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DISCOURSE, COGNITION AND SOCIETY: CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE STORY THAT MUST NOT BE TOLD

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Abstract:

The paper presents a critical discourse analysis of Kavery Nambisan's *The Story That Must Not Be Told* based on Teun A. van Dijk's discourse-cognition-society triangle approach. Kavery Nambisan, the South Indian writer is prominently known for her social themes and in that way, the novel explicates the abyss between haves and have-nots. Though the elite residents of Vaibhav apartments and the local workers of the slum Sitara are interdependent, the dominant's root hatred for the vulnerable slum dwellers is highlighted. The emotions and opinions of the two different worlds divided by a single wall carry poignant episodes of the lifestyle of the elite as well as the existence of the poor with less basic needs. The discourse structures of the elite exhibit the power in controlling the slum dwellers, where the story further moves to the demolition of the slum and migration. The personal context of Simon to support the slum receives huge opposition from the apartment residents. Van Dijk brings forth the connection among discourse, cognition and society stating that cognitive perceptions influence the interpretation of discourse elements built within the social structures. Similarly, the paper attempts to portray how Simon, the protagonist's motive to help the slum people failed due to the power of the dominion, class conflicts and varied perspectives.

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1.0 Introduction:

Kavery Nambisan is a remarkable novelist and also a surgeon from the hills of Kodagu, South India. Her writing reverberates with social concern and collective responsibility. Her novel *The Story That Must Not Be Told* (2010) was shortlisted for the Man Asian Literary Prize in 2008 and the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature in 2012. It is a sensitive fiction of two different cultural zones. It was Norman Fairclough, the professor of Linguistics who explained the term Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in his book *Language and Power*. Fairclough (1989) defines that language has the status of discourse and social rules. Though other scholars have modified the technique of critical discourse analysis, this paper concentrates on the concepts of Teun A. van Dijk applied to the selected novel of Nambisan. Being an eminent scholar of critical discourse analysis, he has formulated a triangular framework connecting three distinct terms—discourse, cognition and society.

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The Story That Must Not Be Told is about Simon, a seventy-four-year-old man who has a strong desire to help the people of slum Sitara near his flat of Vaibhav Apartments. This plot is a serious work of Nambisan blending humour, aspiration and rue. This slum fiction records the life of the downtrodden with vivid characterisation. The backdrop depicted by the author runs through the worst lives of Sitara with a lot of unfulfilled dreams and ambitious desires. Sitara, the expanding township is called Nachchatiram (a star), a refuge for the poor who left the villages. Sitara, the slum at Chepauk in Madras, is located near the Vaibhav Housing Colony where few people from the slum worked for the rich of the apartments. The shuddered walls, dirty roads, filthy smells from the River Cooum moan the neglected episodes of a community holding meagre aspirations.

This research paper analyses the application of Dijk's terms to the social novel, which spotlights the huge distinctions between the elite class of Vaibhav apartments and the downtrodden of the slum Sitara. They are neighbours according to the geographical code but lived as employers and workers in reality. Presenting a poignant description of the urban clean world (Vaibhav Apartments) and the urban slum world (Sitara), the author discusses how power decides a life's worth. The slum is often associated with scarcity, as these people are explicitly controlled by the rich social order.

The discourse of this novel focuses on the marginalisation of the slum workers of Sitara. The instances of discrimination, social inequality are described through the social actions which pinpoint the prejudices of a community about the outgroup. The objective of the paper is to highlight that a) the discourse elements are associated with the societal dimension on the cognitive basis of "culturally shared mental representations" (Dijk, 2014, p.131), b) the dominant groups exercise power and control over the subordinate through discourse structures.

2.0 Critical Discourse Analysis:

The critical discourse analysis explicitly connects the discourse elements with the societal structure to highlight the tones of power, abuse and domination. Dijk states, "A socio-cognitive theory assumes that social structures need to be interpreted and represented cognitively and that such mental representations affect the cognitive processes involved in the production and interpretation of discourse" (2014, p.121). Generally, the social variables like class, gender, power, culture, ethnicities cause direct control over the discourse of a community. The cognitive dimensions affected by the external social situations are processed through this analysis. "CDA is discourse study with an attitude" (Dijk, 2015, p.1). Fairclough and Wodak (1997) bring out the significant tenets of CDA as follows:

- CDA address social problems
- Power relations are discursive
- Discourse constitutes society and culture
- Discourse does ideological work
- Discourse is historical
- The link between text and society is mediated
- Discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory
- Discourse is a form of social action (pp. 271-280)

Based on the terms developed by van Dijk, the novel is further analysed in the angles of discourse elements, cognitive representation and societal behaviour. Critical discourse analysis focuses on diverse perspectives of social problems and political issues. It attempts to explicate the terms of social interaction embedded in a social structure. It specifically concentrates on the methods, in

which the discourse elements echo the power abuse and domination in the society. In 2012, van Dijk refocused his definition,

Critical discourse analysis is discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. With such dissident research, critical discourse analysts take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose and ultimately challenge social inequality. This is also why CDA may be characterised as a social movement of politically committed discourse analysis (Wodak, 2013, p.2)

2.1 Discourse:

Discourse is the domain of interaction and communication expressing opinions and evaluations. Hawthorn defines, “discourse is linguistic communication seen as a transaction between speaker and hearer, as an interpersonal activity whose form is determined by its social purpose. Text is linguistics communication (either spoken or written) seen simply as a message coded in its auditory or visual medium”(1992, p.189). The discourse of the novel moves around Simon recollecting the incidents like his elopement with his wife Harini, his disciplined forty-two years of married life, his bisexual daughter Sandhya, his scientist son Mitra, his clever daughter-in-law Rashmi, loneliness after the death of Harini and his sudden attachment towards the perpetual poverty of slum. Later, he was shocked by the naked reality of the slum Sitara.

Speech act has always an intended purpose. It has three significant aspects — a) a characteristic function b) usually interpreted with the world of knowledge c) knowledge of general conditions to accomplish actions. Van Dijk says, “Speech acts often pertain to past or future activity of the speaker or the hearer. They are essentially functioning as expedient ways in which such activities are planned, controlled, commented upon, etc... They are intended with the purpose to provide information for such actions”(1977, p.216). When Simon visited the school in Sitara, the headmaster, with his broken English, explicated the poor standard of facilities in school. Swamy’s silence disturbed Simon as he expected he would be thanked for the water cooler, he donated to school. Prudently, the headmaster told Simon to help them with money and not things. Later, Simon vented out his frustration that construction was a never-ending process in Vaibhav apartments. Seeing the new foundation laid for the new block, Simon criticised its name Trupti (satisfaction) because the disturbing noise of the construction ruined everyone’s satisfaction. Thus, the discourse determines personal opinions and prejudices.

Retrieval and reproduction become essential in a discourse, where the most important information of the text is called the macro proposition. “A macro proposition has a high structural value due to its many links with a) the micro propositions from which it is derived, b) other macro propositions and c) schematic categories (e.g. narrative structures)” (Dijk, 1979, p.150). Baqua’s tone was sober and serious when he made Simon stay in Sitara so that he knows more about the place he wanted to help. “Live in Sitara and you will know that hard work does not kill anyone. It is not so easy to die. The body learns to take a little more, a little more. A lot more” (Nambisan, 2010, p.135). The macro proposition is the concern of Simon to donate a water cooler to the school in the slum but it is linked to various micro propositions like the headmaster’s anticipation of cash donors and Baqua criticising the polished favour and exploitation of poor. The narrative structure of Simon’s opinions before and after meeting Baqua had few changes in his views. Baqua asks Simon, “You want the people here to accept kindness on your terms. You do it as a favour, an apology for being rich” (Nambisan, 2010, p.143).

Dilip, the friend of PK, shared the experience of how his cousin stepped on excrements when he went through the lanes of the slum. He even ridiculed that he had changed the name of the slum from Sitara to Shittara. PK appreciated Simon's inner will to help the people of slum in some way. Simon wished that the poor people should be benefitted from the charity while PK denied his opinions that they could be offered charitable deeds only if they obey the law. PK accused the slum members as they avoided taxes and were selfish, expecting only benefits. They may be heartless even to commit murder and never regretted stealing electricity and water.

Dijk explains, "Language use, discourse, verbal interaction and communication belong to the microlevel of the social order. Power, dominance and inequality between social groups are typically terms that belong to a macro level of analysis" (2015, p.468). Personal and social cognition act as a bridge to unify the macro and micro levels. Every language user has memories, opinions, knowledge as well as the collective consciousness of the culture shared with others. The discourse acts as the mental representation of the social beliefs and hence the cognition remains the interface between society and discourse.

The employment of metaphor shows how those expressions precisely define thought patterns and observations. The epigraph of the seventh chapter is distinctive with a high maxim, "of course, my yellow may not be the same as your yellow" (Nambisan, 2010, p.203). Opinions differ from person to person and everyone can't be the same. The world of Vaibhav apartments never tries to understand the needs of Sitara. Thatkan, the slum boy in teens, wants to be a police officer. Disliking his father's job, Thatkan was forced once to clean the manhole. Kittan, his father, motivated him that it's easier to remove the block by pushing it with a stick standing on the third step. "It's our food...our food comes from other people's shit, don't forget" (Nambisan, 2010, p.229). Pitifully, Thatkan lost his life by the slip of his feet drowning in the hole. In a nutshell, the discourse structures of the novel relate a lot of emotional stances and personal experiences.

2.2 Cognition:

The human brain is like a computer that not only accepts inputs from the environment but also is affected by it. The mind processes the aggregate information collected from the social surrounding and generates response dispositions. "Cognition is defined as the symbolic (or conceptual) processing of information that is required for the central representation and organizes expression of a response (Lang, 1984, p.192). "The analysis of mind control presupposes the usual distinction between personal or autobiographical memory on the one hand, and generic, socially shared "semantic" memory on the other" (Tulving, 2002).

The cognitive component comprises memory, mental models and socially shared knowledge of the world. The patterns of discourse are interpreted in the sequentially processed cognitive framework. Situation models are also called semantic models which signify the subjective interpretation of the discourse. Context models are also called pragmatic models that alter according to the participant's comprehension of the communicative experience. "They define the appropriateness of discourse with respect to the communicative situation" (Dijk, 2015, p.67).

The system of knowledge becomes the fundamental element of cognition, perception and discourse shared among the communities. The shared social knowledge helps in constructing ideologies and attitudes, related to positive or negative evaluation about an idea. "Power and power abuse, domination and manipulation, as well as all other illegitimate forms of discourse, interaction and communication are rooted in social structure and relations between social groups" (Dijk, 2015, pp.69-70).

In the novel, Simon donated a water cooler to the school in the slum. Only then he realised that his act, which was much generous to him was only a simple act of goodness to the people who encounter greater problems every day. The cognitive framework has two distinct aspects—personal and social. Personal cognition describes the subjective production and interpretation of the discourse. In the annual general meeting of the apartment, Simon’s speech recalled the history of slum Sitara, called Nachchatiram narrating how the fishing swamp was transformed into dumping garbage by industries of the modern age. He further stressed that the people from various villages were settled in Sitara to work for the richer class. The elegant homes of the rich were constructed by the sweat and labour of these people inhaling dust. Simon felt dejected at the unsympathetic and heartless decision of getting rid of the slum.

Though the discourse is the mental representation, it is based on the shared social interaction called social cognition. “In other words, the personal and the social in discourse processing are inextricably intertwined” (van Dijk, 2014, p.123). Simon’s belief in helping the slum dwellers was denied by many. In the meeting, Madhavan, the secretary implemented new rules like identity cards for workers, video coverage for visitors and emergency buttons. Not believing the slum people, Vaibhav residents demanded more safety and were worried about their comfort zones engulfed by the slum residents. They convinced themselves that Sitara, the three-acre areas contained more than three thousand people utilising electricity and water illegally. It was the birthplace of criminals usually stealing, adulterating products and brewing illicit liquor. They also discussed the upcoming dangers of letting these culprits into Sitara in name of maids and workers. The Research of Ph.D. scholars showed that crime began from such a place. He indirectly accused people like Simon being in the grip of slum dwellers.

“The acquisition and application of world knowledge is crucial for all cognitive processes of perception, understanding, interaction, language use, communication and discourse” (Dijk, 2016, p.9). “In discourse understanding, such knowledge is activated and applied in the understanding of words, sentences, meanings and overall discourse meanings, and in the construction of personal mental models. And vice versa, the understanding of discourse and the formation of mental models of specific events may be generalised and abstracted from the acquisition or modification of generic knowledge of the world” (Dijk, 2016, p.9).

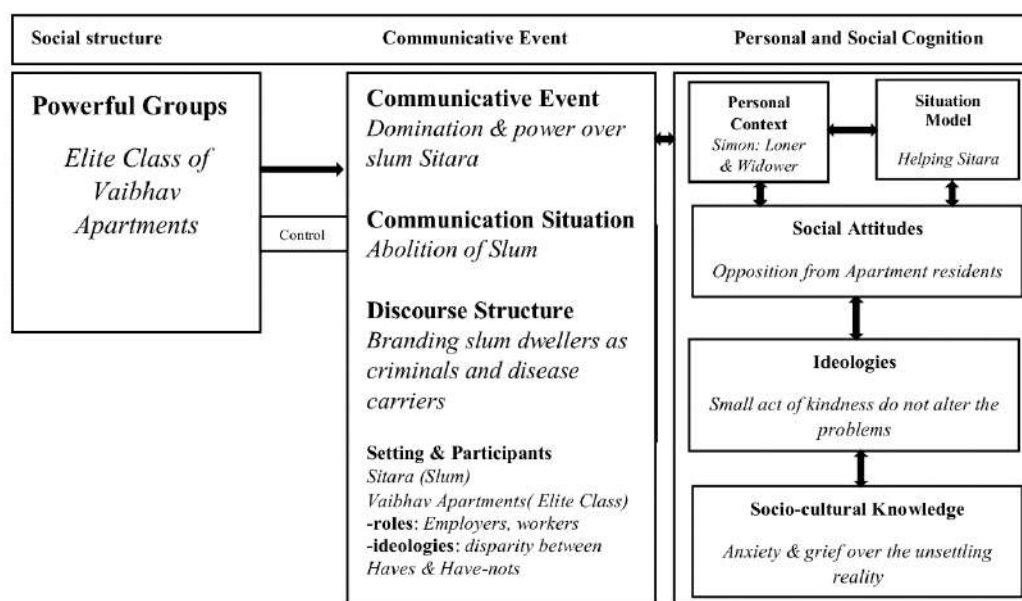


Fig.1: Redrawn by the authors following Dijk, Critical Discourse Analysis, 2015.

(Source: Adapted from *Critical Discourse Analysis* (vol. 1, p. 474), van Dijk, T. A, 2015, *Handbook of Discourse Analysis*.)

Van Dijk states, “Contexts are not “objective” but “subjective”, they are not a relevant section of “objective” social properties of the situation, but a subjective definition of such a situation. In other words, a context is what is defined to be relevant in the social situation by the participants themselves” (2009, p.5). The slum Sitara and the Vaibhav apartments exhibit two different cultural setups. Their discourse patterns and interaction explain the plight of uneducated daily labourers and symbolic elites. The cognitive mental models have both personal and social components in the novel. The personal cognition of Simon empathetically struggles to render adequate aid to Sitara while the social cognition of the elite group constructs the ideology to plan against the livelihood of slum dwellers despite keeping them as maids and workers. In order to protect themselves, they wholly agree to demolish the slum.

The above Fig.1 explains the schema of power connecting discourse, cognition and society based on van Dijk’s model. The bold lettered words are the actual terms proposed by van Dijk in analysing how the social structure is embedded within the discourse elements affected by personal and social cognition. The italicised words are the evaluated terms applying Dijk’s model to the selected novel of the study. The powerful groups always control the communicative event constructing social ideologies. Though cognition is of personal and social, they always depend on social attitudes and the socio-cultural knowledge. Examining the same, it is scrutinised that the powerful elite group of Vaibhav apartments curb the slum dwellers of Sitara. The rift and tension gradually rise to meetings in apartments where the discourse structure portrays the prejudiced opinion of the elite class. The disparity between the haves and have nots results in the abolition of the slum. Though Simon, the protagonist is sympathetic towards this neglected environment, his personal cognition is suppressed by the social ideologies shared among his community. At last, he feels helpless where his kindness could not alter the problems of the slum.

2.3 Society:

“The discourse is viewed as a social practice that transmits ideology, as a distorted view of reality, because it reflects the power relationships obtaining in a given society” (Teubert, 2010, p.18). “Social interaction, social situations and social structures can only influence text and talk through people’s interpretations of such social environments” (van Dijk, 2015, p.64). The societal macrostructures reflect the power abuse of dominant groups through the micro-level of everyday interactivity and the macro-level decisions of the whole structures of communities. The subjugated groups are controlled by the employment of power and domination. The above social dimensions mirror personal and social cognitive patterns. Discourse structures combined with cognitive components formulate the domination ideologies.

According to van Dijk, the ideological discourse framework representing power and domination in society are

- Polarization – Positive portrayal of the ingroup and a negative picture of the outgroup.
- Pronouns – The political pronoun ‘we’ is used to exhibit the differences of opinions between the ingroups and outgroups.
- Identification – The dominant group reveals their identity incessantly.
- Emphasis of positive self-descriptions and negative other-descriptions – sometimes ideologies are marked with positive self-descriptions and the negative descriptions. “This rhetorical combination of hyperbolic emphasis and mitigation of good or bad things of ingroups and outgroups is called the Ideological square”(2015, p.74).
- Activities – The activities of the ideological group define how they defend themselves to control the outgroup.

- Norms and Values – The ideologies are usually built on good values. The prejudices or evaluative statements about the outgroup are expressed through the elements of the discourse.
- Interests – “Ideological struggle is about power and interests. Hence, ideological discourse typically features many references to our interests, such as basic resources (food, shelter and health) as well as symbolic resources such as knowledge, status or access to public discourse” (2015, p.74)

The dominant social groups exercise their power to control the mind and talk of other groups. “This ability presupposes a power base of privileged access to scarce social resources, such as force, money, status, fame, knowledge, information, “culture”, or indeed various forms of public discourse and communication” (Mayr 2008). Rashmi, the daughter-in-law of Simon even persuaded him to get a better flat away from slum. She said, “The slum caused filth, bad odours and noise” (Nambisan, 2010, p.93). At a point of time, the association held a meeting to discuss the possibilities of discarding Sitara. They even claimed it as the dwelling place of criminal-workers.

The power and domination of elite class connect social structures to their control of the text. It not only influences the personal beliefs but also the shared ideologies of the group. “If controlling the contexts and structures of text and talk is the first major form of the exercise of power, controlling people’s minds through such discourse is an indirect but fundamental way to reproduce dominance and hegemony” (van Dijk, 2015, p.472). The residents of Vaibhav considered the slum people as disease carriers and Madhavan found those boys stole plastic buckets, doormat and plundered the wealth of the rich. Persuading the audience against the slum, he called them as predators and opined to remove the criminals before they grow. He also forwarded the idea of an industrialist to purchase the three acres of slum and convert it into an eco-park with a garden, swimming pool and gym. To compensate for this change, the people of slum would be migrated to seven storeyed high building of Tambaram, providing a space of 175 square feet each. Thus the humanity was lost at the cruel thought of removing the slum for selfish benefits.

The discourse of the ingroup expresses their grievances and disappointments. Mokamma, a woman of the slum was dejected sharing that once the swamp yielded good fish and hence a decent life. She worried that fish stunk very much as the water was poisoned with garbage. Sooner the complaints of fishermen were not heeded and they were warned that God has punished for their greed. Mokamma mourned that they were compelled to opt for cleaning toilets and drainages. They were isolated from the main society and most of them became drunkards. They were called only to clean sewage. The poor produced the own liquor and even bribed the police to flourish the business.

The meeting with Allaudin Baqua, the don of the slum was a shock to Simon, PK and Sandhya as he conditioned them to adverse situations. Baqua highlighted that they were shown only the good places of slum and not the places of child labour, gambling and voluptuousness. Baqua was seriously asking Simon to cook food, PK to carry sacks of gravel and Sandhya to load a heap of bricks. Baqua chided at their complaint of stones in rice and stale oil. He was sarcastic that poverty was glorified in films like women enjoying their work through songs, poor labourers being excited about their hard work and patriotic beggars.

Baqua snapped at the purposelessness of Simon’s donation of the water cooler. This strange situation made them perplexed and angry. Baqua condemned the subjugation of their types. The people of Sitara were exploited, blackmailed and treated as low creatures. The rich people never recognised their humiliation to the poor. He claimed that their right to live was controlled by the wealth and power of the rich. Every labourer was subjugated to the routine duties and if there was

a demand for a pay rise, they were intimidated by losing jobs as the owners usually blackmailed preferring materialistic gadgets to servants.

Baqua yelled at Simon for utilising the services of Velu, the school going boy. Baqua's childhood was a harsh reality where his parents, on the verge of adversity sustained with affordable necessities. He recalled his mother's words, "It's better to be a pig in the sewer than be poor. Pigs have dignity" (Nambisan, 2010, p.139). Leaving home once for all, his travel taught him the deep reality of how the rich exploited the poor. He identified numerous Sitaras around where few powerful people extracted the hard work of dominated labourers. Disheartened by the fate of being poor, mostly they had a cursed life of wondering why a mistake of birth led them to face grinding hardships and lack of money. The hidden unconsciousness of the poor was afflicted with the hatred for the wealthy class.

Baqua accused that not even thieves looted wealth like the sophisticated, selfish, parasitical, rich people. He wanted the affordable lot to think over the kindness distributed through materialistic favours with no empathy. He was rational, cool but angry pointing out that sooner there would be terrorists oppressed by impecuniosities. Though Simon never changed his mind of helping the slum, he was ashamed of his weird experience with Baqua.

3.0 Conclusion:

In the broader framework, the discourse-cognition-society triangle is applied to analyse the micro and macro levels of the plot. The point of this succinct analysis is to prove that the social distinctions between Sitara and Vaibhav apartments are related to their opinions, attitudes, beliefs, values reflected in their discourse. "In general, CDA as a school or paradigm is characterized by a number of principles: for example, all approaches are problem-oriented, and thus necessarily interdisciplinary and eclectic" (Wodak, 2009, p.1-33).

The concerned study has influenced the researcher to focus on the situations connecting discourse, cognition and society. The realistic situations are recorded with the implications observed by the linguistic scholar van Dijk. The paper resounds with the power abuse, social inequality delivered through the discourse properties. The macro and micro structures portray the discourse control affected by personal and social cognition. Subsequently, the researcher has applied this triangle concept of three dimensions to the novel under investigation. The discourse structures discuss the depth of the novel depicting the pulse of the two different worlds. The cognition portrays empathy of Simon and the troubling anxiety of the Vaibhav apartment residents. The society sector identifies the power struggle between the subjugate ingroup and the elite outgroup. Every specific incident of the novel is segregated to extract precise ideas related to the aim of this paper.

From the application of the triangle concept of van Dijk to the novel, it is figured out that the power and domination of the discourse are reflected in the text and talk of the novel. The researcher has given the glimpse that these discursive themes and orders of discourse belong to specific social domains. Exploring the phenomena of discourse analysis, the text opines that there is a possibility of manipulating personal beliefs when society constructs an ideology. The conclusions and findings of the research paper could be further refined. Critical discourse analysis is usually regarded for its qualitative nature of the study. Specifically, van Dijk's model is considered as the proper methodology as it is postulated that it would represent the appropriateness of the social context for those researchers who attempt to construe mind control and exercise of power. The social consequences of those kinds of discourse structures result in social inequality which in turn affects cognition but in different modes. "Discourse structures express structures of mental models, which are related to more permanent social representations such as knowledge, attitudes

and ideologies, which in turn are the shared ways groups and cultures represent their goals, interests, concerns, structures or institutions” (van Dijk, 1993b, p.122). Neglecting social cognition and discourse, no social practice, domination and dissent can be conceived.

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