefinite limits with one exception of biological form **"penis"**. This biological addition to male body has nothing to do with nuns' capability

towards "**goodness and rightness and truth**" and church duties. By using this logic Thomas attempts to create a phenomenal situation for a female reader and influence her by rhetorical questions. This is an attempt to create oppressive identity of the religion and hence, worth resisting.

Ideological concerns of the author lie in her attempt to expose the sexist approach of religion and discriminatory distinctions made between man and woman. She resists the taken for granted norms set by the church wherein women are consigned to the less powerful positions. To counter this universalized truth of the patriarchy (church) Ariel asserts, "**I am a woman . . . capable of everything man can do**". By putting questions to the approach of religion, Thomas invites her reader to reject this status quo – a sign of oppression made by man. Here language becomes a site of struggle wherein Thomas attempts to focalize the meanings associated with words "**Pope**" and "**nun**" which are otherwise defined by the so called 'legitimate' authorities of Church. So this fiction discourse is a struggle for identity and power, what Foucault (quoted in Mills, 1997) argues about discourse: "Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines it and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (p. 45).

This passage is also important in view of question 8 that how sentences are linked together. Though this aspect apparently refers to analysis of formal features of a text however, in the perspective of poststructuralism, its value lies in its attempt to highlight the temporal, spatial and logical; relationship between sentences. The connectors of sentences are also not without their ideological value

and discursive significance. They also refer to relationship between text and context. In this passage use of "**than**" twice reflects contrastive relationship between the Pope and rest of society. Moreover, use of "**then**" twice refers to time and consequential situation that Pope despite being pious man in his designation is unjust in his practical approach. It can be supposed that by developing this contrastive relation between Pope and society through these connectors the author is making her discourse strongly resistant to the patriarchal power of the Pope. Through these connectors she also tries to make it a logical conclusion that Pope is unjust and wrong and need not be treated as a distinctive figure than rest of the society.

Moreover, clauses in sentences are connected in a way that the main clauses carry major information than the subordinate clauses which are used either to compare or to explain further the main clause like "**I am a woman and after a lifetime experiment I know I am capable of everything men can do**". The purpose of using main clause for main information here is to assert her position as a woman and subordinate clause joined by "**and**" is mere explanation to strengthen that position. The use of all connectors in this passage indicates author's ideological stance. She is discursively resisting patriarchal forces appearing in the form of Pope and Church as an institution imposing restriction upon women that they are not capable to become leading person in church.

Thus this text is a site of contestation wherein Ariel is contesting single-handedly for a position, if not powerful, at least equal in relation to man.

Discourse and Identity

Ariel, in her dreams, is with Adam. Adam is trying to convince her to leave this world of Troposphere (imaginative world) and join the life because she has got her life to live. She is adamant to stay on for acquiring knowledge. Rather she desires to take Adam along on this journey. She narrates their dialogue like this:

(3)   *Ariel.*   *There's nothing you can say to change my mind. I don't want to go back.*

     Adam: *But you've got your life to live . . . You've got the potential to become the kind of thinker who can change the world. You could be the next Derrida, or . . . anything you want.*

     Ariel: *But I know what I want.*

     Adam: *You have to go.*

     Ariel: *Adam, please, I can't get what I want outside of here, I know that. And I also understand that this is the curse. But I want the knowledge. I can find in here. I want us to go to the very end of this together. I want us to go back as far as we can go to find the edge of the Troposphere. I want to know how it all started, and what consciousness is (p. 449).*

This passage is significant in view of distinctive female identity construction and interactional conventions used. It concerns with expressive value (Question 7 of the Framework) of grammatical features and how Adam and Ariel interact (question 9 of the Framework) with each other. Subject position is quite clear that Ariel dominates in voicing her concern and telling about her decision confidently. Adam is merely presented as a submissive man who is rather belittled in his masculine dimensions and patriarchal

domination when Ariel says in first sentence; "There's **nothing you can say** to change **my mind**". Ariel does not leave an iota of doubt about her decision to continue her journey of thought experiment aiming to touch the limits of knowledge and consciousness as she likes. She absolutely denies the intervention of unjustified masculinity by using "**nothing**". The humble position in which Thomas places Adam, the requests made by Adam ("**You've got your life to live**", "**You've got the potential to become the kind of thinker . . . Or anything you want**") and Ariel's categorical refusal to any "**Kind**" offered by Adam ("**I know what I want**") are worth noticing. Adam's position as patriarchy or tradition/norm has been reduced to nothingness, because there's "**nothing**" he can say and he does not "**Know**", It is only "**I (Ariel) know**". In front of Ariel's "**I**" (Subject position), Adam's "**I**" does not appear. Adam exists only in "**You**" again attributed to Ariel.

Thomas establishes Ariel's female identity with the conspicuous use of **"I"** against the given meek position of Adam. Here lies the essence of discursive practice that Thomas makes deliberate choice of linguistic items - pronouns, vocabulary and syntactic structures - where Adam's patriarchal position and male domination are reduced to insignificance in front of Ariel's active position ("**I don't want to go back**", "**I know** what **I want**", "**I know** that", "**I also** understand"' "**I want** the knowledge", "**I can** find", "**I want** us" and "**I m staying**".

Narrator's extensive use of **"I"** throughout the text and especially in this passage sounds quite distinctive. Does the author want to convey some special meanings? If it is supposed that this text

is a resistance to patriarchy, then it is important to sort out the use of female "I" in relation to male "I". This relational use of "I" by Ariel can also be evaluated in the light of possible context which the author expresses in an interview with Mondore (2007). Thomas tells that her attempt in Mr. Y is on different directions than that of a mere romance story:

> People sometimes forget that real, women even ones covered in nappies and shit and bleach, etc., do not spend all their time thinking about dresses and princesses and kisses – it's women in stories that do that, my stories are different because they are not like other stories (p. 5).

> Adam is central to the story, he is complex and what I like best about him is that in the adventure parts of the story he pretty much has to do what Ariel tells him: 'It's clear that this is her story and she's in charge (p. 8).

In the light of Thomas's these reflections, it can be assumed that the author has deliberately avoided romance and love story pattern in order to make it a discourse of resistance which is different both in patterns in language use - use of personal pronouns, and patterns of language use - authority of the participants, how much verbal space a speaker occupies and speaker's authority with respect to the truth probability of a representation of reality (Griffin, 2005). It seems that Thomas as a woman endeavors to emancipate this genre (fiction) from the domination of male writers who have been or are using it both in contents and form to perpetuate male traditions where women are usually projected dependent upon men for the fulfillment of their worldly needs. By the dominating voice of Ariel, the author seems to set different objectives which women achieve and can achieve independently with no concern for submissive love, restricted domestic life and so called religious bindings. Ariel's intention (I

want us to go to the very end of this together) in asking Adam to go along does not indicate that she needs his help. She wants to take him along **(I want)** and not to go with him. This language use reveals Thomas's ideological interest that she attempts to represent women capable of doing things (which men think extraordinary for women as Adam says **"you've got your life to live"**) with their own choice. They can pursue lofty aims sublimely without egotistic help of patriarchy. At the end Ariel says, **"I'm staying"**. It also reveals Thomas's belief to stick to her decision of writing a different text.

In view of Question 9 of the Framework, this interaction between Ariel and Adam indicates a number of conventions which make this dialogue a linguistic struggle. It reflects a gender relation wherein Ariel is more assertive and persistent in her pursuit of knowledge and consciousness and Adam is bit hesitant and submissive as he makes an appeal to Ariel, **"But you have got life to live"**. Ariel retorts, **"But I know what I want"**. Adam's piece of advice is rejected. When Adam insists, Ariel comes with longer explanation which reflects her mental strength. Then reference to Derrida by Adam is an intertextual convention. It is used by Adam not to highlight importance of Derrida rather to dissuade a female from pursuing knowledge. Against this attempt of Adam through intertextual reference, Ariel comes with a very definite language use which asserts a well recognized position of 21st century female. She says, **"But I know what I want"**. Moreover, against the convention of appeal and threat of Adam **"You have to go"** Ariel interacts directly rather becomes directive with proposal that **"I want us to go to the very end"** and then **"I want us to go back as far as we can go**

to find". This interactional convention of appeal and direction between two participants also reflects orthodoxy of patriarchy and yearn for knowledge of female youth. This interaction between Ariel and Adam is struggle over language wherein the author places Ariel above Adam and makes Ariel's language use more attractive and convincing. Moreover, Thomas's attempt to create a different tradition in fiction text continues throughout the text.

So as Thomas's claim to produce a text of different kind is concerned, she is attempting to create a tradition acceptable to women away from men's bias and oppression. Robbins (2000) contends in this regard: "This is not to say that seeking a tradition is unimportant or wrong. It is one of the keys in which sub-cultured and marginalized groups seek out their own identities" (p. 95). If Thomas is trying to seek out women's identity, it raises a few questions: Who are those women? Are they educated white women, middle class women or women living in slum areas with no resources to reach such kind of discourse as offered by Thomas. It can be understood that Thomas is endeavoring to act to do whatever good she can do to women.

Conclusion

This paper has focused on issues concerning language as a discursive practice rather selectively with regard to novel text by Scarlett Thomas. One of the important concerns in this paper was to explore experiential, relational and expressive values of vocabulary and grammar and to establish that language use is not what it seems. It is opaque and mystified. There is an element of delicacy in terms of

smaller and broader interconnections made between context and language use as also referred to in the objections raised against CDA discussed earlier. CDA makes it clear through critical assessment of discursive strategies of language that different phenomena like power or patriarchal forces are not only constructed through language rather they work in the background as well and can be made visible as well as invisible by means of language itself. Such a critical understanding of language as a discursive practice provides insights into the strategic relationship and constant dialogue between language use and larger contexts of social practices, which also reflects intertextual way of working of a novel's text. It also reveals that language is not a neutral and objective tool rather a socially oriented and informed process. Its functions are mediated and discursive. All this makes a researcher's job quite delicate, dynamic and complex. I conclude with the understanding that language exists in its discursive practices, ideological and dialogical forms, and as speakers, writers, listeners and readers, we need to be creative and aware of discursive strategies of language use.

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