

The Discursive Construction of Elite Aspiration and Bureaucratic Power: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Moral Compromise through Sheraz's Character in Umera Ahmed's "*Man-o-Salwa*"

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36755/ijll.v6i1.140>

Abstract

This paper inspects the discursive formation of aristocratic aspiration, administrative power dynamics, and moral dilemmas in Umera Ahmed's social-romantic novel *Man-o-Salwa* through the Critical Discourse Analysis of Sheraz Akbar's transformation. It also employs a socio-political approach to highlight the broader discursive practices disseminated throughout Sheraz's narrative. This research aims to investigate the role of discourse in reshaping the ideological constructs of social advancement, corruption, elite identity, and moral compromise in dialogues and narrative instances of Sheraz's character. This study is grounded in Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis, an approach to studying discourse that views language as a social practice and a communicative event. It adopts a qualitative textual analysis of selected excerpts from the novel and performs an intricate study to identify recurring linguistic patterns, narrative strategies, and ideological assumptions embedded in the text. The findings indicate that the protagonist's moral decisions and elite identity formulation are shaped through discursive practices that construct success and respectability as outcomes of aligning with dominant socio-economic structures rather than individual ethical consistency. Overall, the study contributes to CDA-based research in Urdu fiction that reveals the interplay between language, ideology, and social power in the Pakistani context.

Keywords:

Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, *Man-o-Salwa*, Social mobility discourse, Elite identity construction, Moral compromise, Corruption.

Received: 01-03-2026

Revision: 06-06-2026

Online: 08-07-2026

Accepted: 26-06-2026



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Introduction:

The scholarly investigation aims to explore class ambition, institutional culture and ethical conflict through a CDA-based socio-political study of Sheraz's character in the illustrious Pakistani Urdu novelist Umera Ahmed's novel *Man-o-Salwa*. Internationally celebrated as one of the most influential contemporary Urdu novelists, short story writers, and screenwriters in Pakistan, Umera Ahmed is known for her social criticism, spiritually insightful narratives, and emotionally charged storytelling. Formally educated in English literature, short fiction marks the outset of her literary career, followed by her widespread popularity through novels and television plays. *Peer-e-Kamil*, *Aab-e-Hayat*, *La Hasil*, *Amarbail*, and *Man-o-Salwa* are some of her most loved works, widely recognized for their soulful blend of profound language and reflective entertainment. Succinctly, Umera Ahmed's contribution to reviving and reforming modern Urdu fiction has successfully placed it on a higher pedestal in both popular and intellectual literary spheres. (Rekhta)

The novel under study, written in Urdu, simultaneously unravels three major stories of three protagonists: Zainab Zia, Sheraz Akbar and Karam Ali, with each narrative poignantly exploring unique attitudes towards human suffering, financial struggles, societal pressures, and moral dilemmas. *Man-o-Salwa* (English: Manna and Quail), published in *Khawateen Digest* between November 2006 and November 2007, is a story about the curses of poverty that dehumanizes emotions and lead to extreme ends of materialism, turning blood relations into money-hungry leeches. (Hussain, 2022)

Alluding to the divine sustenance provided to Bani Israel and their ingratitude towards it, the narrative explores the concepts of *Rizq-e-Halal* (lawful sustenance) and *Rizq-e-Haram* (unlawful sustenance) within the context of contemporary Pakistani society. Through characters such as Zainab, Sheraz, Karam Ali, Zarri, and Jamal, the narrative illustrates how economic pressures and consumerist desires compel individuals to compromise their ethics and personal identities in their struggle for a better life. At the same time, the novel highlights the spiritual and psychological significance of lawful earnings as a source of inner peace and moral balance. Fundamentally, the novel is both a reflection and critique of the cultural realities of Pakistani society, allowing it to resonate deeply with readers.

To explore how language influences power in society, critical discourse analysis is used. Van Dijk (2009) explains that CDA shows how discursive elements are sustained and repeated within social, political, and historical contexts. Fairclough's Dialectical-Relational Approach to CDA is a socio-critical framework influenced by Marxist thought, rooted in his (1989, 1995) research on language, ideology, and power. This model of CDA by Fairclough consists of three categories, referred to as 'dimensions', which are text, discursive practice and social practice respectively. Additionally, the study of 'discourse and politics within critical discourse analysis highlights that the systematic, ethnographic, and discourse-based examination of political institutions and everyday life, as well as decision-making processes in organizations, has become a central focus of CDA (Wodak,

2004). This is why, in the current study, the framework of CDA is used to analyze Sheraz's character from a socio-political angle.

The recent study, *The Critical Discourse Analysis of Power Dynamics and Hidden Ideologies in Mohsin Hamid's Novel "Moth Smoke"* (Khadim & Irfan, 2024) employs Fairclough's three dimensions to uncover hidden societal and ideological representations that run throughout the story. It follows Daru's journey and Mumtaz's struggles in Lahore, which give important insights into the motifs of identity crises, class struggle, societal expectations and power relations through a rigorous analysis of the work. This study aligns with the discursive deconstruction of exploited bureaucratic power in this research. However, its application of Fairclough's three dimensions remains largely descriptive at the discursive-practice level, whereas the present research foregrounds genre-specific production contexts (institutional interviews, private confession, and internal monologue) to more precisely mediate between textual and social claims.

Recent CDA studies on social mobility discourse have highlighted how upward mobility narratives are often embedded within neoliberal ideologies that encourage individuals to internalize elite norms while simultaneously reproducing structural inequalities. The study *Rags to Riches: A critical analysis of social mobility discourse, ideology and power in neoliberal Indonesia* (Ahlstrand, 2025) illuminates the ripeness of neoliberalism and its consolidation with regional ideas of class, gender, and place. It sheds light on the way the women striving for upward mobility legitimise and reproduce unequal power dynamics akin to Sheraz's verbal manipulation of his fiancée's stalker situation. Though Ahlstrand's neoliberal ideology framing centers structural economic forces, the present study foregrounds individual discursive agency as the primary vehicle of ideological reproduction.

The CDA studies on the discursive decoding of bureaucratic power as discussed in the present research align with the discussion of ideological formation in the discursive practices of administrative institutions. In this regard, the study *Ideology and discourse in the public sphere: a critical discourse analysis of public debates at a Brazilian public university* (Persson & Neto, 2018) applies Critical Discourse Analysis to examine how bureaucratic discourses surrounding the affiliation of UFSC University Hospital with EBSEH construct and legitimize dominant governmental interests while presenting them as neutral administrative decisions. It highlights how ideological dimensions such as neoliberalism, blame avoidance, and participation rhetoric function, aligning with the present research's concern with how institutional discourse mystifies bureaucratic reality. However, Persson and Neto examine collective public debate while the present study centers a single character's discourse as the site of ideological construction.

The study *A critical discourse analysis of institutional power and corruption in Abubakar Khadija Jali's "The Life Changer"* (Adama & Jibrin, 2026) examines the way language encodes ideological representations of authority, bureaucratic inefficiency, corruption, and social hierarchy through CDA. Grounded in van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach, it demonstrates how macro-, meso-, and micro-level linguistic strategies reproduce dominant

ideologies while highlighting tensions between institutional authority and individual agency. It sits well with the critical dissection of systemic corruption in *Man-o-Salwa* deployed in this research, though Adama and Jibrin's employment of van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach mediates ideology through mental models and shared social cognition, whereas the present study's use of Fairclough's dialectical-relational model anchors ideology more directly in the textual and discursive structure of specific scenes.

Though not a CDA, this study, *Postcolonial Existentialism: Identity, Race, and Belonging in Contemporary South Asian Fiction* (Hashmi et al., 2025), examines how postcolonial South Asian fiction constructs fragmented identities shaped by globalization, displacement, and inherited colonial hierarchies, where characters experience a persistent crisis of selfhood and belonging. This is relevant to Sheraz's character in this research, as his continuous effort to align himself with elite social circles reflects a similar identity crisis, though Hashmi et al.'s postcolonial framing locates identity fragmentation in colonial inheritance and displacement, whereas the present study traces an analogous fragmentation to intra-national class mobility within a bureaucratic system.

Furthermore, the studies done on the novel under research, '*Man-o-Salwa*', are either from stylistic or sociolinguistic perspectives. The work *Representation of women in Mann O Salwa: A case study through feminist stylistic analysis* (Shah et al., 2014) attempts to apply a feminist stylistic approach to the novel in order to investigate how female characters are represented in the novel. This research aims to explore whether female authors have succeeded in abolishing the stereotypical representations of women in Pakistani society, as most male authors tend to do, by diving deeply into the psychological and linguistic processes of the female figures in the story. While Shah et al.'s feminist stylistic analysis shares this study's interest in *Man-o-Salwa*'s construction of character identity, its focus on female representation and psycholinguistic processes leaves the novel's discursive construction of bureaucratic power and class ambition — the present study's central concern — unexamined.

Whereas the second work on the novel *Exploring Gender Fluidity through Code-switching in "Man-o-Salwa": A Sociolinguistic Study* (Iqbal et al., 2022) follows a descriptive qualitative paradigm, analyzing 118 code-switched instances in the novel using the concept of gender through 'Gender Performativity' (Butler, 1990). The study also discusses the socioeconomic factors of the selected instances and demonstrates the novel's linguistic richness, but its focus on gender leaves class and corruption's ideological dimensions unaddressed.

The need for this research emerges from the gap in the pre-existing analytical works on *Man-o-Salwa*, which focus on gender studies, stylistics, and sociolinguistics. However, no significant CDA-based research has been conducted on the novel. While these studies provide valuable insights into linguistic variation and gendered discourse, they do not engage with the broader ideological structures embedded in the novel. Moreover, the motifs of social mobility, normalized corruption, institutional misconduct and elite identity have been previously explored in both international and South Asian literature but not in

Umera Ahmed's novels. Therefore, the present research is significant since it appears to be among the few systematic attempts to apply Norman Fairclough's CDA model on the work of an immensely popular Urdu novelist like Umera Ahmed. It also imparts a legacy for the future researchers to explore more horizons in the field of CDA in Pakistani Urdu literature, thereby contributing to national literary heritage and new research avenues.

The primary objective of this research is to critically examine Sheraz's character and discursive practices through Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA framework, focusing on how language reproduces ideological representations of corruption, class consciousness, social mobility, bureaucratic culture, moral compromise, and elite identity within Pakistani society. The study analyzes selected scenes, dialogues, and narrative descriptions to explore how Sheraz's linguistic and social behaviour reflects his gradual transformation under materialistic and societal pressures. The scope of this research remains confined to a CDA-based textual analysis of the novel, with particular attention to how discourse contributes to the normalization of corruption and the construction of elite-oriented identity within bureaucratic settings. The following research questions guide this study:

Research Questions:

1. How is Sheraz's ambition, relentless pursuit of elite status, and materialistic egocentrism discursively represented through language and narrative practices in *Man-o-Salwa*?
2. In what ways do the narrative and dialogue strategies establish Sheraz's ethical compromise, infidelity and emulation of elite power figures?
3. How does the novel's depiction of Sheraz reveal the normalization of systemic corruption, the pressures of social mobility, and the formulation of aristocratic identity within Pakistani bureaucratic culture?

Materials and Methods:

The data for this analysis is drawn from selected key scenes of the 2012 edition of Umera Ahmed's *Man-o-Salwa*, translated from the original Urdu text into English by the researcher with the assistance of Google Translate and manually refined for contextual and lexical accuracy; a published English translation exists but was inaccessible due to its limited-edition availability. Translations were subsequently cross-verified by two independent experts, one specializing in English and one in Urdu, to ensure fidelity to the original text's meaning and connotation. Scenes were selected through two full readings of the novel: all scenes centering on Sheraz Akbar were first extracted, then compared against the study's three research questions, retaining only those most directly illustrative of his discursive engagement with bureaucratic and elite systems.

The close Critical Discourse Analysis of these scenes aims at the identification of recurring linguistic patterns, narrative strategies, and ideological assumptions entrenched in the text. Furthermore, argumentation, in-depth analysis, and reasoning are the primary analytical

instruments employed in this research. Finally, the research adds implicit insights from the broader CDA perspectives in addition to Fairclough's model, especially regarding power relations and oppressive social structures. However, Fairclough's framework remains the central guiding structure for analysis, which ensures a systematic movement from textual evidence to broader socio-cultural interpretation.

This scholarly study employs a qualitative research design incorporating the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of *Man-o-Salwa*, an Urdu Novel by Umera Ahmed. Ahmed's compelling story provides a lens into the inescapable inequalities and asymmetrical power dynamics strewn in Pakistani society, through a story-within-a-story framework that narrates Sheraz Akbar's predicament as a man from the lower social tier. Keeping this into consideration, this academic investigation uses Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional framework for Critical Discourse Analysis (1989, 1995), which is well-known for its ability to examine diverse types of speech and literary expressions. In general, CDA involves the critique of existing hierarchical structures; it acknowledges the existence of a non-egalitarian societal framework reflected and sustained in speech, which is frequently viewed as a kind of 'social injustice' (Fairclough, 2009). It inspects the enduring impacts of certain issues as well as their fundamental motivations, which requires a thorough breakdown of the relationship between text, discourse, culture and society.

This model is considered as an interdisciplinary approach to the study of discourse, as it views 'language as a form of social practice' (Fairclough, 1989, p. 20) and focuses on the ways through which social and political dominance is exercised in discourse by speech and text. In this model, Fairclough (1989) conceptualizes discourse through three interrelated dimensions to critical discourse analysis. The first dimension is text that refers to any object of analysis, including verbal, visual or verbal and visual texts. The analysis at this level emphasizes on linguistic features and is called 'textual analysis'. The second dimension of 'discursive practices' can be described in terms of production, reception and interpretation of a text in a particular situational or inter-textual context. The third dimension could be described as 'social practices' which situates discourse within broader socio-political structures and power relations that both shape and are shaped by the discourse (Nusrat et al., 2020).

Sheraz's socio-economic and identity transformation is not solely represented through his actions in the narrative; rather; it is gradually devised through narrative commentary, internal monologue, judgmental linguistic choices, class-conscious observations and socially programmed interaction, rendering the Fairclough's three-dimensional model particularly relevant to the present study. At the textual level, the study focuses on the language reflective of wealth, prestige, bureaucracy, social status and embarrassment, all of which are critically explored through lexical choices, tone and narrative description. The perspective that vocabulary and sentence structures shape and reinforce specific worldviews and hence often carry ideological significance (Fairclough, 1995) is key to understanding how Sheraz internalizes elite ideology and starts to perceive human relationships in terms of social transaction and status.

At the level of discursive practice, the study analyses the contribution of narration, internal monologue, and dialogue to meaning in *Man-o-Salwa*. Sheraz's moral justifications for engaging in corruption and seeking social advancement become increasingly accepted as the story continually associates his ambition, ethical compromises, and class anxieties with the socially dominant discourses of 'success', 'status', and 'practicality'. Meanwhile, at the level of social practice, the analysis positions these meanings within Pakistani elite and bureaucratic culture, where moving up the social ladder, connecting with the elite, and holding institutional power determine the behavior and mindset of an individual. Sheraz's transformation is a reflection of a broader system of society that presents corruption and elitism as necessary for survival and social progress within bureaucratic bodies. This research is essentially organized according to these three dimensions, with textual and discursive analyses presented in the Results sections and social practice analysis executed in the Discussion section.

The study also derives conceptual assistance from Teun A. van Dijk's view of ideology and the dominance of the elite in discourse. Van Dijk suggests that power is frequently maintained through the control of discourse, societal knowledge, and institutional narratives (van Dijk, 1993). This viewpoint backs the current analysis of bureaucratic culture in *Man-o-Salwa*, where privileged social groups, institutional prestige, and economic influence collectively shape Sheraz's understanding of the world and his sense of right and wrong. Similarly, Halliday's idea of language as a 'social semiotic' (Halliday, 1978) supports the argument that language choices within the novel are motivated by social and ideological factors rather than being merely aesthetic. However, these perspectives are used only as supplementary conceptual insights, while Fairclough's three-dimensional model remains the principal analytical framework for the study.

Ultimately, the current investigation adopts a sociopolitical approach of Critical Discourse Analysis, which helps explore the role of discourse in the nourishment of elite ambitions, normalization of corruption, and reinforcement of class ideology within Pakistani bureaucratic culture. Through the analysis of selected scenes from *Man-o-Salwa*, the study aims to reveal the ideological processes through which bureaucratic authority and aristocratic identity are legitimized both linguistically and narratively. Therefore, the integrated theoretical nature of the study enriches the research objectives and helps frame the research problem into a more inclusive pattern of society, politics and discourse.

Results:

Set against a contemporary Pakistani backdrop, Umera Ahmed's disconcertingly meticulous novel *Man-o-Salwa* is an indelibly stark frame narrative, portraying an ambitious Machiavellian Sheraz Akbar, who, in resentment of his modest milieu, is willing to transcend all moral boundaries for social ascent. The novel intricately explores his rags to riches journey as he carves his way through social hierarchies, personal relationships and moral ambiguities while navigating the complex power dynamics of Pakistan's bureaucratic elite. The analysis aims to plunge deeply into the discursive deconstruction

of broader societal pressures, including the normalization of systemic corruption, the tension between personal ethics and social mobility, and the impersonation of elite norms through Sheraz's actions and choices. The discussion revolves around three central research questions that examine how language contributes to the reinforcement and defiance of these social phenomena through a thorough comprehension of key scenes.

Question 1: How is Sheraz's ambition, relentless pursuit of elite status, and materialistic egocentrism discursively represented through language and narrative practices in Man-o-Salwa?

Throughout the story, Umera Ahmed masterfully curates a vivid effigy of Sheraz to uncover and articulate the striking realities of a lower-middle-class household and how one's socioeconomic setting shapes one's thought process, insecurities and aspirations. In the opening scene where Sheraz is introduced as a frustrated and cynical young man, he is shown polishing his worn-out shoes. His bitter response to his mother, 'I am lamenting my fate' (Ahmed, 2012, p. 24), highlights his dissatisfaction with his circumstances. His dislike for his father's profession, even though he takes bribes, is shown when he says, 'Of all things in the world, Dad had to end up a meter reader.' (Ahmed, 2012, p. 25) The same disillusionment is also evident when he gives way to his poisonous thoughts and critiques the men of his family for their professional and social stagnancy through the sentences like 'All men of this family are cowards; they sit curled up in their shells like turtles', 'Born in this neighborhood, they are destined to die here too' (Ahmed, 2012, p. 25) and expresses his rushing desire to break free from this humdrum life. 'He had to run—headlong, relentlessly, fast enough that no one's shadow could catch up with him.' (Ahmed, 2012, p. 25).

The textual dimension proposes that Sheraz's stacking of derogatory lexical choices such as 'cowards', 'turtles', and 'destined to die here' constitutes over-lexicalization that associates a semantic field of stagnation and defeat with his family, suggesting that he does not want to walk in the footsteps of his elders who couldn't rise above their situation solely because they earned an honest but humble living. Moreover, his words 'secured a distinction wherever I went' (Ahmed, 2012, p. 25) and 'eventually my eyes will give out spending the whole day poring over heaps of files' (Ahmed, 2012, p. 25) draw a comparison between his potential as a brilliant achiever and his prospects in the job market. On the discursive level, the internal monologue, rendered as free indirect discourse rather than reported or narrated summary, frames his yearning for a respectable social role as needed and justified, granting the reader unmediated access to this self-justifying logic without narratorial intervention. This technique produces a form of reader intimacy with his perspective even as its content invites moral scrutiny.

Sheraz's answers in his Central Superior Services interview are again an evident testament to his class ambition. When asked about his 'most valuable asset in life' (Ahmed, 2012, p. 35), he enlists a plethora of things like his intelligence, academic record, his ambition, his passion for his ambition, his practicality and only names his family and love when a board member wonders where exactly he places them in his priority list, an expression of

egocentric self-praise. His subsequent interaction with the interview board about his fiancée Zainab perfectly exhibits his character's crux:

Why do you love her?

She is very pretty.

So is that the only reason?

No, there are many others.

Like?

She is caring, loving, honest, loyal, sincere and selfless.

What will you prefer? A beautiful woman with all these qualities or a beautiful woman with loads of cash?

(Ahmed, 2012, pp. 36-37)

This exchange foreshadows his following decisions as his choice of a wealthy woman over a loving one, revealed only in the novel's climax, marks the pivot point from which his desire to escape his family's unwanted socio-economic situation grows into an overarching aspiration for a posh lifestyle. The involuntary lexical choice of 'pretty' uncovers his objectified mindset through the textual level of CDA. At the discourse practice analytical level, the CSS interview functions as an institutional genre expecting displays of civic commitment and integrity; Sheraz's blunt prioritization of wealth over these expected values marks a refusal to perform the genre's conventions.

Sheraz's intention of using his civil service as an excuse to gain material and social stability following his securing of the second position in this competitive exam may be critically analyzed in the scene where a news reporter, while interviewing him, questions his choice of the Income Tax Department as his first preference for commission. Sheraz responds:

The taxation system in our country needs a lot of improvement and changes, and I wanted to go to a department where every day is a new challenge for me and where I would feel satisfied that I am using my skills in the best way.

(Ahmed, 2012, p. 109)

The reporter decodes this answer in his notebook, which starkly uncovers his understanding of Sheraz's true intent behind his apparent expression of goodwill.

The taxation system in our country has the most flaws and shortcomings, and to take advantage of these flaws, I wanted to go to a department where I can make money through files daily instead of monthly and where I would feel satisfied that I can make the most money in the least amount of time by using my skills in the best way. (Ahmed, 2012, pp. 109-110)

The euphemistic lexicalization in 'every day is a new challenge' contrasts with the reporter's reinterpreted framing of 'making money through files. This contrast is not discursively latent but authorially explicit: Umera Ahmed writes the reporter's decoding directly into the narrative as a parallel gloss on Sheraz's own words, rather than leaving the ideological masking for the analysis to uncover. At the discourse practice level, the analytical interest lies not in exposing this contrast but in how the novel stages it;

positioning the reporter as a stand-in for the reader's own skepticism, and performing a version of ideological critique within the text itself rather than requiring one from outside it.

Question 2: In what ways do the narrative and dialogue strategies establish Sheraz's ethical compromise, infidelity and emulation of elite power figures?

Ahmed's characterization of Sheraz Akbar in *Man-o-Salwa* enunciates his development from a struggling middle-class youth to a consumerist bureaucrat through a chain of ethical compromises, infidelity to his relations and values and the conscious efforts to be a seamless part of the ruling elite. The intense hunger for monetary resources, power and control etched in his subconscious can be sensed from miles away in one of the initial scenes when he bitterly criticizes Zainab and her father for their honest living, rendering him the reason for his eldest daughter's strained domestic circumstances.

If someone else had been a clerk in the Income Tax department instead of him, he would have been rolling in money. He would have given everything in dowry to Zahra, and there wouldn't have been so many complaints from Naeem bhai to Uncle. But what does he care?

(Ahmed, 2012, p. 54)

He, then, proceeds to mock her for her 'lower-middle-class mentality' and comments: 'What great achievement has uncle made anyway? I consider it foolish to sweat blood for just ten rupees. Not hard work; why doesn't Uncle make money, after all?' (Ahmed, 2012, p. 55)

The phrase 'a clerk in the Income Tax department' is re-contextualized through Sheraz's dismissive lexical framing, where the modal evaluative adjunct 'foolish' encodes his valuation of wealth over ethical labor. He attempts to impose his Machiavellian philosophy on Zainab by implying humiliating, dominating and purposely demeaning language. At the discourse practice level, this dismissive framing occurs within an unwitnessed domestic exchange addressed to his fiancée rather than any institutional audience, permitting Sheraz a franker register than his public, professional speech allows elsewhere in the novel. This generic freedom is what makes the scene function as an early indicator of the values his later public persona will work to conceal.

Sheraz's infidelity is the core leap in his journey towards a social upgrade. His aggressive reaction on seeing a man handing Zainab a letter is a deliberate use of a golden opportunity to sever all ties with his 'naïve' fiancée and become the son-in-law of one of the richest men in the country. His statement to his mother, while knowingly twisting the entire incident, highlights the potential of the language to make one's life while wrecking another's.

My blood is boiling thinking that she was making a fool of me. Today I have seen all this. And I don't know who in the street will see all this. What will people think, what will they talk about? This is what these local/suburban girls do.

(Ahmed, 2012, p. 167)

‘Mohallay me rehne wali larkiyan ’, as the original Urdu text says, shows his ingrown misogyny and contempt for the women of the lower-middle class while also revealing his intention to seize this moment for his own benefit, shooting two birds with one stone. His strong emotional reaction to the situation indicates that he presupposes the reality when he sees his intended with another man without considering the truth of the situation, despite clearly recognizing that this man was a stalker. At the discourse practice level, spoken privately to his mother, this code-switched phrase draws on a vernacular register of class-coded gossip, licensing a contempt his public speech elsewhere suppresses, ironically positioning him within the very community he disowns.

After the ultimate attainment of a position of power and a conspired role of the son-in-law of one of the most influential political figures in the country, Sheraz has to live up to the appearances fitted for an elite class man. He goes all out to maintain his own façade as well as cover up his family’s “low-class” etiquette in order to exhibit a presentable image to high society. The text shows this gradual psychological transformation when he refuses to wear Zainab’s hand-sewn shirt, stating that ‘Well-tailored shirts are worn in the academy; if I wear such shirts there, people will make fun of me’ (Ahmed, 2012, p. 148) when earlier, he used to accept and wear the same gift very earnestly.

The lexical opposition between ‘handmade shirts’ and ‘well-tailored shirts’ constructs a binary of class distinction, where the high-value predictive modal ‘will’ in ‘people will make fun of me’ encodes social anxiety as near-certainty rather than possibility. The same internal conflict weighs upon him when he takes his family to Sheena’s house and gets embarrassed by their inadequacy to follow dinner etiquette and moves heaven and earth to make them behave accordingly as his wedding day comes closer. Such an instance follows his internal monologue: ‘There are still a few days to the wedding; I will ‘tame’ them by then.’ (Ahmed, 2012, p. 237)

He, then, swiftly corrects himself, replacing ‘tame’ with ‘teach’ as if they were wild animals to be trained according to his will. The textual analysis acknowledges that his initial train of thought shows his true sentiments regarding his family, and his lower-middle class background. At the discourse practice level, the shirt refusal is spoken aloud to Zainab, performing his new self-image for an interlocutor, while the ‘tame’/‘teach’ substitution occurs in unvoiced internal monologue, exposing a self-correcting reflex — the same euphemistic impulse seen in his public professional speech — before it is ever spoken aloud.

Question 3: How does the novel’s depiction of Sheraz reveal the normalization of systemic corruption, the pressures of social mobility, and the formulation of aristocratic identity within Pakistani bureaucratic culture?

Sheraz’s drive for money, authority and status centers his persona; his marriage to Saeed Nawaz’s daughter marks his first leap toward upper-class benefits through his father-in-law’s influence. In the early days of his career after his marriage, the text reveals him signing files on Saeed Nawaz’s orders that would ultimately make him millions in a day,

resorting to the 'long flight' rather than remaining sincere with his profession and the receivers of his services.

Leaving his middle-class colleagues and the group of officers of the common, he had taken a long flight and he was sure that all those colleagues would be jealous and envious of his fate in the same way as his relatives and people from the neighborhood did.

(Ahmed, 2012, p. 344)

The transitivity structure positions Sheraz as Actor in a self-directed material process 'he had taken a long flight', functioning as a metaphor of ascent and escape, while the explicit naming of 'middle-class colleagues' and 'the group of officers of the common' constructs a binary between his new elevated position and the ordinary rank he has left behind. Unlike this lexical binary, his presumed envy is authorially explicit, not discursively latent — Ahmed states it directly. The metaphor instead reframes this presumed envy as the natural outcome of that flight, collapsing professional achievement into social escape. At the discourse practice level, this comparison to his former colleagues and neighbours is rendered through free indirect discourse, granting the reader access to a private self-congratulation Sheraz voices to no one: an unvoiced measuring of his worth against those he has left behind, unchecked by any interlocutor's judgment.

The discussion of systemic misconduct goes hand in hand with the investigation of the encumbering pressures of social mobility in the lower-middle class. Sheraz's choice of leaving Zainab for Sheena, driven by social and financial necessity rather than genuine affection, reflects societal expectations and elite aspirations that he is unwilling to compromise. One such textual instance shows him reminiscing about his fruitless, insulting married life with Sheena, but then he remembers the luxuries this relationship has rained upon him and reassures himself that his self-worth is not that big of a price for this lavish life. 'Everyone makes some compromises in life, and my marriage to Sheena is my compromise, and in this compromise, I have not lost everything, but surely have gained a lot.' (Ahmed, 2012, p. 373)

The nominalization of 'compromise' obscures who is compromising and for how long, normalizing ethical sacrifice as a static, completed condition rather than a continuing choice, linguistically reframing moral erosion as pragmatic gain within elite structures. At the discourse practice level, this rationalization reaches the reader through free indirect discourse rather than confession to an interlocutor, meaning the self-justifying logic is never tested against another's response; a condition that lets it stand unchallenged.

His climactic prison conversation with Zainab after his arrest also recounts the struggle to make both ends meet for his family as the fundamental justification of his actions and blames society for compelling people like him to take part in this rat race, absolving himself from all moral responsibility. 'You blame me, everyone blames me, but why doesn't anyone blame this society, which forces people like me to run after money?' (Ahmed, 2012, p. 678)

At the textual level, Sheraz's repeated use of modal deflection in 'why doesn't anyone blame this society' and the agentless construction 'forces people like me' shifts responsibility outward through transitivity alone. Instead of apologizing, he condescendingly asks Zainab; a top Pakistani actress now, to spend the night with an officer, if necessary, for his release, accusing her of illicit affairs and characterlessness once again.

You have contacts, you hang out with so many big officials, ministers, you will give someone a hint even once, and I will be free. So what? Spend the night with them, you already do it, do it for my sake once more...

(Ahmed, 2012, p. 679)

At the discourse practice level, the prison visitation is conventionally a genre that permits confession or apology, given the intimacy and finality of the setting; Sheraz's refusal to use this occasion for either, opting instead for renewed blame and a degrading request, marks a consistent failure to adapt his discourse even when the genre most invites it.

Ultimately, the road to attaining a respectable or stronger class-worthy personality, for Sheraz Akbar, goes from the intentional suppression of one's origins towards the construction of a fluid identity fitted for a blue-blooded lifestyle. On his very first night in the Civil Services Academy, he is faced with the vehement epiphany that he is a misfit among his commoners who all belong to the ruling elite. Although there are several other position holders from his own social class, he still feels overly conscious of himself being an 'alien' among the four other top position holders since he considers it insulting to share company with lower position holders. As he goes to bed, he swears a pledge: 'That night, sitting in that room at the academy, he had decided that he would rub every trace of his class off of himself.' (Ahmed, 2012, p. 140)

This is the exact moment when he starts building a new identity, one that won't embarrass him before the high-born elites. He clones his identity to the point that he severs all ties with his old self, just to scratch away the fragments of his poverty and construct a brand-new, polished, acceptable-in-the-bureaucracy identity where no one can get a hint of his old life.

On the textual level, the lexical item 'alien' encodes Sheraz's self-perception as fundamentally other among his fellow position-holders, reinforcing his sense of exclusion from elite status despite having earned a place among them. At the discourse practice level, this pledge is rendered as a private, unwitnessed vow rather than a declaration made to any addressee, allowing the reader alone to witness the precise moment his self-transformation is resolved upon; a discursive privacy that recurs throughout the novel at each pivot point in his identity construction.

Discussion:

The findings demonstrated in the Results section are extracted from the textual and discursive analyses of Sheraz's discourse, which present how it is entrenched with recurring patterns of ambition, ethical compromise and identity shift within bureaucratic

and elite contexts. While the first two dimensions of CDA analyze the production of meaning within selected extracts from *Man-o-Salwa*, the following discussion extends this interpretation and situates these discursive mechanisms within the wider socio-political and socio-economic structures of Pakistan. It is important to note that Sheraz's discourse, though illustrative of broader ideological patterns, is not unmediated social data but a doubly-constructed artifact: filtered first through Ahmed's authorial and moral intentions, and second through the conventions of the social-romantic novel as a genre. CDA, designed primarily for naturally occurring discourse, is here adapted to a deliberately constructed literary text; accordingly, the following analysis treats Sheraz's discourse as Ahmed's *representation* of dominant ideologies surrounding corruption and class mobility, rather than as unmediated *reproduction* of how such discourse actually functions within Pakistani bureaucratic institutions. This analysis is done at the social practice level and ponders over the social issues in the novel such as systemic corruption, class mobility and materialistic self-interest.

To begin with, Sheraz bitterly bemoaning his fate and stating the sad reality of the prospects of working as a clerk despite his qualifications is represented by Ahmed as reflecting the broader structural inequalities in Pakistani society, where talented individuals from ordinary families are stuck with less rewarding or in many cases, no opportunities at all. This cultural polarization of wealth and the entitlement of elite status normalises the pressure to succeed at any moral cost, leading an average lesser-privileged man to succumb to blind ambition for power and money.

This frustration reshapes his preferences, evident when, in his CSS interview, he chooses a woman with financial security over a loving, loyal one. This exchange portrays Sheraz as an archetypal corrupt civil servant who is willing to go to any length to achieve an elevated social status even if it means using a woman as a social ladder, except the fact that he is openly proud and expressive about it. Fairclough's social dimension directly situates this scene within Ahmed's portrayal of a society which offers very little accountability for the factors causing the members of marginalized groups to resort to dangerously covetous mentality as well as the consequent practices that hinder the path of social cooperation.

Furthermore, the reporter decoding Sheraz's interview dramatizes the hypocrisy Ahmed attributes to news and media agencies along with the critique of creeping curse of favoritism and class ambition in administrative systems. Ahmed notes the reporter is unimpressed by such flowery promises, implying they are far from unusual. This reflects Ahmed's critique of how media builds its ratings and narratives on the mound of public suffering as it knowingly avoids the disclosure of this systemic oppression of the people's right to information.

In addition, Sheraz scorns at Zainab's father for still holding on to the idea of 'halal' and 'haram' when he has no means to secure the future of his daughters, including the eldest who is married. On the social level, this conversation dramatizes a moral dilemma Ahmed positions as characteristic of Pakistani society which honors the reckless antics of the elite

over the honest struggle and suffering of the underprivileged and does nothing to protect their integrity, careers and other means of survival. Moreover, Sheraz blaming his uncle for his son-in-law's poor treatment of Zahra because hints at a norm Ahmed frames as prevailing in Pakistani society where men are acquitted of all responsibility while the entire blame lies on the women and their families for not submitting to the in-laws' demands. This conversation is very much consistent with the false character assassination of Zainab, where the analysis enables the readers to identify the same patterns in their social surroundings, hinting at the overpowering manipulation of a woman's truth for the sole purpose of the satisfaction of a man's ego and the fulfillment of his thirst for money. Sheraz's embarrassment over his parents' lack of awareness of elite norms and his strife to wash off visible traces of his previous class from both himself and his family point to a social practice Ahmed depicts as pervasive in developing societies where social mobility comes at the cost of moral sacrifice and contempt of one's own social origin, resulting in the marginalization and distorted construction of middle-class image. Moreover, culture and grace is associated with wealth, power and status, which is thoroughly reflected through Umera Ahmed's characterization of Sheraz and her careful assembly of his ruminations.

At the point of his arrest, he bewails this custom of society but does not acknowledge his own role in perpetuating the same system he criticizes. CDA interprets these illustrations of discourse as illustrative of Ahmed's critique of Pakistani society's weighted demand of socioeconomic mobility, causing the individual to constantly chase after unrealistic standards of life rather than a collective effort to improve the conditions required for such a change. However, his own entitled behavior is rendered problematic by the narrative as it is a reality that his family lives in a tight spot initially. Contrastingly, Zainab's family also bears the consequences of her married sister's aggrieved marriage, yet her father never opts for underhanded means of income. This juxtaposition suggests that ethical conduct remains a conscious choice within the same socio-economic conditions, highlighting differing responses to structural pressure. It also complicates the paper's broader emphasis on systemic determinism: where Sheraz's own discourse repeatedly frames corruption as a near-inevitable response to structural pressure, Zainab's father's persistence in honest living under comparable hardship suggests that individual ethical agency retains force even within the same constraints Ahmed critiques.

Consequently, Sheraz's hypocritical claims of public service in the interview contrast with his openly corrupt activities later in the narrative. Through such instances, Umera Ahmed's narrative strikingly dramatizes the living reality she attributes to millions of masses in Pakistan who place their sacred trust in their bureaucratic administration and yet witness an increasing ratio of corruption cases despite the periodic promises of transparency and due process. It also hints at Ahmed's critique of class disparity at the core of bureaucratic corruption, tied to pressures on individuals from marginalized backgrounds to slowly lose their aspirations and become mechanized entities of money makers. The author also depicts much of the department as complicit in this illegal financial chain, yet it is treated

as routine practice. This normalization further reinforces the ideological structures shaping Sheraz's metamorphosis.

Ultimately, Sheraz curates an entirely new identity for himself which will help him secure approval and advancement within elite bureaucratic circles. This echoes, through Ahmed's lens, the story of thousands of young people in Pakistan, who, in their attempt to rise above their social standing, gradually distance themselves from their initial identities in the process and become someone their younger selves would not even recognize, leading to a sort of existential crisis emerging from class anxieties and financial issues. This interpretation also aligns with postmodern perspectives on identity as fluid, fragmented, and socially constructed rather than fixed or stable (Hall, 1996), where the self is continuously reshaped through social discourse and power structures.

Conclusion:

This research study set out to examine the discursive construction of class aspiration, corruption, and elite identity in *Man-o-Salwa* through Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model. The findings indicate that Sheraz's socio-economic transformation is brought about by his ambition, moral compromises and identity alteration which emerge not merely as psychological traits but as products of textual, discursive and social practices. The analysis further demonstrates that upward mobility is often achieved at the cost of ethical principles, while corruption is legitimized as a harmless routine within bureaucratic discourse.

In relation to the research questions, the research illustrates that Sheraz's representations through both language and storytelling construct class consciousness, materialistic desires, and ideological shift as shaped by broader socio-economic structures. It contributes to CDA-based literary scholarship by showing how linguistic and discursive choices in *Man-o-Salwa* reproduce and sustain dominant power relations within bureaucratic and class systems. However, the analysis is limited to selected textual instances from the novel.

Applying Fairclough's model, built for political speech and institutional discourse, to a popular Urdu social-romantic novel required adapting its categories to internal monologue and free indirect discourse rather than public, multi-party discourse. Although *Man-o-Salwa* follows three parallel protagonists, this study's focus on Sheraz alone meant the discursive-practice dimension, concerned with production and reception across speakers, had less to engage with than a multi-character analysis might have offered. Future research could extend this model across Zainab's and Karam Ali's narratives within the same novel, or incorporate reader-response methods to test whether readers from different socioeconomic backgrounds interpret Sheraz's self-justifications as condemnation or vindication.

Acknowledgements:

The author acknowledges the valuable guidance and academic support provided by Dr. Zahida Hussain, Department of English, Government College Women University Faisalabad, throughout this research. The author acknowledges the use of AI-assisted technology (ChatGPT, OpenAI) for sentence-level language refinement and paragraph restructuring in the Materials and Methods and Literature Review sections. This assistance did not extend to the analysis, interpretation, or findings presented elsewhere in the paper, all of which are the author's own. All AI-suggested edits were manually reviewed and verified against the original content to ensure fidelity to the author's intended meaning.

Disclosure Statement:

The author reports no competing interests to declare.

Data Availability Statement:

Data sharing does not apply to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

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