

## A Symbolic Representation of Women's Oppression in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Burqa

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### Abstract

This study examines how the burqa in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini serves not only as a cultural garment but also as an effective symbolic and sociolinguistic marker that shapes the realities of Afghan women. Despite the feminist and postcolonial scholarly discussion of the burqa, it has, in most cases, been addressed as a background to the text and not as a main sociolinguistic object that should be subjected to systematic analysis. This paper is an answer to that gap by offering the burqa as a symbolic, discursive, and semiotic resource indexing power, identity, and gendered subjectivity in the novel and the contemporary media discourse. Sociolinguistic analysis, semiotic interpretation, and critical discourse analysis (CDA) are used in the study as a qualitative, interpretive study design. The primary data are the scenes in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* related to the veil of the body and are enriched with a corpus of media (BBC, UN Women, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty, CNN, Reuters, AP News) to present the discursive constructions of the veil in Afghanistan at a contemporary time. Findings indicate that the burqa is a multi-layered sign, a passive garment, not an object. It organizes speech, silence, embodiment, and movement of space. Media and literary discourses not only create the meanings of sexuality; they also contest them. The burqa both permits and facilitates oppression and strategic action. This work, in which the semiotic, discursive, and ecological aspects of the burqa are anticipated over time, contributes to the theoretical and empirical explanation of how the symbols of veiling are used in the systems of power and sociolinguistic meaning. It provides a twisting interpretation, which goes beyond reductive binaries and places the experience of Afghan women within a broader web of debates, discourses of media, and lived lives. Thus, the work will not only be a contribution to the Hosseini scholarship but also help to open the sociolinguistic discourse of veiling to the field of fiction, where symbols are dense.

*Keywords:*

*Sociolinguistic Indexicality, Symbolic Oppression, Veiling Discourse and Embodied Agency.*

## Introduction

*A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) by Khaled Hosseini has emerged as one of the most effective contemporary stories describing the experiences of the Afghan woman under overlapping layers of interconnected patriarchal authority of war and political chaos. The novel depicts the existential lives of Mariam and Laila two women whose lives shed light on how gendered violence, restrictions of movement, marriage, motherhood and state control, are embedded in the lives of the Afghan society. In this scenery, the burqa is not merely a garment, but one of the most symbolically charged indicators of female oppression, invisibility, silence and negotiated agency (Naseem et al., 2024). Despite the feminist and postcolonial scholastic discussion of the burqa, the burqa has, in most cases, been addressed as a background to the text and not as a main sociolinguistic object that should be subjected to systematic analysis. This paper is an answer to that gap by offering the burqa as a symbolic, discursive and semiotical resource indexing power, identity and gendered subjectivity in the novel and the contemporary media discourse. It is based on three foundations of the literature that are essential to this investigation. First, feminist and Third-World feminist readings stress that the characters of Hosseini live in the areas where oppression is created not only by husbands and families but also by the state determinations, warlords, the Taliban, and the world geopolitics. Second, symbolic analyses acknowledge the burqa as a two-tiered sign, i.e. at once eliminating women, on the one hand, and creating a kind of physical security in militarized space, on the other. Third, the fact that veiling is discussed in the world community allows seeing that the burqa is not a unitary symbol of victimhood, but its meanings can vary between coercion and erasure and other meanings of piety, strategy, and protection, depending on the sociohistorical situation. Nevertheless, regardless of all these discussions, the burqa as a sociolinguistic sign is seldom examined as a form of structuring speech, silence, positioning in interactions and discursive identity. Literature therefore calls on the research that would incorporate symbolism, sociolinguistics and discourse analysis-incorporation that this paper offers. The theoretical insights are operationalized through methodological framework. Sociolinguistic analysis, semiotic interpretation, and critical discourse analysis (CDA) are used in the study as a qualitative, interpretive study design. The primary data are the scenes in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* related to the veil of the body, and are enriched with a corpus of media (BBC, UN Women, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty, CNN, Reuters, AP News) to present the discursive constructions of the veil in Afghanistan at a contemporary time. The strategy of the dual corpus is a direct answer to the focus of the literature on the contextualization of literary representations in the broader political and cultural contexts. The inductive, deductive process of coding was informed by the main constructs identified throughout the literature: oppression, anonymity, embodiment, surveillance, Western gaze, mobility, and agentive bargaining of the veiling norms by women. The choice of the analytical tools (indexicality, stance, discursive positioning, semiotic symbolism and ecolinguistic "stories we live by") is due to their ability to embody exactly the meaning dimensions that the literature pinpoints but has not tackled methodologically. These theoretical and methodological commitments are valid and extended in the data analysis and findings. The facts demonstrate that

the burqa has always been a multi-layered semiotic entity: an indicator of erased women, a disciplinary power, an experience of body being restricted, and an indicator of obedience or disobedience and a worldwide icon signifying Afghan womanhood represented in the media. The media corpus of testimony by women echoes the fact of suffocation, limited visibility, fear, spatial confinement and forced silence of the novel. Simultaneously, it should be noted that both corpora also disclose the idea that the burqa is a kind of tactical mask a sort of anonymity or security in perilous situations, thereby assigning its duality as such: the burqa is a prison as well as a protection. This ambivalence reflects the tension in the literature between the perception of the veil as oppressive and the agentic interpretation of the veil, and empirically shows how these meanings are made in discourse. The literature finds the necessity of addressing the burqa as a symbolic and sociolinguistic marker, the methodology offers the analytic means of capturing its discursive dynamics, and the data demonstrate that the burqa is indeed mobilized and can structure gendered identity, influence norms of interaction, define the experience of the body, and index ideological signification in both the fictional and real worlds. This work, in which the semiotic, discursive, and ecological aspects of the burqa are anticipated over time, makes a contribution to the theoretical and empirical explanation of how the symbols of veiling are used in the systems of power and sociolinguistic meaning. It provides a twisting interpretation, which goes beyond reductive binaries and places the experience of Afghan women within a broader web of debates, discourses of media and lived lives.

### Research Questions

1. How does the burqa operate as a sociolinguistic and indexical resource in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, structuring women's speech, silence, and gendered subject positions?
2. How do literary and contemporary media discourses construct the burqa as a site of gendered power, ideology, and agency?

### Research Objectives

1. To analyze burqa-related scenes in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* through sociolinguistic concepts of indexicality, stance, and discursive positioning, in order to show how the burqa regulates interaction, voice, mobility, and embodied identity.
2. To critically examine, using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), how the burqa is discursively framed in the novel and contemporary media texts, identifying dominant and competing ideological constructions of oppression, surveillance, and strategic agency.

### Literature review

*A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) by Khaled Hosseini has emerged as one of the most talked-about Anglophone stories concerning Afghan women, war, and patriarchy. Throughout three decades of war, the novel trails Mariam and Laila on the journey out of a household imprisonment

and violence by the state to an unstable agency. Opponents have always interpreted the work as a literary archive of the plight of Afghan women in the oppressive systems of patriarchal control - a family, the state, armed militia, and international politics of power (Cevik and Tongur, 2019 and Imran and Ismail, 2022). Through this larger context of gendered oppression, the burqa is not a non-committal object of clothing; it is one of the most heavily weighted visual and symbolic objects in the novel. In the case of Mariam, the burqa is first seen as a continuation of her forcible marriage and physical confinement, whereas to Laila, it is an extension of her daily negotiation of the street, her visibility and exposure at the time in the Taliban regime. According to recent scholarship, in the fictitious world of Hosseini, veiling is frequently associated with the acts of domestic violence, deprivation of legal rights, and the deprivation of women of their social personhood (Naveed, 2024). Concurrently, veiling studies around the world advise against the tendency to make the burqa a mere indicator of victimization. Based on sociological, anthropological, religious, and media studies, it has been demonstrated that veiling may also mark piety, respectability, political dissent or strategic self-protection, depending on the contextual conditions (Alvi, 2013 and Abbass, 2023). The contradiction between the burqa as a form of oppression and the burqa as a rather agentic practice is the core of the current study. The sociolinguistic approach to the interpretation of the burqa in the novel can thus help understand how a rather disputed symbol on the global scene is discursively produced within a literary-Afghan context. A significant amount of criticism has interpreted the novel as a work that focuses on feminism, Third-World feminism, and postcolonialism. The previous fiction prefigured the way the novel records the violence against women, forced marriage, rape within marriage, battering in marriage, honor culture, and the legalized airs of the Taliban decree (Cevik and Tongur, 2019). An example is Cevik and Tongur, who demonstrate the presence of Afghan women in the text, living in a third-world feminist status where gender oppression cannot exist outside of war, imperialism, and inequality of classes. The more recent literature has not merely been cataloguing work on abuse but has been looking at patterns of resistance, sisterhood, and archetypal female roles (Baheer et al., 2024). Imran and Ismail (2022) suggest that the women discussed by Hosseini are traveling a spectrum of obedience to resistance and empowerment, and transform into modern characters encapsulating the Afghan womanhood who redefine agency in oppressive forms. Similar stress Ayswarya and Angelin Sheeja place on the fact that the novel phases consist of silence splendour: the battle of women against the forces of patriarchy in small but cumulative protests of defiance: protecting children, creating friendship, telling stories, or even a sacrifice killing which will put an end to abuse (Kesuwo, 2021). Voice and subalternity have been a subject in a group of studies. Based on the question of Spivak (2015), Can the subaltern speak Soraya can see Mariam and Laila as subaltern women by identifying the systemic silence of the Afghan patriarchy on their voices, but whose voices are slowly re-emerging with narrative focalization and dialogic scenes. In her writing on living on the edge, Shameem follows the women surviving at the fringes of Kabul's social world by surviving on their own, along with their moral standing, and not because of their rights or even by the law. These are important studies in a sociolinguistic approach since they bring to fore the fact that speech, silence, and narrative positioning are used

as technologies of power. In addition to these, several articles explore structural inequalities and inferior conditions of the women of Afghanistan in the fiction by Hosseini, with a particular emphasis on legal disenfranchisement, restricted access to educational opportunities, and institutionalized physical violence. In the recent analysis published in *Journal of Applied Linguistics and TESOL*, Naveed specifically approaches the novel as a commentary on the issue of female oppression within a patriarchal Afghan community, framing gendered violence as the problem of systemic issue, but not a personal issue. The entire corpus creates a canon in which *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is now canonized as a critical site in terms of thinking about the phenomenon of oppression, resistance, and the voice of the Afghan women. Nonetheless, despite the extensive amount of discussion about oppression, the burqa is not necessarily always foregrounded as a sign of sociolinguistics; many people assume it to be a simple component of the overall environment.

### **Symbolism and Semiotics in the novel: The Sign of the Burqa**

A little but increasingly common literature directly analyzes symbolism in the novel. According to Kesuwo, on the topic of Symbolism and the search for new social awareness, Hosseini employs a web of repetitive symbols - the burqa, the kolba, the orphanage, and the metropolis of Kabul - to pre-empt the suffering and moral perseverance of women. In this sense, the burqa becomes a sign of the double: it not only realizes the female invisibility and confinement, but also turns into a thin veneer that enables women to navigate militarized streets somewhat more safely without fear of being harassed (Abbass, 2023). In the article, one can see that the burqa is frequently used at moments of narrative when there is fear or even humiliation or the sense of space limitation - when Laila is not able to see through the mesh, trip on potholes, and when the pleated cloth touches her lips. These images welcome the readers to experience veiling as physical suffocation. Other important articles (such as Paul, 2024) relate the images of the burqa to third-world feminism and marginalization, meaning that the body of the women is literally concealed so it can be more easily manipulated and can no longer be clearly identified as a subject in legal statutes. However, even in symbolic analyses, the emphasis is more literary and thematic. Little is made to treat the burqa as a sociolinguistic resource i.e., as something that acts like a sign or utterance in a communicative system of gender, power, and religious discourse (Azhar et al., 2016)

It is here that our proposed study joins semiotics and sociolinguistics to pose the question: how does the burqa index the specific identities and relations of power within the linguistic text of the novel?

### **Veiling, Burqa and Hijab: International Controversies and Hypotheses**

Whenever one conducts any analysis of the burqa in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, it must be placed within broader academic arguments on Islamic veiling. In the early Western media and policy discourses, the veil was particularly the burqa and niqab as a symbolic symbol of oppression and cultural othering of Muslim women. Bullock, in her work on Western media representations of



veiled women in the press, provides an example of how veiled women are portrayed as silent victims and veiling is anti-modern through the continuous repetition of these signs. Byng (2010), in his very influential article entitled *Symbolically Muslim: Media, Hijab, and the West*, poses this argument by showing that the hijab is used to organize anxieties about terrorism, immigration, and national identity. The Anthropological text *Concealment and Revealment: The Muslim Veil in Context* by Alvi (2013) makes this look more complex because it demonstrates that veiling practices gain significance only in the context of certain arrangements of honor, shame, kinship, and religious pioussness. The more recent scholarship is now actively engaged in criticizing the equation between the veil and oppression. The veil: A Silhouette of Autonomy and Empowerment by Abbas claims that veiling is adopted by a significant number of Muslim women due to their desire to have autonomy, self-discipline of morality, and faith. On the same note, Paul has provided legal and political analysis of European judicial cases on full-face veiling and concludes that bans in the name of social cohesion tend to increase social division and put veiled women at risk of harassment instead of safeguarding them Ali and Khan, 2022). In parallel with these international discussions, there is a wave of studies that also discuss veiling in the background of Muslim-majority societies. The research conducted by Azhar, Khan and Naz (2016) on the practices of hijab in Pakistan also engages the negotiation theory to demonstrate how women in Pakistan have assumed a prudent approach to veil practice because of the pressure exerted by their families, economies, and religion. Other more recent Islamic-studies scholarship such as Azhar et. al., 2016 previews scriptural and juristic discourses about hijab, and focuses on ideas of justice, modesty, and social righteousness, as opposed to mere body-covering. Collectively, this body of literature confirms the fact that the burqa is a disputed sign: in certain situations, it is perceived as a forceful and patriarchal sign; in other situations, it is embraced as a voluntary sign of faith, decency, or even protest. The highly particular description of the burqa Hosseini provides - in wartime Kabul, by the threats of violent husbands and the decrees of the Taliban - can be interpreted in the light of these more diverse global connotations.

### **Sociolinguistic Approach and Discourse-Analytic Approach to Veiling**

Although much of the veiling literature is historiographic, theological, or juristic, several of the studies take sociolinguistic and critical discourse analytic (CDA) approaches, which are quite applicable to this project. Byng (2010) has been extensively quoted in the study of media, though it is fundamentally a CDA of press-discourse: the adjectives of evaluation, the metaphors, and narrative frames by which the hijab has become a shorthand description of symbolically Muslim identity. Bullock (2022) also examines the rhetoric of freedom, choice, and security in television debates and newspaper articles, and how the voices of veiled women are often drowned out by the commentators associated with the discussed topic. The ethnographic analysis of the veil by Alvi (2013) in another register shows that veiling is closely associated with discursive practices of greeting, turn-taking, address, and handling of public/private boundaries. These results are very indicative of reading Hosseini: in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, the burqa is not a silent background; it is present in certain speech acts, reproaches in the street, negotiations in the market, or

engagement with soldiers and forms who have the right to speak and the manner of speech. The accounts about Muslim women further reveal the use of veiling as a means of self-representation in research done on the narratives of Muslim women. In an example, the interviews and online testimonies of hijabi women indicate intricate identity work where women agree, defy, or reconstruct dominant discourses on modesty and modernity. The Pakistani and Bangladeshi works that deem the negotiation theory point out the way women explain veiling to mothers and husbands, peers, and religious leaders, continuously re-negotiating the meaning of the veil in conversation. The recent CDA-oriented research on the controversies of veiling (such as the hijab bans in India or Europe) also illustrates how the state and media discourse make some meanings of the veil natural by relying on the metaphor of security, terrorism, and backwardness. These works are methodological and theoretical instruments that can be applied to fiction: they demonstrate the way veiling should be read not necessarily in terms of clothing but rather in terms of a discursive field constructed by law, media, religion, and daily life. Similar tools, such as indexing, stance, metaphor, speech-act analysis, and CDA, can therefore be applied in our sociolinguistic analysis to the narrative by Hosseini, where dialogues and descriptive passages are treated as some data on how the burqa indexes oppression, fear, anonymity, or, at other instances, safety.

### War and Representation of Afghan Women

In order to base the novel in the socio-historical context, researchers have also delved into the non-fictional portrayals of Afghan women. In a piece in which Fahmy (2004) analyzes the AP news photographs during and after the Taliban regime, he records how body of Afghan women, and specifically the veiled bodies of women, became the iconic representation of the coverage of Afghanistan in media across the world. In Ghosh (2003), the history of the Afghan women and the issue of status have been highlighted with the emphasis that it has swiveled drastically in the hands of various regimes, where relative liberation has been followed by war and the reaction of conservatives. The literature criticism of Hosseini in relation to this larger context holds that his novels produce and problematize the humanitarian media accounts of Afghan women. Adabpal and Kesur (2022) demonstrate how both *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *And The Mountains Echoed* portray conditions of inferiority of women but also delve into the emotional colorings of their daily lives, including motherhood, friendship, and memory. Imran and Ismail (2022), in their article entitled *The Frontiers in Sociology* state that Hosseini opposes the monolithic Western perceptions of Afghan women as unquestionable and uninformed in their roles by creating characters who shift through the phases of obedience, resistance, and empowerment. These debates are significant to this topic, as they emphasize a dual requirement of our novel by Hosseini: not only is it supposed to witness the reality of suffering of real Afghan women, but also not perpetuate the lazy Western daydreams about brown women being rescued by brown men. The demand can be addressed by a subtle sociolinguistic interpretation of the burqa as a symbol, which reveals how the novel constructions of oppression are made and yet leave a room for agency, solidarity, and moral complexity.

## Establishing the Gap: Towards a Sociolinguistic Approach to the Burqa in the Novel

There has been a rich feminist/postcolonial writing on *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, which has recorded gendered violence, sisterhood, and archetypes of the Afghan womanhood, but very little to no ethnography of the burqa besides the larger context of oppression. Symbolic and semiotic readings acknowledge the burqa as a central motif that sums up invisibility, confinement, and fear, but they usually do not go as far as to use the sociolinguistic idea of indexicality, stance, or discourse positioning. The field of veiling and burqa work in the world today is advanced and extensively controversial, with the focus on the fact that the same outfit may represent oppression, holiness, uprising, or empowerment in various contexts. There are both sociolinguistic and CDA approaches to veiling, which are primarily used in media texts, legal texts, interviews, and ethnographic sources, rather than fiction. This gap can be addressed by this article by: adjusting descriptions of burqas and scenes of veiling/unveiling to discursive events and not as descriptive detail; examining the way the burqa reflexes specific subject positions (wife, mother, proper Muslim, social outcast, possible threat, etc.) in the Afghan context of the novel; deliberating the relations of the burqa with the silence, speech and narrative focalization to generate oppression of women or take strategic modes of defense and offence. Thus, the work will not only be a contribution to the Hosseini scholarship but also help to open the sociolinguistic discourse of veiling to the field of fiction, where symbols are dense.

### Methodology

This paper follows a qualitative, interpretive research design, which is in line with the literature review that focuses on the burqa as the symbolic and discursive construct of gendered power dynamics. The identification of the burqa as a multi-layered symbol in the literature determines that the methodology of the study rests on sociolinguistic discourse analysis and semiotic analysis to analyze the functional aspects of the burqa as a signifier in the narrative world of *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. This design corresponds to the tendencies that are mentioned in the data analysis section, which include oppression, indexicality, embodied experience, and Western framings. Thus, meaning-making, discursive positioning, and the semiotic work of the burqa in the text are given prominence by the methodological orientation.

### Research Tools

Two data sources were used:

- a. Primary Text was all the passages mentioning the burqa, veiling, body restriction, female movement, or even silence in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini
- b. Supplementary Media Corpus: The excerpts of news, human rights reports, and visual media (HRW, Amnesty, BBC, Al Jazeera, Reuters, CNN, AP News, etc.) were chosen due to intertextual resonance with the novel selected.



The background of the burqa in Afghanistan is presented in this corpus of media (as discussed in the Findings) and thus contributes to the sociolinguistic analysis of the novel.

### **Analytical Framework**

The analysis combines:

#### **a. Sociolinguistic Analysis**

It shows grounded indexicality (Silverstein, Bucholtz and Hall, 2003) as a concept to ascertain the Afghan cultural reflection in signifying the mold of the burqa accordingly. Stance and positioning clearly advocate the relevance of the burqa in Afghan society. This is consistent with the literature review that brings out the burqa as a communicative measure that organizes the interactional roles of women (e.g., who speaks, who is silenced).

#### **b. Semiotic and Symbolic Analysis**

The use of symbolism in the fiction of Hosseini is manifested while presenting the burqa and its adjacent connectors. The semiotic discourse of veiling as a two-sided sign, first as a sign of oppression and second as a sign of protection, connects two counter views. This is tied to the thematic results of restriction, visibility, and embodied experience.

#### **c. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**

It explains the construction of women's identities through the novel and the media discourses. It also includes tracking down stories we live by (Stibbe, 2015) that make-or-break patriarchal ideologies. This is in line with feminist and postcolonial narrative literature.

### **Data Analysis**

Two sets of data were analyzed that are interrelated:

#### **Literary Corpus**

The two main corpora were the passages in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* that are related to the burqa. These included: 1. Examples of veiling and unveiling, 2. Scene of limited motion, silence or surveillance, 3. Socializing in the streets (markets, streets, crossroads) and 4. Symbolic and sensory descriptions associated with the burqa.

Every passage was also regarded as a discursive occurrence as opposed to a narrative detail.

## **Media and Advocacy Corpus**

The extra corpus included written news and advocacy texts of: Human Rights Watch, Amnesty Global, UN Women, BBC, The Guardian, Reuters, CNN, Al Jazeera, NPR, The New York Times, and AP News.

These pieces of writing were chosen because of their intertextual reverberation with the novel and their contribution to the development of the discourses of veiling and Afghan women in the world.

## **Coding of Data and Thematic Development**

The procedure of coding consisted of two stages:

### **Inductive Coding**

Open and inductive coding, which meant close reading of the two corpora, was the first stage. The repetitive use of lexical elements, metaphors, and narrative themes was observed without any forceful theoretical classifications. Initial codes included: Oppression, Erasure, Surveillance, Silence, Mobility restriction, Safety and Western gaze. These codes were created out of textual patterns.

### **Deductive Coding**

In the second step, the first codes were narrowed down with the help of the theoretical framework. The following were informed by deductive categories: Sociolinguistic (indexicality, stance, positioning) concepts, Feminist theory of the postcolonial world and Stories we live by ecolinguistics theory are included in it. These actions represent the outline and themes that are presented in the following sections.

It was a phase where abstract ideas (e.g., ideology, agency, embodiment) could be systematically wheeled to concrete textual material.

## **Levels of Analysis**

To ensure analytical clarity, data were analyzed at 3 levels:

### **Level 1: Lexical and Descriptive Level**

Attention was given to: Evaluative adjectives (e.g. hidden, erased, dangerous, protected), Vision, movement, and enclosure metaphors and imagery and Recurring keywords through literature.

### **Level 2: Interactional Level**

Scenes were analyzed for: Who talks and who is quieted down, Tables of manners and interrogatives and Interactional differences between the presence and absence of the burqa.

### **Level 3: Intertextual and Discursive Level.**

Texts were examined for: Repetitive patterns in the literary and media discourse, Harmony between the language of human rights and fiction, and Media meanings that are reinforced visually and verbally.

### **Comparative and Intertextual Analysis**

Having analyzed the novel and the media corpus individually, the findings were compared to identify Discursive convergence (common discourses of oppression or invisibility), Discursive variance (agency, resistance, contextual variation), and Support or conflict between non-literary and literary texts. This comparative step ensured that interpretations were not text-bound.

### **Reliability and Analytical Rigor**

To ensure rigor:

- a. Coding was done repeatedly after repeated readings
- b. Categories were narrowed down until saturation with respect to themes.
- c. Explicit textual evidence was used to make the interpretations.
- d. Triangulation was done with literary and media data to prevent overgeneralization.

The findings and discussion transition is supported by the existing knowledge and research presented in the paper. The critical processes provided in this chapter resulted in a list of common themes related to oppression, sociolinguistic indexing, embodiment, media representation, and agency. The next section is based on these themes that are interpreted in respect of the research questions, objectives, and the theoretical framework.

### **Findings and Discussion**

This section provides the answers to the research questions in a sociolinguistic, critical discourse analysis framework. To demonstrate how the burqa is a discursive, sociolinguistic, and semiotic resource, as opposed to a cultural artifact, the analysis uses passages associated with the burqa in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and an additional corpus of current media and human-rights discourse (i.e. Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, UN Women, BBC, CNN, Al Jazeera, Reuters, NPR, The New York Times, AP News, etc.).

### **Burqa as a Discursive Process of Repression and Suppression**

Throughout both corpora, the burqa is a discursive tool of erasure all the way, as it creates women as invisible, immobile, and silent objects. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International make a consistent claim that compulsory veiling is a policy that de-socializes women and links the attire to imprisonment, intimidation, and forced domesticity. Lexical structures like hidden, erased, confined, and restricted are used again and again, consolidating a normalized discourse of female inability to have a presence in the life of the populace.

This is the same trend in the narrative of Hosseini, where the move into burqa-wearing creates a shift of limited agency and enhanced surveillance and silence, especially in the lives of Mariam and Laila. The burqa is therefore a functioning of what ecolinguistics calls a story we live by; a repetition that makes visible women's invisibility and situates the presence of women as a social threat that should be attired away.

These findings, interpreted using the postcolonial feminist sub-discipline of CDA, affirm veiling as a non-neutral form of gender governance and hence agree with Ahmed and Abu-Lughod that women have their bodies controlled by the state. Combining the novel and media texts, one can note a certain ideological framework of suppressed voices of women, which respond to RQ1 by displaying the regulation of social participation and subject positioning by the burqa.

### **Burqa Sociolinguistic and Indexical Resource**

The results prove that the burqa acts as an indexical sign, which is visible and structures interaction stance and addressivity. The testimonies of UN Women and BBC reveal that the wearing or non-wearing of the burka has a direct influence on the treatment of women in terms of how they are addressed, interrogated, disregarded, or punished. Women are not addressed when covered and misused by questioning, rebuking, and dictating when uncovered.

The same interactional changes take place in the novel when Laila puts on the burqa; her identity is turned into a generic and anonymous one, and her interactional status is altered. Names are lost, eye contact is dissolved, and speech is asymmetrical. These results indicate that the indexicality of the burqa is an expression of compliance, submissiveness, and moral acceptability in Taliban-controlled spaces through the theories of Silverstein and Bucholtz and Hall (2003). The clothing thus serves as a semiotic controller of discourse by validating the main objective of the study, that the burqa formations who can talk, the performance of speech, and the policing of gendered identities through discourse.

### **Embodiment, Mobility and Discursive Ecology.**

Another outstanding observation is the veil in bodily experience. The description of media and literary metaphors is based on the restriction of senses, blurred vision, limited movement, painful breathing, and fear. The tactile imagery of Hosseini is replicated in the reports of Reuters and guardian, making the burqa a discourse of bodily discipline real. This body control is expanded into space: the streets, checkpoints, and markets become gendered spaces in which the movement is discussed using fabrics.

The burqa is interpreted using feminist phenomenology and ecolinguistics, and it is involved in discursive ecology, in which bodies, space, and power engage. Mobility is unevenly distributed, biased towards the masculine presence, and limits the movement of the female. This discussion (RQ2) makes the sociolinguistic argument stronger as it demonstrates that discourse is not purely

linguistic, but corporeal and spatial, which supports gender hierarchies on the lived experience level.

### **Western Media Construction and Ideological Framing of the Burqa**

This shows that the burqa is often used by the Western media as a metonymic image of the victimization of Muslim women, which tends to simplify the internal diversities. Time and again, CNN, Al Jazeera, and AP News use veiled Afghan women as victimless objects to tell stories of rescue, intervention, or backward cultures. But some texts have reflexivity and challenge these reductive images. These results provide answers to our second research question by indicating the ideological instrumentalization of the burqa in global power discourses through CDA. The clothing has become a geopolitical shortcut instead of a situationalized practice. This framing is then complicated by Hosseini, who anticipates the interiority, solidarity, and moral agency of women in her novel and thus opposes monolithic Western narratives, as well as subverts the dominant narratives of rescue, to an extent.

### **Dual Signification: Strategy and Power.**

The dual semiotic role that the burqa fulfills is one of the most notable discoveries. Whereas structurally repressive, the garment is also tactically borrowed by women as a means of anonymity and a cover. The testimonies of NPR and the New York Times, as well as the narration of Hosseini, demonstrate women as people who know how to use the burqa so that they can maneuver through the hazards in order to be less harassed and survive in the hostile conditions.

The above findings are based on the binary feminist models used by Mahmood in his reconceptualization of agency, where agency is simply resistance. Instead, agency is negotiated, constrained, strategic; it operates on the inside of the oppressive systems as opposed to the outside of the systems. The duality makes sociolinguistic and CDA accounts of veiling more interesting with the acknowledgement of the parallel nature of the stories of domination and survival.

In conclusion, findings prove that the burqa is a multi-layered sign, a passive garment, not an object. It organizes speech, silence, embodiment, and movement of space. Media and literary discourses not only create the meanings of sexuality; they also contest them. The burqa both permits and facilitates oppression and strategic action. International visual and media discourses are threatened with being homogeneous, which is partly challenged by literature.

### **Conclusion**

This paper aimed at exploring the burqa as a symbolic, semiotic, and sociolinguistic phenomenon in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and in modern news and human-rights discourses. The introduction placed the burqa not merely as a garment but as a discursive object, which organizes the visibility of women, their voice, embodied experience, and their placement in interaction in the Afghan society. This argument underpinning was developed in the literature review, which showed that the burqa has hardly been studied as a sociolinguistic indicator, an object that controls speech, silence,



bodily agency, and ideological connotations, although many feminist, postcolonial, semiotic, and veiling studies have been done. The existing studies acknowledged the symbolic load of the burqa but failed to delve into how this aspect functions and how it takes part in the linguistic, discursive, and indexical apparatus. The current research answers this requirement. In both corpora, the burqa was identified as a marker of structural oppression, which marked the erasure of women, their forced silence, and limited mobility in a patriarchal and Taliban-dominated world. It always seemed to be a sociolinguistic indicator that determined who was allowed to speak, who was addressed, and the allowable speech acts. The embodied aspect of veiling impaired vision, shortened stride, and restricted breathing was also analyzed beforehand, as the impaired gendered control was directly inscribed on the body. The burqa served as a universal visual symbol in the media corpus, where it was commonly being narrowed down to a shorthand symbolizing the concept of Afghan womanhood and political crisis. However, results also demonstrated that women are also tactical in their use of the burqa as a shield, as a form of anonymity and relative security, hence validating its dual identity as a means of prison and protection. The findings in conjunction with feminist, postcolonial, and sociolinguistic theories indicated that the burqa is not a fixed symbol, but rather a dynamic semiotic tool in which power, voice, identity, coercion, resistance, and protection are negotiated. The novel and the media texts are mutually constitutive in that the burqa is worked to create the theme of control, yet both also bring to light the instances when women move, through constraining form, through tactical conformity, and negotiated agency. This dichotomy complicates simplistic binaries in debates on global veiling and emphasizes the need to analyze them contextually. Collectively, the study determines that the burqa in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is a very pregnant semiotic and sociolinguistic symbol, rather than an aesthetic or thematic device. Second, it is highly contextual in its meanings, and it moves between domestic spaces, public relations, the Taliban decrees, and global media discourse. Third, the burqa generates gendered oppression and, at the same time, allows oneself to work strategically within oppressive conditions that reveal the constraints of dichotomous models that position veiling as either wholly coercive or wholly agentic. Fourth, the representations in the novel are echoed in modern media discourses, which are also involved in the visual and ideological constructions that are likely to homogenize the lived realities of the Afghan women.

This study adds a more subtle, theoretically based, and empirically evident explanation of the way the burqa operates in systems of multi-layered sociolinguistics. Through filling the gap between literary analysis and the actual world discourse, it proves that the burqa is not a dumb symbol but a living actor in creating women's identities, women's bodies, women's silences and women's resistance mechanisms. The paper contributes to the veil scholarship by reconfiguring the burqa as a discursive, ecological, and socio-semiotic phenomenon, and providing an interpretive paradigm, which can be adopted to other literary and socio-political contexts in which clothing as a site of power, ideology, and contested meaning can be seen.

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