

## UNPACKING THE EMPOWERING NARRATIVE OF LINDA M CRATE'S POEM WOMEN AREN'T WEAK, YOU ARE: A FEMINIST CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The researcher applies Lazar's feminist critical discourse analysis in the poem 'Women aren't weak, you are' by Linda M Crate. The poem showcases different aspects of gender discrimination and expresses a socially constructed ideology about males and females. Male is always dominant and female comes under the sheds of man. Male represents power and the female shows weakness. There are a few elements of FCDA in the poem such as power abuse, victim of the patriarchal system, objectification, oppression, hegemony, dependency, and marginalization of women. Women are slaves in this patriarchal system that always considers women as weak, having lack of skills, and powerless. The study explores the discourse behind the representation and treatment of women in the poem. The researcher deals with the content of the poem along with other related research articles to support his topic under study.*

**Keywords:** FCDA, gender discrimination, patriarchal system, power abuse.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Modernism and Postmodernism have affected almost every discipline in society which gives a path to other disciplines and fields in the society. Critical Discourse Analysis is also a part of this influence. Now CDA has been discussed by many authors in various ways. It has now been recognized as a discipline and field in social sciences and humanities (Breeze, 2011). Dijk indicates that CDA has become a permanent approach in the field of Social Sciences and Humanities (Lazar, 2007, p. 143). Schwab (2000) suggests the idea that when society accepts that impact then language also comes under that influence. CDA deals with the impact and role of language in society. It focuses on how language intervenes in social practices. It also expresses that discourse is a part of social practice. Fairclough offers the viewpoint that according to FCDA, discourse is a part of social practice which is presented in particular

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ways. Wodak confers that there is a relationship between discourse structure and social practice (Lazar, 2007, p. 144).

CDA helps to highlight all social powers like dominance, inequality and abuse which are acted out, replicated and defied by text and converse in social along with the political framework. It is a discourse that makes relationships among all powers in the context of social and political (Darweesh & Abdullah, 2016). When power is practiced on a person or people in an unjust way that is called oppression. It can be emotional and physical level or it can be based on identity like religion, ethnicity, sexuality and gender. The aim of CDA is to highlight ways that language and discourse are used to sustain oppressive practices (Baker & Ellece, 2011).

Current feminist and previous structuralist theories contribute to a multifaceted perspective of gender and power relations within specific social order. There are two important approaches which are called diversity and difference among men and women. This is called culturally and historically gender sexism along with discursive mechanisms of modern power in various societies (Lazar, 2007, p. 148). Breeze (2011) confirms that it is usual in areas like postmodern approaches to feminism where the common justification is to maintain feminist perspective in the patriarchal system. It is difficult to find balance for the value of feminist perception in this society where man is dominant and powerful.

The researcher combines feminist studies and CDA which bring feminist critical discourse analysis. It aims to explain power and ideology about gendered social understanding and patriarchal hegemony in cultural context. Gender is represented as an ideological structure which is implanted and replicated in discourse. The perception about gender is categorized in two classes: male and female (Lazar, 2007, p. 141). The researcher believes in this context that feminist CDA is important and it underlines inequalities and social injustice of gender. According to Fairclough, discourse reflects the understanding of social practice. In discourse, the overlapping of power and ideology is not usually oblivious to participants concerned with specific social practices (Fairclough & Wodak) (Lazar, 2007, p. 145).

Holmes and Marra (2010) demonstrate that in the construction of gender, language plays a vital role. Feminist experts know the skills not only to highlight discursive attitudes which penalize women in social context but also to describe, identify and analyze the discourse of masculinity and femininity.

## **1.1 Focus of the Research Study**

The researcher applies Lazar's FCDA in the poem of Linda M Crate 'Women aren't weak, you are' to find out gender issues, patriarchy, social

injustice, hegemony, ideology and identity issues. These issues were discussed earlier in the domain of feminism in different literary works from different writers. However, FCDA is new in this context and most of the people are not aware of the application of this. The researcher uses FCDA on the said poem to highlight the key elements where women suffer in the society from different contexts including culture.

## **1.2 Research Objectives**

The research objectives are to:

- Investigate the elements of Lazar's FCDA in the poem 'Women aren't weak, you are' by Linda M Crate.
- Discover the powerful ideology behind this discourse.

## **1.3 Research Questions**

- How and why Linda M. Crate's poem is so effective in regard to the elements of FCDA?
- What is the driving force behind the ideology of this discourse?

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Critical discourse analysis becomes popular in the postmodern world. Scholars rush towards various genres to critically analyze them according to CDA. When these genres inculcate gender issues, then the scholars begin to analyze these writings through FCDA (Sohail, Sanzar, & Mehboob, 2020).

### **2.1 Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA)**

Lazar (2007) embodies that CDA and FCDA are the same as they explain the interrelationships among power, gender, ideology and discourse which are multifaceted. Feminist CDA can be discussed in a few ways such as theoretical, methodological and research projects plus interdisciplinary publication. It is also helpful in terms of close textual investigation of spoken and written discourse and interpreting communal structures (p.151). Therefore, the researcher applies FCDA as a tool of inquiry. FCDA has become very popular due to its relation with the third wave of feminism. Now it is treated as separate critical discourse for many reasons; it includes a feminist critical activism, gender is responsible for the ideological structure behind this performance, it shows the complication of gender power relationships and critical reflection of practicing. All these points are related to the modification of gender and social justice (Benavente, 2014).

Lazar (2007) further proposes that the purpose of FCDA is to inspect how dominance and power are discursively created or resisted through textual

demonstration of gendered social practice or through interactional plan of talk. This highlights women's empowerment and their participation in the social domain (p.149).

FCDA plays a vital role in analyzing text from the perspective of feminism. It reveals that gender is a communally constructed identity. FCDA questions the influence of hierarchy in society. It is interdisciplinary in nature and it adds feminist perspective in discourse studies and language. CDA is in debt to feminist approach in the studies of women and now it has been acknowledged everywhere (Dijk) (Lazar, 2007, p. 142). FCDA points out that it is futile to investigate gender and feminist issues in the study of women. Feminist CDA has many aspects such as social justice, gender studies, power, ideology, and hegemony. All of them are related to political perspective on female and gender issues (Lazar, 2007, p. 144).

Urbain (2018) portrays that Feminist Discourse Analysis (FDA) is a type of feminist interpretive inquisition that shows how discourse lines up with feminist practices and values. The purpose is to identify feminist values not to confirm feminist intent. Feminist analysis shows feminist notion as influential which helps to dislodge patriarchal ideology as the status quo. Lazar (2007) clarifies that FCDA is a part of social practice which is presented in a meticulous ideological way.

Social practice is constituted and reflected by discourse. A feminist perspective harks back that various social practices are neutral and gendered. This social practice could be articulated in two ways; first gender proposes an interpretive category and second, it has relation with all social activities. Based on male and female division, the outcomes allot to each other within tangible social practice. A feminist political assessment of gendered social practices affects social transformation. The social status of vision is a just society where there is no discrimination on the basis of gender (Lazar, 2007, p. 145). Feminists work for the better progress of the society where everyone gets equal opportunities.

AlMaghlouth (2017) renders that a gender study is also a branch within CDA with the title of FCDA. It is the outcome of marriage between CDA and feminism. Its aim is just social order in regard to gender associations (p.27). Lazar works with other members to produce a community where women are in power and they change the entire unjust social order (AlMaghlouth, 2017).

## **2.2 Elements of FCDA**

### **2.2.1 Gender**

FCDA offers a gender viewpoint investigated by feminists. These feminists discover gender biases in the language along with that they also

investigate the demonstration of females in certain texts. FCDA explores how men and women are illustrated in the texts and what gender ideologies are behind the discourse. Language plays a pivotal role in the identity of gender and is spoken in written language. It works as an instrument to build the identities of man and woman (IbrarUllah, 2018). Lazar (2007) argues that FCDA is a political viewpoint about gender and it concerns demystifying the interrelationships of discourse in regard to ideology, power and gender. It is the appropriate study of written and spoken texts equally (p.144). The matter of gender and language are connected to the identities of different sexes in society. It creates problems to assign one sex to male gender and other sex to female gender. Therefore, these two have different recognitions in society and these recognitions create a comparative environment for both sexes.

Gender is not biological and it is constructed. It is continuously built and rebuilt in this society. There are various elements which help in the construction of gender (man or woman). These elements and norms are mostly in favour of man. Man must always be stronger, skillful, wiser and powerful than woman. These beliefs give benefits to men and marginalized women. Therefore, man obtains more opportunities to show his skills and on the other hand, these norms affect women in a negative way. It is considered that women are weak, less wise and sensitive than men (IbrarUllah, 2018).

Lazar (2007) exemplifies that an ideology is a representation of practice shaped from a specific perspective in regard to unequal power and dominance. This perception is related to Marxist accounts in terms of class relations but now it spreads and controls other affairs of power including gender. From the perspective of feminism, this gender conception is recognized as an ideological structure which separates people in two classes (man and woman). It is based on subordination and hierarchical domination. This perception leads man and woman in two different directions. Feminists criticize this perception of man, woman and socially constructed gender (p.146). In social practice, the gendered nature might be explained as it relates to all social practices and activities based on male and female. But socially both have different parts and roles in the society (Lazar, 2007, p. 145). They give the idea that there is no difference in gender and everyone has the same task and responsibility in society.

### **2.2.2 Patriarchy**

Lazar (2007) points out that the ideology of patriarchal gender is structural and it connects to individual and social order. It means that asymmetrical gender should not be discussed by the individual's intentions. But again, it is the individual who is responsible for the oppression in the

society (p.147). In the areas of postmodern studies feminism's viewpoint is hard to maintain its value in the patriarchal system. FCDA is concerned with sustaining a patriarchal social order and power that offers a man privileged in a social group and provides disadvantage and disempowerment to women in a social group (Lazar, 2007, p. 145). FCDA expresses the idea of equality in this society. There are two groups in the society; first is male who is privileged and the second is female who is restricted. Man gets everything and woman gets the leftover (Baker & Ellece, 2011).

### **2.2.3 Ideology**

Ideology is a belief system as it needs cognitive elements. Ideology is related to cognition and social discourse. There are numerous factors involved in making this socially shared system. All ideologies are abstract mental systems which arrange socially shared manners. Ideology controls social beliefs and opinions shared by members of the society. It is an important feature of developing and sustaining imbalanced power relations. It is a study of the meaning that suggests and constructs symbolic shapes along with its constructed social context in which symbolic forms are used. In other words, how ideology developed the discourse and how this discourse created the individual's ideology (Darweesh & Abdullah, 2016). Lazar (2007) states that Ideology is a belief system which concerns unequal power and domination. As time goes by, it becomes very broad that it covers every aspect of the society (p.146).

AlMaghlouth (2017) articulates that women have particular jobs around the world. They cannot go beyond these jobs and these jobs provide less earning than men. These jobs don't have any progress therefore; they cannot get higher leadership positions. Because they are considered 'Kitchen creatures', as it is concerned with domestic work and care for children.

### **2.2.4 Social Injustice**

The reason between feminism and CDA is its relation with social injustice and inequalities. Working on gender's inequality in discourse expresses the issues of power abuse and domination. FCDA appears due to discrimination against women and it also rises with the issues related to gender (AlMaghlouth, 2017). After the development of CDA, the gender study takes a different diversion. Its aims are to classify injustice, power abuse and all unjust activities. FCDA becomes popular as this area has been discussed after social injustice and domination in society. A lot of people have adopted this discourse in their writings for the sake of equality and justice for women (Darweesh & Abdullah, 2016).

### **2.2.5 Identity**

In the discourse of construction about the identity of man and woman, it is pointed out that man is intellectually and physically strong and woman is restricted to domestic works. It gives dominance to one gender and pushes aside the other gender. Society's discursive structure doesn't allow assigning different tasks to gender as it gives the man the role of the leader not only in family but in every aspect of life. It is a dynamic process to construct identity that includes specific linguistic resources which are indexed for gender (Holmes & Marra, 2010). Identity isn't used in the traditional sense now but rather it is understood as something related to the creation of one's interaction with self and outside world.

### **2.2.6 Power**

The female gender should be different from man due her attitude and nature. But what makes her different is not the attitude but power's distribution in society which divides gender in different social roles. Due to these roles, they have to behave differently in society.

## **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The researcher applies Lazar's FCDA in the poem of Linda M Crate 'Women aren't weak, You are' through textual analysis along with close reading. Textual Analysis is an educational guess which helps to find out the underline meaning of a text. Close Reading assists the Textual Analysis in dividing the text into chunks.

### **3.1 Theoretical Framework**

According to Lazar (2007), FCDA explores the power, gender, ideology and discourse which are multifaceted and these are the core issues in the third wave of feminism (p.151). The researcher takes this FCDA and analyze the above mentioned poem to focus on gender issues, identity issues, social injustice, patriarchy and hegemony.

## **4. DISCUSSION**

Two different genders are discussed in the poem, in which male is presented in the female's perception and narration. She claims that in the perception of man, a female is weak because she is a girl or a woman. She is considered weak because of her emotions, loyalty, love, sensitiveness and compassion. Male believes that the female has a lack of understanding and she doesn't belong to this world. Man uses women for his benefits like shelter and possession. After telling about the male, now she restates or answers all the

claims with the repetition of these words 'You don't understand me'. These words express that a female is not weak but strong, capable of creating her own world. She will rise from ashes and fight for her life like a phoenix. She will fight like toph or yona (comparison) and with the passage of time she will be stronger and wiser. She will eradicate all evils (blames) from this world. She will show to the male that she is capable of everything so that the male shuts his lips and doesn't say anything about the woman's weakness. She can be everything but not weak. In the last few lines, she dines man's power, strength and ideology.

The poem seems to construct the ideology of gender discursively via discourse. The poetess represents male are dominant, strong, powerful but on the other side females are weak, sensitive and empowered. At the beginning the poetess shows how male consider females as weak but later in the poem, the rise of females is also discussed. A female struggles for her existence in the society as male do not consider her existence and soon man recognizes her existence in this world.

The identity of male is to be strong and powerful, and the ideology of the female is to be weak and sensitive. Male is the owner of everything, including the female. Man sees women as not worthy of anything. She is presented as a weak, soft and mild creature. These perceptions have been discursively made by society. As society needs man for its development and female is for kitchen only. Or in other words, there is no major role for women in society; therefore, women should not have power because it doesn't suit her. The researcher focuses upon a few elements of FCDA in the poem of Linda M Crate 'Women aren't Weak, you are'. These elements are gender representation, hegemony, power, ideology, dependency, patriarchy, objectification, weak, oppression, and marginalization.

#### **4.1 Gender Representation**

*"you try to tell me that I'm weak  
that I'm only a woman, only a girl  
emotions will always get in the way;  
and my sensitivity dreams better visions  
i wasn't born to fit into this world"*

In gender representation, the poem reveals the nature of woman that she is weak, sensitive, incapable, and very emotional. She does not belong to this world and lives in her fantasy world. She is oppressed and victimized. She is a possession and inferior being. The word 'girl' represents a weak gender in



male dominated society. Whereas male is powerful, capable and easily adjusted in this world. Male is a superior being and oppressor. At the start of the poem, the female is presented as weak but later in the poem, the female tries to be superior to the man. In Foucault's point of view, power is related to self-regulation. FCDA shows that power is everywhere; therefore, gender is affected in many ways (Lazar, 2007, p. 148). According to Lazar (2007), in FCDA, gender is divided into two classes in the society, man and woman. It is an ideological structure that stood on subordination and hierarchy of domination (p.146). Fairclough remarks that ideologies are shaped from specific perspectives which are related to dominance and unequal power. Now it has covered all the aspects including gender (Lazar, 2007, p. 146). Gender or sex is not responsible for good and bad performance in society. It is the society which assigns different roles to male and female (IbrarUllah, 2018).

#### 4.2 Hegemony

*loyalty, love, and compassion are strengths  
not weaknesses;  
and my sensitivity dreams better visions  
into being  
i wasn't born to fit into this world i was born  
to make my own—  
you want to put me on a pedestal so you can smack  
me down and make me shatter,*

The poem shows that women are submissive while men are living dominantly in this society. Men think that love, sympathy and sincerity are the weakness of women. Woman is sensitive and emotional therefore, she doesn't belong to this world or even doesn't fit here. Man wants to rule over the woman and tries to use her as a shelter for his desires. According to Baker and Ellece (2011), hegemonic masculinity emerges when man is considered more superior than others in the society. There is no role and place for females in this hegemonic masculinity. Connell's calls this situation emphasizing femininity which means all females are subordinate.

#### 4.3 Power

*"you try to tell me that I'm weak  
emotions will always get in the way  
you say i don't understand the way of the world,  
but you don't understand me*

*i wasn't born to fit into this world i was born  
to make my own"*

'You' is more powerful than 'I' here. 'You' represents man and 'I' represents woman. Men can control his emotions but women can't. The words of the man have power connotations than the woman, though she tries to compensate but it seems only loud empty words without actions. The tone of the man's words is very antagonistic that shows that man has the upper hand. Man even denies the existence of women in this world. He has an influence over women from the beginning till the end of the poem. As Batular (2019) conveys that in gender's perception, male has the upper hand and he gets all the power of the society. Male has to be powerful due to his biological creation. Man abuses women for everything and it is a sign of power for man and empowerment for women. It is discursively shown that man is always powerful and woman is always powerless creature. It is due to language that constructs gender domination in social practice.

#### **4.4 Ideology**

*"you try to tell me that I'm weak  
that I'm only a woman, only a girl*

...

*I wasn't born to fit into this world I was born  
to make my own—  
you want to put me on a pedestal so you can smack  
me down and make me shatter"*

This is a world phenomenon or a social practice that man is considered powerful, dominant, strong, wise, fighter and capable of doing almost everything. On the other hand, women are considered as weak, unwise, subservient, and having a lack of understanding. It becomes a perception of the people that a woman is rude and doesn't fit in this society. The poem shows the submissive ideology of women with the help of the following adjectives; weak, sensitive, emotional, etc.

Darweesh and Abdullah (2016) utter that ideology is a mindset and related social structure. Society translates male and female actions along with their identity, position and aims. Ideology is a practice that sustains dominance and unequal power. Now it covers all the areas of life involving gender conception as well (Lazar, 2007, p. 146). Particular gender or sex creates particle identity as woman is told to be a good mother, whereas man is told to be aggressive, having power and controlling woman for his desires. The concept

about gender is coming and transmitting from generation to generation with the help of various tools. Family, media, workplace, social circle and academia propagated and established the norms and beliefs (IbrarUllah, 2018). Wodak bestows that the institutionalization of gender discrimination is discursively endorsed through education, media and other ways (Lazar, 2007, p. 147).

#### 4.5 Dependent

*“that I’m only a woman, only a girl  
emotions will always get in the way;  
loyalty, love, and compassion are strengths  
not weaknesses;  
and my sensitivity dreams better visions  
you say I don’t understand the way of the world,  
I wasn’t born to fit into this world I was born  
you want to put me on a pedestal so you can smack  
me down and make me shatter”*

The poem highlights the dependency of women. She cannot live without man and she needs love and sympathy for her survival. She knows that man is oppressor, opportunist, emotionless and selfish but she only threatens in the entire poem and doesn’t take any action. The words of the poem like weak, emotional and sensitive make her dependent. Khan & Ali (2016) propose that females are generally measured as fragile, dependent and weak in comparison to male. This is a war between male and female poets. Both represent male and female images according to their own perception.

#### 4.6 Patriarchy

*“you say I don’t understand the way of the world,  
I wasn’t born to fit into this world I was born  
You want to put me on a pedestal so you can smack  
me down and make me shatter”*

The setting of the poem shows the traditional relationship between males and females. Male is independent and female is dependent. They live together as they need each other but man is superior to woman and she has to follow the rules created by man. She is much influenced by patriarchy even though she is not able to take any decision except showing off her weak strength. The poem provides enough evidence about patriarchy that she

knows everything but can't do anything in a male-dominated society. In the patriarchal system or tradition, a woman is a possession of man or male should rule over woman (Urbain, 2018). Breeze (2011) talks about the patriarchal system that it is so powerful in which females are not able to survive in this system. FCDA works through this situation and puts a female perspective in this male-dominant system.

#### **4.7 Weak, Oppressed and Marginalized**

*"you try to tell me that I'm weak  
that I'm only a woman, only a girl  
emotions will always get in the way;  
and my sensitivity dreams better visions  
you say I don't understand the way of the world,  
I wasn't born to fit into this world I was born  
you want to put me on a pedestal so you can smack  
me down and make me shatter,  
always rising from the ashes of my chaos and burning  
your lips shut because women  
are anything but weak"*

The poem has a soft corner for women in the sense that from the beginning line till the end woman is presented as fragile and oppressed. She is judged a weak link in the man's life. Every line of the poem articulates the oppression of women in every aspect of life. She is marginalized at every portion of society. When there are differences in the society in regard to gender, then inequality and oppression prevail. This conception is also exploitation. IbrarUllah (2018) states that women are depicted as less powerful and skilful than men. Women are decentralized. Khan and Ali (2016) depict that history is full of the marginalization of women in a patriarchal society. They are denied from their existence, and they are not free to present themselves. When they get the chance, they usually draw a weak image of themselves. Man is always satisfied by female oppression. The ideology of gender, woman is portrayed as a low status regardless of the position she holds. Marginalization of females is usually practised around the world. It is easy to suppress a female's voice and females are often the victim of oppression. In society, it is simple to target a woman where there is a norm of gender discrimination. The literature of that society also presents the same images of women. Surprisingly not only male writers marginalized women but also the female writers do the

same job. This trend is everywhere in all genres, even in poetry (Khan & Ali, 2016).

#### **4.8 Objectification**

*“you want to put me on a pedestal so you can smack  
me down and make me shatter”*

Woman is objectified in this poem as she is used as a shelter and possession. Man gets benefits from her and treats her like slave. Even she is told she is woman and girl which is the sign of flaw. Man sees her as an object not as human being. The poem reveals the ideology that the man controls woman for his desire. She is objectified for the sake of pleasure. Female is not shown as sex object by male poets but also female poets developed the same identity for woman. Female poetess depicts women as the sex object for man. In this case, male domination is still there which influences everything in the society (Permatasari, 2015).

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

FCDA explains the interrelationships among power, gender, ideology and discourse which are multifaceted. Linda M Crate’s poem ‘Women aren’t weak, you are’ shows gender discrimination in the narrative perception of female. The poem has all the elements of FCDA as female is presented as sexual object, marginalized, oppressed, a victim of patriarchal system, and a slave. Woman is presented weak, sensitive and emotional. Man is shown as powerful, skilful and strong which is also a common ideology of every culture. The poem also exposes the powerful ideology behind the discourse which shows that man has to be powerful to rule over society and woman has to be weak creature and work in domestic limitation. The discourse finds out that women have been allotted one more important task which is to provide pleasure to men. Women are the victims in every culture and society in this modern time because of abuse, weak and inferior creature, and useless without men. Above all, a focus should be brought on the eradication of this inferior ideology and women should be considered as an equal part of the society and they should be given all the basic needs. The FCDA paradigm can be used for future references and it can play a vital role to spread awareness in the society.

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