

# **PUSHED TO THE EDGE: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF 'OTHERNESS' IN ANITA SHREVE'S *BODY SURFING***

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This study seeks to investigate the ways in which the dominant gender i.e. man tries to promote the subservient status of woman on the basis of her constructed ideology of 'weaker sex'. Women in society are often given the secondary role and importance by men, considering them powerless, deficient, incapable and weak. Theory of 'Other' provides the conceptual framework for the study which exclude women from the arena of social activities and behaviors. Critical Discourse Analysis is applied as a method of interpretation to the text of novel *Body Surfing* together with post-structural analytical perspective. It will try to highlight how language of the text is used to construct a dominant ideology of excluding women from social atmosphere. This social exclusion of women, on the basis of 'other' group, is turned into the concept of marginalization i.e. women constitute a class of their own due to other traits, other mentality, other activities, totally different from those of men in every respect. The various words, phrases and sentences will be analyzed under the theme of marginalization and the deeper and multi facets of meanings will explored to see how discourse legalizes women's marginalization and make them 'Other'.*

**Keywords:** *Marginalization, Inequality, Discourse & Otherness*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The attainment of power has been and is an extremely important factor in human history and society. Society consists of varied groups like men and women, rich and poor, educated and illiterate, and rulers and masses etc. There is always intra-group and inter-group strife for the attainment of power, with the former one being more dangerous. The intra-group conflict over the acquisition of power is often observed in the clash of ideologies. One group tries to dominate the other by trying to reverse the cause of the other group in every possible way. Various social and individual factors contribute in the relegation of the dominated group. The foremost and probably, the most important among these factors is the language. It is ideology through which a change takes place and behind every ideology there is language. Language is primary machinery which changes people psychology about the existing order of things. It is a revolting agency and brings change both positive and negative. Positive change is always constructive, fruitful and bearable whereas the negative change is seldom constitutive, productive and acceptable.

In society men and women constitute an individual class i.e. gender. Due to patriarchal affiliation, man has become influential and dominant. The patriarchal institution has exercised the dominant ideology of 'man as powerful' through discourse. Such patriarchal discourse also made the language of man powerful. The use of non-generic words or family names put after the names of father in a family etc. are clear indicators of man-made language. Some feminists like Mary Daly revolted against such man-made language and wanted to bring about a positive change in women's lives by changing the accepted nature of the present language which according to her is purely patriarchal (Daly, quoted in Wallace, 2009). She is of the view that language is primarily responsible for constructing the "identity and reality" (p. 142) of women as a group; therefore, it should be changed altogether. Man has ideologically placed woman in an inferior social position. This ideology is perpetuated generation after generation and now it has become a norm. A woman's psychology is judged by the norm of womanhood. She is woman, so she is incapable. Her honor is molested by men. Her role is that of maid only; to produce children and serve their men.

Their participation in social activities is curbed by men. They are denied their social rights and equal opportunities. They are regarded as the outcasts of society. This social exclusion results in women's stagnation of social, economic and political participation of the society. They are marginalized by men and pushed to an aloof edge of the society where they are alien, having no concern with the society of humans. The present study is delimited to gender marginalization only. It explores the marginalized status of women through the text of novel. It examines the various ways in which gender discrimination plays a vital role in giving the identity of 'Other' to woman in the same class of gender. Being a textual study, it will explain how certain linguistic structures carry with themselves multiple layers of meanings beyond the obvious superficial meanings. It will investigate how language is used by the writers to support certain cause or the otherwise by arriving at the various textual and contextual situations within the same discourse of novel.

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

This is qualitative research based on the analysis of text. For analysis, this paper adopts Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as research method and Fairclough's three dimensional model of CDA as research strategy. CDA seeks to investigate underlying factors responsible for the construction of discourse and resists the power factor active behind the construction of discourse. It criticizes the dominant structures and hegemonic relationships responsible for running of institutions, knowledge systems and truth and reality norms. According to Fairclough (1995), any text is to be analyzed from three different angles: texts themselves as they are i.e. their structural aspect; discourse as it is constructed, erected and exercised in society and the relationship of discourse to the society.

Text of the novel will be analyzed keeping in view the three elements of Fairclough's model. There is strong correlation between this qualitative research and CDA. van Dijk (quoted in Sajid & Ahmad, 2014) asserts that texts are bearers of reality and that this reality is the depiction of personal and institutional interests. Therefore, the aim of CDA is "to find out or reveal means of dominance/ hegemony and inequality present in the society by critically examining texts whether spoken or written" (p. 27). My task, as a researcher, will be to find out those power structures which lead to unequal and subordinate position of women in society by examining the multiple meanings that the texts have.

### **The Research Question**

How are women placed in the group of marginalized human beings, on the basis of the constructed ideology of 'weaker sex'?

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Marginalization occurs when certain group is denied their rights by the more influential group of the same pair. It has many kinds like political, religious, social, economic, work-oriented and role-oriented etc. but the most severe form of it is ideological. Men consider women possessing weaker social status and try to exclude them from every social activity on the basis of gender discrimination. In the most simplest way gender marginalization can be defined as every activity, policy, tactic or rule devised by men which is in the disfavor of women and which categorize them as having separate and patented group, detached from the world of men. Talking about women's marginalized status in Indian cricket, Gupta (2013) observes that Indian women do not participate in cricket on the same level as Indian men. According to her, this affects the psychology of Indian women who consider only Indian men capable of getting national identity.

They are denied their due share in the public and social life of Indian society which results in their marginalized status. Indian women are "functionally excluded from the sites of exposure" (2013: 100), that can generate national and religious integrity in India. This partiality in Indian cricket generates gender inequalities which in turn lead to many other associated social injustices with women. Talking about gender inequalities in US, Reckdenwald and Parker (2008) argue that primarily it is economic marginalization which is responsible for other types of women's marginalization. The poor social status of women, joblessness and workplace injustices make them marginalized group. According to them the family squabbles, robberies by women, prostitution, late night rambling, and arrests are the result of economic marginalization of women. They are paid less as compared to their male counterparts. They are treated unfairly by their bosses in offices and at workplace settings. The same is true of every social activity where the matter is of earning. Women's economically weak social position make them criminals.

The lack of equal opportunities for women to earn their living make their life miserable. After all one has to survive for her life but in patriarchy it is the fittest (man) who will survive. According to a study, despite women's greater participation in world's work, their share in the income is minimum. In the view of Borren: Women do 80 percent of the world's work and own 1 percent of the world's property and are 70 percent of the world's poor. The gendered world-system affects not only those of us who fall into constructed category of women particularly, but all people, since gendered systems are a vehicle for the global expansion of neo-liberal capitalism. (quoted in Karides, 2013: 188-189). In the same way, Reckdenwald and Parker (2008) further put that women's partner-killings and earning black money in US are also the result of their unequal economic status. Whereas men have greater and valuable opportunities to earn their livelihood, women on the other hand are restricted to getting such opportunities. They are marginalized into a separate group the 'Other' one, totally different from and opposite to that of the group of men.

The term 'Other' or 'Otherness' has different facets of meanings. In sociology, this concept refers to the recognition of certain group that is marginalized at the hands of the more dominant group. In society we, as human beings are recognized through our affiliation with certain group possessing the shared characteristics of that group. This affiliation and its recognition is called identity. The modern society is more political, having much larger space for power to exercise than the ancient times. There is ideological struggle on macro level, in various sectors of society and on micro level, within the groups, for the acquisition of identity. It is this struggle that often produces frustration, controversy, denial and sometimes dispute on part of the less powerful people in the group. In the view of Bauman (1991), the categories into which social identities are framed are often dichotomous:

The second member is but the other of the first, the opposite (degraded, suppressed, exiled) side of the first and its creation. Thus abnormality is the other of the norm, deviation the other of law-abiding, illness the other of health, barbarity the other of civilization, animal the other of the human, woman the other of the man, stranger the other of the native, enemy the other of friend, 'them' the other of 'us', insanity the other of reason, foreigner the other of the state subject, lay public the other of the expert. Both sides depend on each other, but the dependence is not symmetrical. The second side depends on the first for its contrived and enforced isolation. The first depends on the second for its self-assertion. (p. 14). Bauman explains that social identities circulate in the form of pairs. What constitutes the powerless is forever the second category in the pair. Here, he seems to support the views of Derrida who asserts that the binary pairs work on the principle of "difference" (quoted in Cavallaro, 2003: 28).

Both the categories are related to but different from each other and it is always the first category that is powerful and which always marginalizes the second pair into the identity of 'Other'. From the review of literature, it becomes clear that marginalization as the

offshoot of hegemony, is mainly responsible for assigning the identity of 'Other' to women. Men in patriarchy have separated women from themselves. They have spared the identity of 'Humans' for themselves and tagged women with the identity of 'Aliens'; that they (women) have no concern with the socio-economic concerns of the society. They are kept aloof from the arena of society, pushed to the edge and are given hollow and sunken premises, far away from the approach of society. This 'Otherness' created by social construction of men, is forever at the discomfort of women. They are treated unequally. The inequality is observed in almost every field of life. From family to workplace and from religion to grave, women are oppressed at the hands of men. The present study is an attempt to explore and highlight the 'Other' status of women in patriarchal society to raise a voice of resistance against the powerful and authoritative practices of men.

### **Novel Summary**

In *Body Surfing*, Shreve portrays the theme of betrayal and sexual oppression of women in patriarchy. She criticizes how in patriarchal societies women's honor is molested. Women's wishes are turned down and their desire of becoming a family is often rejected. This novel is a harsh criticism on the subject of love and marriage. Marriage is considered as fun by men in the modern society. Before reaching the age of 30, Sydney Sklar's heart is broken thrice, who is heroine of the novel. She is once divorced by her pilot husband, once widowed from her doctor husband and once left on the day of her engagement. Modern society has no care for such helpless and distressed women, and if somehow they arrange to support their living, it is done at the cost of their bodies. Sydney tutors a young girl for which she is paid. She is tutor but serves as a maid. In this way, Shreve deals with the themes of love and marriage, which are considered as rudiments for the sexual exploitation of women in society. Women are regarded as sexual objects by men, only to play with. They are regarded as possessing inferior and demeaned social position. Shreve criticizes this weaker social status of women in society in her novel *Body Surfing*.

### **DISCUSSION**

Data is analyzed and interpreted under Fairclough's Three Dimensional Model of CDA. Textual data is in abundance but following the criteria of space for the paper, some most relevant paragraphs are randomly selected from the novel with a brief reference to the context. Moreover, novel text is put in quotation marks with bold fonts and italicized in analysis and interpretation section, in order to separate it from general discussion. Against the suggestion of Fairclough (1992) that three stages in his three dimensional model could be used separately, this paper has a certain diversion. I have used all the three stages together during the process of interpretation and analysis. **Reference to the context:** All the family members including Sydney are sitting at a dinner table discussing various subjects. Julie, Edwardses' only daughter has grown plump due to overeating or may be due to her prolonged sitting for hours of study. We are told: Julie appears not to worry about her weight ... needs to be watchful. (p. 24).

**Weaker Social Status of Women**

The paragraph is an example of discourse of authority which is given to men, to guard women. It is in ideological site of power in which men are given preference over women. It regards women as too weak to defend them. In this discourse type a covert struggle for powerful status is going on by treating women as unable and incapable of defending themselves. The word “weight” has an expressive value since it ideologically classifies the word in this particular discourse type to have a negative impact i.e. “voluptuousness”. Elsewhere, like in medical discourse “weight” would not have any negative connotations. In medical discourse too growing “weight” has the adverse effects, for example it can cause obesity which is a type of physical disorder but it does not produce any sensuality. So, here, in this discourse type the word “weight” is classified to have a sexual association i.e. people usually are sexually diverted to chubby women. The phrase “as a result” is ideologically used to connect the second subordinate clause with the principal clause. The fact that Julie looks sexy being fat is ascertained by the relation of result which means that of course, Julie’s fatness appealed to men.

The truth supposition leads to the fact that overeating or not taking proper diet and exercise do lead to fattiness, which can then take the shape of obesity. Julie ate and drank lavishly gained weight and now she sexually appeals to men. The adjective “appealing” in the adjectival phrase “appealing voluptuousness” is a presupposition which presupposes that men’s sexual gazes of Julie are sexually attractive. Julie’s buxomness attracts men and appeals to their sensuousness. Moreover, the noun phrase “appealing voluptuousness about the girl” is nominalization. The purpose of all this is the ideological implication of the writer to refer to the whole supposition of the fact that many things in young women can sexually appeal to men. The purpose of the nominalization here is that we can refer to the larger discourse of sexuality in patriarchy, each and everywhere and in each and every point in time in the world, in which men are sexually attracted to women through their various physical features. Makeup, flirting gestures, fashion, clothes, jewelry, besides other physical features like chubbiness, slimness, curled hair, and height etc. on part of women count to attract men.

So, the nominalization is a kind of general treatment in which women must be cautious in their style. But it is not clear whether only men are sexually attracted by such physical features of women or women too are not spared by this appealing sexuality. In Western societies in particular, it is not only the heterosexual men who seek women; lesbians also are sexually attracted by women and particularly young girls. Julie does not “worry” to get chubby. She has no genuine or utilitarian reason to be chubby; in order to attract men towards her. “Not to worry” presupposes that she has no intention to become fatty but even then patriarchy has the dominant ideology of sexual attraction about women’s getting fat. Men, on the other hand, if they get weight and become fat are free to move everywhere without any compulsion because they do not appeal to the women. The use of

the word “girl” again has an ideological value. “Watchful” in both “the brothers must be watchful” and “someone needs to be watchful” is a non-possessive attribute used as adjective here. The process type involved here is a non-directed action i.e. to be alert and watch the “girl”. This non-directed action is represented with responsible agents i.e. the brothers. The ideology behind all this is that the action is made rather indirect in respect of the agents i.e. Julie’s brothers.

By so doing, one cannot directly blame and make responsible Julie’s brothers to keep an eye on her. Women in patriarchal societies have been given unjust treatment. Their ideology is based on weakness. Often, it is assumed that women cannot defend themselves and need some male guard to defend them. This ideology is constructed on the basis of weaker sex of women in comparison to men who are considered strong and powerful to have the ability and power to save women from any danger. The accepted nature of this ideology and its recurrent application to women has made women really weak. Even women have begun to think themselves as weaker sex who can be safe only and only in men’s possession. Women have found themselves secure in men’s arms and in order to retain this security, they blindly follow their men at all cost. Men abuse women, hit them, torture them, and oppress them but they do not say anything against their patriarchs because if they revolt against men’s authority, their security might be at stake (Qureshi, 2014).

**Reference to the context:** Sydney and Mr. Edwards are plucking roses in the rose garden for her wedding bouquet as she is going to marry Jeff the next day. They converse about the history of the house among many other things. Mr. Edwards tells her the brief history of the house and says that originally the house was built as an accommodation for nuns. He tells: There is tremendous history to the house ... local young women’. (pp. 168-169).

### **Women’s Disgrace**

The extract is a conversation that is going on between Mr. Edwards and Sydney about the history of the house, now owned by Mr. Edwards. Sydney is a stranger, staying at the house of Mr. Edwards but now she is going to marry his son Jeff Edwards. It is an order of a larger discourse of women’s oppression since it discusses the role of scandals and their outcomes in women’s lives. As a whole, the discourse is having a covert power dimensions because of the authority and masculinity of Mr. Edwards. This power factor is evident in many respects. First, Mr. Edwards, being a man has a natural authority which makes him a speaking subject over Sydney who is a passive listener. Secondly, it is his age, which gives a potential authority to him over Sydney. Mr. Edwards is an aged man having lived a long and experienced life in respect to Sydney, who is like his daughter, having somewhat less experience than him. Patriarchal ideology makes women listen to their men. It does not matter, how much experience a young woman has; she has to listen to the male, if he is older than her and even if he does not have any experience at all.

Next, this masculine authority is attributed to Mr. Edwards on the basis of the fact that he is the owner of the house and Sydney, as a stranger, is only a guest. Naturally, then she has to listen to him and believe in what is told to her. Also, Mr. Edwards has lived here for a very long time which necessitates his authority as the giver of information on the basis of his knowledge about the history of the house; and Sydney, having no information or knowledge about the house, is given the role of a receiver of information. What she does is the passive submission to the facts, told to her by Mr. Edwards. The various words, phrases and clauses like “history”, “library and the local historical society”, “age”, “six, seven, eight families have lived here”, “was originally built”, “aging house”, “dormers”, “date”, and “the house was sold” presuppose, provide the necessary contextual background, and make clear the fact that the conversation is about the history and age of a house. The extract is also a covert example of masculine discourse in which there is an ideological contestation. Masculine and feminine ideologies are contested here giving weight for the former’s struggle to mark its stance.

The word “convent” which presupposes that primarily the house was erected as a building for the accommodation of ‘nuns’, also makes this discourse a site for implied struggle on behalf of men. It is because the opposite of the word “convent” i.e. ‘monastery’ could also be used but in that case there would be no implication for masculine idealization, since the word “convent” has been used here by Mr. Edwards with negative connotations like the associated notions of “scandal” and “corrupting” influences. The word “bedrooms” in the same way, also has the negative association with masculine ideology concerning ‘sex’. The word at once, unconsciously, presupposes the sexual business that would have been done there in the house by the “nuns”. This extract is also an implied criticism on the character of religious class of women i.e. “contemplative order”. A (woman) hermit lives the life of seclusion in contemplation. She does not rear any mundane thinking or material benefits. But patriarchy has not spared even the religious class of women. They are criticized on the basis of having illicit relations with monks. The clause “bedrooms for nuns?” works here as a nominalization. It puts the whole class of nuns in the category of immoral and sexually perverse religious class, on the basis of its generality of nature.

Studied separately from the context of this discourse, the nominalization acts as a general ideology putting women in a degraded status and inferior position. The house became notorious for sexual business through the nuns and it is proved by the use of the noun “scandal” which has an experiential value. It could be replaced by a near synonym or its nuance like ‘rumor’ but in that case it would have no ideological benefit. “Scandal” has an ideological value in so far as it alludes to the secret illicit relationship that two people have. The seemingly generic phrase “young novice” presupposes it to be a nun. It cannot be a monk in so far as it has been used with the non-generic “priest”. As the discourse here is a heterosexual one, so it is definitely a “priest” and a “young” nun, who are involved in a sexual relationship. The adjectival phrase “young novice” also presupposes that the nun is ‘unskilled’ yet in religious matters and that she is a ‘girl’.



Ideologically, the whole discourse refers to the exploitation of priests which they exercise on young girls who become nuns. These young women sacrifice their wishes and luxuries to the will of God but they do not know that even in the Church, they are not safe from the lust of male clergy.

Moreover, “priest” and “young novitiate” are put in binary opposition to each other. A “priest” is a qualified religious person having deep knowledge of the religious matters. On the contrary, a “novitiate” is a person (here a girl) who has just joined a religious profession and is not fully expert in religious business. Such inexperienced nuns can easily be molested at the hands of skilled priests who can manipulate them in various ways. “Nothing changes but the date”, in the same way, presupposes Julie’s elopement from the house. The house has, in Mr. Edwards’ notions, even now, the same vicious echo, of seduction. It is here, in the same house, Mr. Edwards thinks, that Julie lived and has eloped from here for some sexual business. So, even now the house has a notorious affiliation with immoral history because it is why Julie, by living here, has become immoral and eloped. It is only the “date” that has changed not the disgrace of the house. “Unwed mothers”, on the basis of contextual information i.e. “contemplative order” presupposes them to be nuns. Those women had no shelter of their own which also presupposes that they were poor, helpless, and homeless people.

In each case the ideology behind the discourse is that those women were left at the mercy of God because they had no families. “Man” and his “daughter” are also put in opposition to each other. It is “his daughter” and not him, who “started a home for unwed mothers”. The ideology behind all this is that men do not feel any need to support helpless women. Being a resourceful man i.e. “the editor” he is in no position to help those poor and homeless women. It is “his daughter” who feels the dire need to help and support them by providing shelter for them in the shape of a “home”. Despite the fact that no man did anything for those women, “the villagers” tried their best to “evict” them. The contextual background provides the necessary information which presupposes that “the villagers” were men. Ideologically too, it is a known fact that most of the blames are put by men against women in patriarchy. Due to helplessness and poverty they started nunnery to help other people with the benevolence of God. But even then they are not spared and accused of “corrupting the morals of the local young women” despite the fact that men did not have any proof of this. Mr. Edwards’ statement “can’t imagine the unwed mothers would have been any trouble to anyone” is a declaration on his part conforming to the fact that it was only a rumor and that those women were not responsible for any obscene activities.

The ideology behind this discourse order is that helpless women are oppressed on a higher level by patriarchal forces. Men do not see the outcome of certain injustices, which seemingly normal can cause greater loss. Women who do not find any shelter are no doubt obliged to become prostitutes and call-girls. A bad name is worse than bad deeds, someone has very beautifully said, which exactly works here. Not each and every scandal

has truth in it. Most often, on verification it becomes clear that a certain scandal was a rumor without the minimum truth in it. But once disgraced, it becomes not only difficult but rather impossible for a woman to regain her lost glory. Such a woman is looked down upon in the society. But men, even after the disgrace can survive and retain their former glory and respect. Patriarchy has no such norms which could penalize men also on the same scale as women. All this is due to the social construction of certain patriarchal ideologies which assign weaker social status to women and regard them as weaker sex on the basis of their so-called unimportant social identity. (Qureshi, 2014)

## CONCLUSION

The discussion can be concluded with the remarks that it is language or discourse that constitutes identity. People represent themselves with various types of identities. These identities are sometimes achieved and attained by giving a marginalized status to the other members of the group. Marginalization as the springhead of oppression is active behind the concept of weaker social status of women. It accords them their separate identity of 'Other' to be recognized with. CDA has proved influential in exploring this identity of 'Otherness' for women in the texts analyzed. It has focused on those discursive formations where the powerful (men) group has constructed discourse in their own interest. This group has legalized women's marginalization on the basis of ideological construction of weakness. The aim of the study is to prepare the readers to apply CDA practically to texts and tally it with the socio-cultural problems of the society; to help them improving their critical thinking and using it effectively in hermeneutics.

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