

## **Punjabi Cultural Ideology and Social Resistance: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Waris Shah's Heer**

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### **Abstract**

This paper critically analyzed Heer by Waris Shah in terms of criticism to understand how the text establishes social norms, power structure, and moral reasoning of the eighteenth century in Punjab. Through the three-dimensional model by Fairclough, the research examined a total of eight thematic categories including patriarchy, resistance, honor, and love to divine justice and moral retribution. A purposive sample of verses was examined in the aspects of linguistic characteristics, intertextual resonances, and socio-historical connotations. The results indicated that the discourse of Shah criticizes and reinstates the same patriarchal precepts: though his poems critique the exploitation, injustice and feudal oppression, they also affirm communal morality and gender regimes. The discourse of accountability used by him through making use of imperatives, metaphors, idiomatic language, and moral judgments holds the capability to question social injustice but within the framework of an Islamic-Punjabi moral order. Notably, the analysis has shown the cultural memory into the text was not the only and Shah also inserting resistance, identification with the marginalized, and idea of moral retribution of the oppressors. This paper is a contribution to knowledge in the understanding of Heer as a literary work art and a socio-historical document which denotes continuity of culture, negotiation of morals and contestation of power.

**Keywords:** Critical Discourse Analysis, Waris Shah, Heer, Punjabi poetry, family disputes, moral commentary, socio-cultural norms, Fairclough's model

### **1. Introduction**

The Punjabi folklore, in particular, the mythology of Heer Ranjha takes the dominant ground in the minds and desires of the South Asian culture and soul, and concludes the problems of love, struggle, spirituality, and socio-cultural relation. The story transcends the barrier of time and space to impact the literary domains more than that of the literature of the Punjab region; the story also impacts communal and cultural ideologies. Scholars have debated over which way these narratives have been embedded in history, religious and social establishments of the region at large. The stories are therefore pertinent up to date.

Deemed reputation the culture ideology of Punjab is rather widely claimed as framed in the narratives and through the synthesis of myth, folklore and spirituality initiated the origination of social space in which themes of resistance and devotion are kept together like trends. Instances

of this sort can be observed in the case of the Izzat Bibi Shrine or the Mai Heer Shrine of Jhang that has been the victim of exactly this type of thing: the spiritual and cultural vaporization of the life and legend of Heer. Believe and folklore, such as the notion that rainfall cannot make its way into the premises of this shrine, is a possible example of constructing collective identity and maintaining tradition (Hussain, Arshaad, Khan, & Khan, n.d.).

The poetic narrative of Heer supported by Waris Shah is particularly significant with respect of reading the discourse of Punjab culture. His discourse presented in his narrative will be analyzed to reveal his themes of social-political and cultural ordering of Punjab in the 18<sup>th</sup> century that puts common men under the power structures and the opposition to oppressive tendencies (Ghulam, Fatima, & Pervez, n.d.). In such a way the character of Heer Ranjha transcends the imagery of a romantic narrative into the creation of culture the story of domination evil and stamina.

Moreover, the characters of Punjabi and Siraiki folk literature emphasize the symbolism, intellectualism and sociability of a nation. Their associations and conflicts illuminate customs, traditions, and beliefs that have long occupied a solid niche in the history, as well as the culture of the people of Punjab (Khan & Chandio, 2015). The state of women and their appearance, as ever prevalent in these stories, accrues the limitations of the patriarchal system and possibilities of revolt. Heer Ranjha interpretation through the feminist lens has discussed how the voice of Heer creates an image of love, struggle and the power politics of the patriarchal society (Tehseem, 2021; Mujahid, 2023).

The Heer Ranjha tale is one that renders some of the elements of religious tolerance, and religious plurality in the region. The scholar's state that the legend at early phases became a cultural medium through which the virtues of harmony and inclusivity were transmitted (Ahmad, 1998). Subsequent reformulation of the religion like in the form given in the Qissa Heer Ranjha by Maulvi Khadimullah Bakhsh incorporated an Islamic doctrines and morality that demonstrated the adaptability of the tale by religious affiliation coupled with social aspects of life (Bibi, Habib, & Raza, 2023).

To summarize, structuralist interpretations of Heer Ranjha have been as active in the meaning of the lokia, a sophisticated folk story. The richness of the tale may be observed through the Propp model characters and functions that situate the tale as one of the six or so tales of folktales have all the richness of folkloric structures and archetypes (Jehan, Kamran, & Raja, 2018). Taken together, the above perceptions reveal that it is not only a love story but rather a text of culture over which Punjab is wrestling about love and faith, resistance, gender and community.

Heer is thus a cultural text occupying cross-sections of ideology, resistance and spirituality. This paper investigates how this narration by Waris Shah can gain social realities, challenge cultural hierarchies and primeval Punjabi identity which manifests itself through discourse using the CDA.

In examining these dynamics, this paper adopts a proposition analytical (CDA) approach following Fairclough three dimensional model-text, discursive practice and sociocultural practice. Herein, we can investigate how the language through which Shah synthesizes and opposes the Punjabi cultural ideology works on the various strands of themes as that of the gender roles, marriage negotiations, feudal power structure, moral critique, and love to duty conflict. In short, Heer is read here not in terms of romantic epic alone but in terms of the locus-wherein language can be employed as a surgical tool to uphold the culture, barter the discourse and subtly rebel.

## 1.1 Problem Statement

*Heer* by Waris Shah is a classic work in Punjabi literature marking the socio-cultural, economic and political realities of south Asian Punjab in the 18th centuries. Although its poetic and romantic character has been much heralded, less attention has been paid to its character as a discourse that helped build up, validate and/or refute social norms, gender roles, hierarchies of classes and power. Existing literature has tended to treat *Heer* either as a literary text, a folkloric piece, or a historical document, omitting the ideological implications of the linguistic choices Shah makes, and the less critical commentary and social observation she makes using language. In terms of Faircloughs (1992) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis text, discursive practice, socio-cultural practice, this paper will consider how *Heer* is not only a literary text, but also a locus of ideological struggle. The lack of research on *Heer* produced around the CDA leaves a gap in the comprehension of *Heer* with the potential to reveal power structure, struggle and identity negotiations in the Punjabi society.

## 1.2 Research Questions

- 1) How do Waris Shah's linguistic choices construct contrasting positions between institutional authority, individual agency, and spiritual love in *Heer*?
- 2) In what ways do the dialogues and narrative exchanges in *Heer* reproduce, negotiate, or resist dominant socio-cultural discourses surrounding gender roles, honor codes, and feudal authority in 18th-century Punjab?
- 3) How does *Heer*, as a cultural and literary artifact, function as a site where Punjabi collective ideology is preserved, contested, and redefined in relation to power relations, moral values, and the tension between fate and personal will?

## 2. Literature Review

The *Heer* of Waris Shah has brought about the literary and cultural attention which have shaped various analytical approaches in the inventory of scholarship, in terms of narratology to gender representation, social-political critique, and cultural ideology. Taken together these studies divulge characteristics of the manner in which *Heer* as a tragic romance can also be seen to be a deeply stated commentary on Punjabi society, its cultural arrangements and its strategies of opposition. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) considers language as social practice and examines the ways in which texts not only represent social reality, but are also constitutive of it. Fairclough (1995) makes it very clear that discourse will never be neutral; it is a location in which power and ideology, as well as social structure, is reproduced or criticized. By use of its three dimensional model-textual analysis, discursive practice, and socio-cultural practice, CDA allows one to analyse the construction and challenge of societal norms in language especially within literary works that have a culture attached to them.

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

Fairclough, (1992) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), is utilized in this study as a very important theoretical tool to analyze how women are portrayed in the poems of Bulleh Shah and Waris Shah. CDA is especially applicable in this research since it does not see language as an exalted mean, but rather presents it as a social practice, and not only reflects but also constructs power relations, as well as ideologies (Fairclough, 2013; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). The discourse in this model is studied in three related dimensions that include, the textual analysis, the discursive practice, and a socio-cultural practice.

Textual analysis dimension lies within the scope of micro-level language elements of the poetic material, such as words, metaphorical phrases, grammar, and inter-textual allusions. These have got nothing to do with the stylistic preferences, but rather carry ideologies of framing women in a specific manner (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

The dimension of a discursive practice study looks into the ways the texts are produced, distributed and consumed in the socio-religious Sufi environment in Punjab. This would entail a consideration of the interpretive repertoires that can be adopted by both historical and contemporary audiences and how poetic discourse makes use of, negotiates, and recontextualizes the existing gender norms (van Dijk, 2008).

Lastly, the dimension of socio-cultural practices contextualizes the poetry in the context of the greater circumstance of the society, the culture, and the patriarchal beliefs of the poets. It questions the way women in Sufi poetry either support, oppose or alter the established prevailing social-cultural paradigm (Fowler, 1991).

The addition of these three dimensions to the model proposed by Fairclough allows a profound level of critical analysis that does not only disclose the manner in which women are textualized but also the historical, cultural, and ideological processes underlying and holding up that textualization. This school of thought is, therefore, significant to the discovery of the interaction of poetic discourse, gender ideology, and power relations in the writings of Bulleh Shah and Waris Shah.

## **2.2 Narrative and Structural Dimension**

In the case of Heer Ranjha, Abbas and Janjua (2021) apply the theory of narratology presented by Todorov, thereby proving how the verbal and syntactic features highlight the cultural and social backgrounds of the narrative. Using five steps of narrative equilibrium and disruption, they claim the narrative moves beyond romance in order to inscribe the collective cultural memory of Punjab. Likewise, Chitra (2017) situates Heer in context of larger Kissa tradition, by characterizing it as romantic ballad that represents not only courage, heartbreak and betrayal, but also codes social-economic and religious-political frameworks of medieval Punjab. Collectively, these readings point to the ways in which narrative sequencing and oral tradition allow Heer Ranjha to be regarded as a work of art and repository.

## **2.3 Historical and Socio-Political Contexts**

According to Suri (1966), the socio-political context of 18th century is focused on the text of Waris Shah where the realism was shown through the sources of authority decline (the Mughals), the invasion of Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali, and the emerging power of the Sikhs. The Heer by Waris Shah has been perceived to be more than a love story and it is a narrative of the changing relations between the classes though petty chiefs, zamindars, and the marginalized cropped the power vacuum. Similarly, Nazir (2001) locates the text in its context of colonial and post-colonial re- Islamization of Punjab re-Islamization of Punjab, and the manner in which British modernity transformed its reception. His text of Waris Shah thus becomes a historical palimpsest- indicative of the shift of Mughal decadence to colonial modernity.

## 2.4 Gender, Patriarchy, and Resistance

The gendered aspects of Heer Ranjha have been discussed in a large scholarly literature. Masood et al. (2024) position female characters as cultural signifiers and state that, Heer created by Waris Shah not only denotes the marginalization of women but also the symbolic opposition to this process. Maqsood (n.d.) contextualizes the scenario of women in Heer Ranjha in larger Indo-Muslim culture whereby only the practices of dowry and anthology marriages appear to be changing without a break in the discrimination against women. Conversely, Dhanju and Saroj (n.d.) criticize the way Waris Shah writes about Heer as part of his perpetuating patriarchal values of passive femininity, which revealed the negative outcomes of the literary texts created by men that pushed women into obscurity intellectually. In the meantime, Grover (2024) understands Heer voice as the Sufi poet who transforms imbibing a female identity as a rebellious activity that rejects the conventional norms of the hegemony. These textual attitudes demonstrate contradictions in the text between subversion and re-strengthening of patriarchy.

## 2.5 Cultural Identity and Punjabiya

The tale of Heer Ranjha has played a major role in the discourses of Punjabiya. According to Aslam (2020), literary and filmic adaptations of the qissa play an essential role in shaping the identity of Punjabis, presenting a view of an ideal Punjab that is not marginalized by linguistic and cultural differences to some degree. Kumar (2023) builds further on this claim by considering the qissa genre as a transmitter of a native modernity, citing its versatility when told in oral poetry, film or any medium. Judge (2024) points out the way that Heer still informs the Punjabi cultural production, especially music, as binaries of lover (Ranjha) and rebel (Mirza) are reconstituted in modern forms. Singh (n.d.) continues to demonstrate the changes in the qissa tradition because of digitization, which keeps the tradition contemporary in the notion of Punjabi culture.

## 2.6 Poetics, Spirituality, and Resistance

Ali (2016) places Waris Shah in the context of the Muslim poetic discursive tradition by placing Heer in the context of spiritual subjectivity and challenge of hegemonic power. By placing Waris Shah in the same circle with the other historical characters such as Hallaj and Ali, the latter points to the political power of poetic knowledge which serves as a cultural resistance. This is in line with the fact that Shaikh (2011) notes that the story criticizes the practices of exploitive religious authorities and the means in which spiritual discourse was infused with social criticism in Punjab in the 18th century.

The literature reviewed yields the conclusion that Waris Shahs Heer Ranjha functions on several registers; in terms of folkloric encoding of Punjabi cultural identity, as a socio-political critique of 18th-century Punjab, as a gendered space of patriarchal reinforcement and resistance, and as a trans historical text that can be deployed onto larger spheres of identity, post-memory and cultural continuity. On the one hand, the work of particular scholars reinforces its patriarchal stereotyping (Dhanju & Saroj, n.d.); on the other, it demonstrates its potential in transgressiveness and resistance (Grover, 2024; Ali, 2016). The flexibility of its oral, literary, cinematic, and digital forms (Chitra, 2017; Aslam, 2020; Singh, n.d.; Kumar, 2023) can only bring up the concerns about its cultural resilience. Taken together, the scholarship shows that Heer Ranjha is a milestone text of Punjabi cultural ideology and social resistance being articulated, refuted and reinvented.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Design

In this paper, a qualitative research design based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was used to examine how the power relations, social ordering and cultural ideologies created by Waris Shah through his Heer reflect and construct power relations and structures in the Punjabi feudal scenario. The three-dimensional model of Fairclough (1995) was adopted to interpolate the text in respect to the following levels: textual description, discursive practice and sociocultural practice.

#### 3.2 Data Collection Method

The data included the extracts of stanzas of Heer that described the intervention of feudal control, social control, and the cultural norm that were selected. It followed a source that drew material on a critical editable waris Shah Heer. Purposeful sampling was used to determine those segments most relevant to the research questions of the study and to confirm transition points that feature the interaction of authority, language and socio-cultural norms.

#### 3.3 Data Analysis Technique

Fairclough CDA frame work was used to analyze the data collected. On the textual side, analyses were carried out on lexical decisions, use of metaphors, markers of modality and syntax to identify language encodings of power and control. On the level of discursive practice, the paper explored how with the help of narrative strategies and cultural references Heer reproduced and transformed the social meanings. The results at the sociocultural practice level were framed in the contexts of Punjabi 18th-century feudal set-ups, patriarchal ideals, and religious ideologies. Such analysis at the multiple levels in itself not only permitted the micro-level linguistic analysis but also macro level interpretation of social power relations.

### 4. Data Analysis

In this section, the results of the critical discourse analysis of Heer by Waris Shah interpreted by three-dimension model of Fairclough are presented. The textual, discursive and socio-cultural aspects are incorporated in the analysis in order to identify how linguistic variation contributes to socio-cultural knowledge reproduction, transmission and challenge in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Punjab. The tables show the categorization of such aspects of linguistics as the features, the themes and socio-political inflexion of the verses. Each table codes sentences extracted systematically on text with interpretative comments, allowing vocabulary, grammar, modality, metaphor and intertextual references to be examined in detail. In this methodical way, the analysis does not only point out the stylistic and rhetorical means but attributes them to the general ideologies of the specific cultural group, especially when it comes to gender roles, honor codes, and power in the Punjabi society.

جتھے نان پہنچے واعظ مولوی، اُتھے پہنچے عاشق مست قلندر  
عشق دا در سیکھایا وارثا، باقی سب پڑھائی ہے فتنہ و شر

**Table 1**

Theme	Textual Evidence (Shahmukhi)	Linguistic Features	Discursive Function	Ideological Implication
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Spiritual vs. Institutional Authority	جٹھے ناں پہنچے واعظ مولوی، اُتھے پہنچے عاشق مست قلندر	Antithesis between “واعظ مولوی” (clerics) and “عاشق مست قلندر” (mystic lovers); use of spatial metaphor “پہنچے” indicating spiritual reach	Challenges formal religious authority by elevating the spiritual quest of the lover over the institutional cleric	Positions love as a higher form of spiritual truth in Punjabi Sufi ideology; undermines rigid orthodoxy
Knowledge Hierarchy	عشق دا در سیکھایا وارثا، باقی سب پڑھائی بے فتنہ و شر	Metaphorical “در” (door) of love; evaluative labeling of non-love-based knowledge as “فتنہ و شر” (discord and evil)	Reframes true learning as experiential love rather than textual scholarship	Reinforces Sufi epistemology: spiritual experience, book learning; critiques socio-religious elitism
Cultural Resistance	Entire couplet	Folk idiom and Sufi metaphor; use of accessible Punjabi register	Aligns poetry with oral folk tradition, making it accessible to the masses	Promotes egalitarian cultural identity; poetry as resistance to elite-controlled discourse

The table reveals that Waris Shah makes a severe opposition between institutional authority and spiritual love making the search of a lover to be the superior district to the strictness of clerics. The contrast of عاشق مست قلندر and واعظ مولوی challenges the establishment of authority in the manufactured religion and gives it to the seeker of God love which thus empowers personal initiative in opposition to dogmatism. To address, knowledge-hierarchies assumed by the metaphor of diction of عشق دا در undermines elite intellectual history, posing textual scholarship merely a recreation and futile without the context of experience, and therefore challenging hegemonic socio-cultural discourses that elevate the formal clerical-authority. Because, when Shah makes the Punjabi idioms and folk registers his textual choice he locates Heer as a cultural object serving to preserve the communal identity and against elitism his text serves a discourse of egalitarianism that could be understood by the masses. Collectively these are some linguistic strategies that demonstrate how Heer becomes a place where power, morality and ideology are in negotiation and this leads to spiritual experience and cultural resistance rather than institutional dominance.

لوک کہندے ناں، ناں، ماں باپ کہندے ویاہ کرائیے  
بیر کہندی عشق نال جڑیا، ایہہ سودا نئیں وکائیے

**Table 2**

Theme	Textual Evidence (Shahmukhi)	Linguistic Features	Discursive Function	Ideological Implication
Conflict Between Individual Desire and	لوک کہندے ناں، ماں باپ کہندے ویاہ کرائیے	Repetition (“کہندے”) creates a pressure rhythm; contrast between	Highlights collective voices enforcing arranged marriage	Shows how patriarchal and communal norms override personal

Collective Honor		“لوک” (society) and “ماں باپ” (parents)		choice in Punjabi culture
Female Voice and Agency	بیر کہندی عشق نال جڑیا	Direct speech by Heer; active verb “جڑیا” (bound/attached) signifies emotional commitment	Asserts woman’s agency to declare love despite social constraints	Subverts passive female role; depicts Heer as an active decision-maker
Love as Non-Transactional	ایہ سودا نئیں وکائیے	Economic metaphor (trade/deal) contrasted with love; negation “نئیں” reinforces refusal	Rejects commodification of marriage and love	Critiques dowry culture and transactional marriage norms in Punjabi society

As discussed in Table 2, the conflict between individual love and collective authority is a central issue here and it reveals that Punjabi cultural narratives are highly adept at mediating power, gender and other social conventions. The theme of repetition and common pressure in using the first theme is to highlight the male authority of the society and the father whose authority dominates the reader, revealing the nature of patriarchal influenced practice of arranged marriages that stifles the personal will. Conversely, the presence of direct speech used by Heer regains female agency, and on a symbolic level, serves to position Heer as an active subject who has chosen the side of love. Lastly, the dismissal of love in the form of سودا reveals the extreme sophistication of economic tropes in the marital customs, criticizing dowry, money-based marriages. Unitedly, these discursive tactics reveal that Punjabi literary tradition not only reflects the limitations of the patriarchal culture and at the same time provides space of resistance, placing the individual agency, especially female voice, and reinterpretation of love as moral, non-commercial value contravening the social order.

سچ اکھاں تان راجے راضی نئیں، جھوٹ بولاں تان ضمیر مار جاوے  
راجے دا حکم ہے، جیہڑا مکھ نہ موڑھے، اوہ سر اتوں ونجاوے

**Table 3**

Theme	Textual Evidence (Shahmukhi)	Linguistic Features	Discursive Function	Ideological Implication
Moral Dilemma under Feudal Rule	سچ اکھاں تان راجے راضی نئیں، جھوٹ بولاں تان ضمیر مار جاوے	Antithesis between “سچ” (truth) and “جھوٹ” (lie); internal conflict framed as a no-win choice	Depicts moral compromise under authoritarian control	Highlights suppression of truth in feudal society; individuals face ethical paralysis
Absolute Authority of the Ruler	راجے دا حکم ہے	Simple declarative clause asserting royal command	Normalizes unquestionable power of feudal lords	Reflects the top-down power hierarchy in Punjabi rural systems



Threat of Violence	جیہڑا مکھ نہ موڑھے، اوہ سر اتوں ونجاوے	Conditional threat; violent metaphor “سر اتوں ونجاوے” (lose one’s head)	Uses fear to enforce obedience	Shows coercion as a structural mechanism of feudal control
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Table 3 shows a reflection of the way that the perception of obedience and fear in Punjabi culture is modeled in feudal discourse with help of linguistic strategies structuring the linguistic support of the authoritarian regime. The initial example outlines the dilemmatic moral issue through the juxtaposition of either of the two, lying or truth; as an individual in a state of moral anesthesia under conforming authority, where, the truth can endanger being persecuted, and lies that kill but conscience. This demonstrates the way the feudal systems oppose the truth and they stifle voices. Abandoning the agency of subjects by the use of a simple declarative statement, the power of the ruler is normalized as an absolute authority and are promoted by power relations that are hierarchical and unquestionable. Lastly, the aspect of violence through metaphorical representation of threats through beheading depicts the aspect of coercive power as an ingrained structure of influence, to the extent that obedience is not an option as a mode of survival. These discursive characteristics combined demonstrate the way language was able to perpetuate feudal power through the creation of fear, justification of dominance and subjection of the individual consciences to the tyranny of the socio-political system.

مامے کہندے جہیز نال عزت ہوندی، وڈے جہیز نال نال روشن ہوندا  
بیر کہندی عزت پیار نال ہوندی، سوناں لتاں کے وی دل نئیں بندا

**Table 4**

Theme	Textual Evidence (Shahmukhi)	Linguistic Features	Discursive Function	Ideological Implication
Dowry as a Status Marker	مامے کہندے جہیز نال عزت ہوندی، وڈے جہیز نال نال روشن ہوندا	Causal link between “جہیز” (dowry) and “عزت” (honor); metaphor “نال روشن” (name illuminated)	Reveals societal belief that marriage honor is tied to material offerings	Reflects commodification of women’s marriage in Punjabi culture
Female Counter-Narrative	بیر کہندی عزت پیار نال ہوندی	Direct refutation; redefines “عزت” through emotional value rather than wealth	Challenges transactional approach to marriage	Positions love and mutual respect as true basis of marital honor
Critique of Materialism	سوناں لتاں کے وی دل نئیں بندا	Hyperbole “سوناں لتاں کے” (piles of gold) contrasted with inability to win the heart	Exposes limitations of wealth in emotional bonds	Questions capitalist and feudalism embedded in marriage customs

The discussion on marriage displayed by the Punjabis in table 4 critically negotiates the conjunction of the spheres of materialism, gender and honor. The relationship between dowry and family reputation displayed in the first theme is the demonstration of how perceived gender norms in patriarchal society devalue women by turning them into objects of exchange, isolating social ranking with material display. On the contrary, the female counter-narrative positively opposes this ideology and this time the redefinition of honor is based on love and an emotional respect, only to put the transactional models of marriage on hazy grounds. This opposition is further enhanced by the critique of materialism which makes the crassness of wealth hollower in terms of the search of the true human contact through the use of hyperbole to point out the superficiality of the capitalist and feudal ideologies. Collectively, these discourses demonstrate that even though social norms continue to strengthen dowry as a status symbol, other voices break and reposition marriage in forms of love and humanness, thereby putting focus on fight between suppressing cultural traditions and emerging counter-ideologies.

ویر کہندے ساڈا نان مٹی نئیں ہونا، ہیر نے کرنی من مانی  
ماں کہندی میری چادر نئیں لٹری جانی، ہیر نوں سمجھاؤ جیانی

Table 5

Theme	Textual Evidence (Shahmukhi)	Linguistic Features	Discursive Function	Ideological Implication
Honor as a Collective Asset	ویر کہندے ساڈا نان مٹی نئیں ہونا	Idiom “نان مٹی ہونا” (name should not be dragged through dirt); possessive “ساڈا” emphasizes collective ownership of honor	Frames honor as a shared family resource to be protected at all costs	Reinforces communal over individual rights in marriage and relationships
Suppression of Female Autonomy	ہیر نے کرنی من مانی	Informal idiom “من مانی” (acting on one’s own will)	Depicts Heer’s agency as problematic behavior	Constructs female independence as socially deviant
Maternal Authority in Enforcing Norms	ماں کہندی میری چادر نئیں لٹری جانی	Metaphor “چادر” (veil) for family honor/purity	Uses maternal figure to articulate cultural morality	Positions mothers as gatekeepers of patriarchal values
Community Mediation	ہیر نوں سمجھاؤ جیانی	Imperative verb “سمجھاؤ” (make her understand) addressed to respected elder “جیانی”	Invokes external authority to resolve internal dispute	Highlights communal intervention in private family matters

As seen in Table 5, the discourses of honor in the Punjabi culture are labeled collectivist, restrictive, and highly connected with patriarchal power. The idiom of “ساڈا نان مٹی نئیں ہونا” recontextualizes honor not as a proprietary entity owned by the individual but a communal asset of the family and thus equates the freedom of choice between women with community status. The motivation Heer has to be autonomous which is painted by the idiom من مانی is portrayed as a negative desire thus female independence is visualized as a social perturbation

that destabilizes the family set order. Controlling maternal power, reinforced by the metaphor of چادر, reveals that women themselves can play the role of the actor of the patriarchal morality; they preserve the family virtue through disciplining of younger women. Lastly, the commandment, پیر نوں سمجھاؤ جیان, shows the dependence on reputable people in the community to help it resolve family conflicts, the implication is that personal associations are put under the scrutiny and scrutiny of group justice. When put together, the discourses indicate the ways honor functions as a control system that places the needs of a collective culture above individual rights and especially the freedom of women thereby justifying the patriarchal hegemony and communal policing.

مُکھی کہندا پنڈ دی مرضی راجے دی مرضی، پیر تے رنجھا گجھ نئیں کہہ سکدے  
جیہڑا حکم نہ منے، اوہ پنڈوں کڈ دتا جائے، عزت نال جیوے تے حکم نال جیوے

**Table 6**

Theme	Textual Evidence (Shahmukhi)	Linguistic Features	Discursive Function	Ideological Implication
Conflation of Village and Feudal Will	مُکھی کہندا پنڈ دی مرضی راجے دی مرضی	Parallel structure equating “پنڈ دی” (village will) with “راجے دی” (ruler’s will)	Erases distinction between community consensus and feudal command	Normalizes feudal dominance as community interest
Silencing of Subordinate Voices	پیر تے رنجھا گجھ نئیں کہہ سکدے	Negation phrase “گجھ نئیں کہہ سکدے” (cannot say anything)	Depicts inability of commoners to challenge authority	Reinforces powerless status of lovers under feudal hierarchy
Exile as Social Punishment	جیہڑا حکم نہ منے، اوہ پنڈوں کڈ دتا جائے	Conditional threat with passive construction	Uses banishment to enforce compliance	Shows control through spatial exclusion from the community
Honor-Obedience Link	عزت نال جیوے تے حکم نال جیوے	Rhyming parallel structure linking “عزت” (honor) with “حکم” (order)	Merges moral virtue with obedience to authority	Frames loyalty to feudal command as moral obligation

As Table 6 discloses, the feudal social and ideological discourse is linguistically built to de-politicize domination and de-legitimize the voice of resistance. Colocation of village and feudal will (“پنڈ دی مرضی راجے دی مرضی”) reduces consensus of the community to the will of the ruler and says feudal domination is communal interest. This effacement of difference prevents the agency of the subordinates, which is also enforced by silencing devices. Exile as social penance (“پنڈوں کڈ دتا جائے”) demonstrates how obedience is not only policed through the power of authority but also by the imposition of the threat of spatial expulsion, so belonging comes at the cost of obedience. Lastly, rhetoric construction of honor and obedience, as two sides of the same coin, because honor (“عزت نال جیوے”) and obedience are ideologically intertwined with morality and submission, and submission to the feudal authority has been rendered a virtuous concept. In sum, the discourse shows the existence of a structure of hegemony, whereby community identity and morality as well as own survival are linguistically associated with feudal frame, and they hardly allow resistance or independence.

رنجھا کھندا قسمت دے لکھے مٹدے نئیں، جیہڑا نصیب لکھیا اوہ ہو کے رہنا  
بیر کھندی عشق دے راہ وچ تقدیر نئیں، دل نال جتن والا تقدیر نوں مڑ گھڑنا

**Table 7**

Theme	Textual Evidence (Shahmukhi)	Linguistic Features	Discursive Function	Ideological Implication
Fatalism in Folk Belief	رنجھا کھندا قسمت دے لکھے مٹدے نئیں، جیہڑا نصیب لکھیا اوہ ہو کے رہنا	Repetition of “لکھے/لکھیا” (written) reinforces predestination; modal certainty “اوہ ہو کے رہنا” (it will happen)	Expresses passive acceptance of fate	Mirrors Punjabi folk fatalism where human agency is secondary to destiny
Agency Against Fate	بیر کھندی عشق دے راہ وچ تقدیر نئیں	Negation “نئیں” directly refutes fate’s control over love	Positions love as a force that transcends destiny	Offers counter-hegemonic view against deterministic cultural belief
Rewriting Destiny	دل نال جتن والا تقدیر نوں مڑ گھڑنا	Metaphor “مڑ گھڑنا” (reshape) for changing fate; valorization of emotional strength “دل نال جتن والا” (one who wins with the heart)	Encourages active resistance against predetermined outcomes	Suggests individual will and love can challenge social and divine determinism

Table 7 points out how folk speech in Heer Ranjha mediates between the determinism and resistance along competing interpretations of fate and agency. On the one hand, linguistically, the fact that Ranjha feels that he is imprisoned by fate and can do nothing about it is reflected in the repetition and the moral certainty of his statement that *قسمت دے لکھے مٹدے نئیں* and the supposed unchangeability of fate is indicated by the writing script analogy. Heer on the contrary opposes this hegemony through a direct refusal, the phrase: *عشق دے راہ وچ تقدیر نئی* Raina (there is no fate in the path of love), in a dynamic that sets love as something transcendent, able to break the deterministic lines. This poses a counter-discourse that elevates humanness and human resistance. This confrontation is further radicalized by the metaphor of *مڑ گھڑنا*, reshaping destiny as a reshaping in both directions, in individual passion and emotional resources as mechanisms to rewrite the supposed script of fate. Collectively, these discursive moves reveal a contradiction between entrenched fatalistic beliefs and new discourses of agency, so that, whereas cultural models accrue action to resignation, the rejection by lovers rein scribes fate as perceptible to negotiation through love and power of will.

وارث کھندا لوکاں دے ظلم توں ڈرو، رب دے قہر توں بچو  
جیہڑا ناں کمزور نال کیتا، اوہ رب کولوں سود سمیت واپس لیندا

**Table 8**

Theme	Textual Evidence (Shahmukhi)	Linguistic Features	Discursive Function	Ideological Implication
Fear of Divine Justice	وارث کہندا لوکاں دے ظلم توں ڈرو، رب دے قہر توں بچو	Imperatives “ڈرو” (fear) and “بچو” (avoid) create moral urgency; parallel structure linking human oppression with divine wrath	Warns audience about moral and spiritual consequences of injustice	Reinforces Islamic-Punjabi moral framework where divine accountability is ultimate
Defense of the Weak	جیہڑا ناں کمزورا نال کیتا	Emphasis on “کمزورا” (weak) as moral subject; negation “ناں” to stress forbidden action	Positions protection of the weak as a moral duty	Challenges feudal exploitation and affirms egalitarian values
Inevitability of Moral Retribution	اوہ رب کولوں سُود سمیت واپس لیندا	Economic metaphor “سُود” (with interest) for divine justice	Portrays retribution as inevitable and multiplied	Suggests that injustice has compounded consequences in both social and divine realms

Table 8 also shows how Waris Shah incorporates moralities and justice in his discourse with a combination of religious authority, social analysis, and symbolism. Fear of divine justice uses imperatives and parallel constructions, which are used to align human oppression with the wrath of God to make the theme a strong admonition that justice is not subject to the worldly power but that it will be subject to the accountability of the divine purpose. The defense of the Weak re-centers the powerless as the subject of moral action, which linguistically was performed through optative emphasis and negation, and consequently defies the feudal hierarchy and the rank-seeking model, instead cultivating the egalitarian ideal in Punjabi-Islamic thinking. Lastly, the Inevitability of Moral Retribution shows how even undeserved actions also rebound because a metaphor concerning a financial interest is applicable, which proves how retribution not only does take place but is also amplified, supporting the idea of divine justice. Collectively, these discourses provide responses to the research questions through demonstrating the ways language can contribute not only to an indictment of social exploitation but also to a reinforcement of a moral-religious worldview within which justice is guaranteed that is not subject to human machinations. The depth of critique is that Shah was able not only to criticize social oppression but also at the same time be able to have a grounding belief of a transcendent moral order that justifies resistance and ethical responsibility.

## 5. Results and Findings

As it can be seen in the analysis, the poetical discourse written by Waris Shah is both an accusation of the system that is a social discourse, as well as an affirmation of a moral divine order. These findings may be discussed as a set of repeated thematic strands that help to understand the way trilinguage, ideology, and power interpenetrate in his text. In the tables, there is always a struggle of resistance by Shah to the deep-rooted feudal and patriarchal

authority. He reveals the wrong through lexical emphasis (e.g. کمزورا weak, negations and moral imperatives) and, moral imperatives are directed, as well as, foregrounding the oppressed as moral subjects. This positing of language undermines the elite dominance by giving legitimacy to the issue brought out by the marginal groups and imposing ethical obligation on those in power. The fact that Shah uses imperatives and prohibitions suggests the strength of evidence to show how Shah transforms injustice into a social and moral wrong.

Throughout themes of fear of divine justice and inevitability of moral retribution), Shah makes use of religious metaphor, especially of divine wrath, and economic interest (“سود سمیت” with interest). These rhetoric ploys establish an inevitable regime of godly responsibility beyond merely earthly power. When the human oppression is managed as divine punishment, Shah supports an Islamic-Punjab worldview in which spiritual justice delivers a balance to worldly oppression. This ethical urgency turns the poetic expression into the kind of ethical pedagogy. The persistent presence of the imperatives demonstrates that Shah aimed at reformism of the social behavior through incorporation of the divine warnings into the usage of thoughts that apply in everyday life in such a way that the frontier between the religious doctrine and the poetical tradition collapsed.

Results of tables devoted to defense of the weak and other themes demonstrate that Shah does support local Punjabi and Islamic values which contain cooperation based on equality and justice. Raising the feeble to the status of the sacred person and condemning exploitation, he performs the discursive construction of the collective by opposing the feudal organization and identifying the community by the common moral principles. In the case of Shah who uses the metaphor on debt and compounded interest to divine justice, the implication is that there is never a time when exploitation is expunged, but rather, there is compounded interest that must be paid. This observation, besides illustrating the theological conviction of celestial retribution, is also to do with a cultural metaphor understood as an available cultural reference to his agrarian viewers. It makes more conspicuous that injustice also bears compounded fruits, which intertwine the social and the spiritual into a mutually reinforcing process.

Throughout all the tables, linguistic elements of resistance such as imperatives, negations, parallel syntax, and metaphors are used. They not only enable Shah to criticize the strong, but also contribute to the strengthening of the conviction about divine justice, therefore, combining both social protest and religious compliance. These two roles do disclose a complicated ideological belief: opposition toward earthly authority structures is matched with the belief in divine authority as the final decision-maker. As opposed to the open political confrontation, the discourse of Shah works through moral persuasion. Incorporating critic within a religious-moral discourse, he manages not to offend the audiences but justice is nevertheless turned upside down in the sense of weakening feudal power. Its implications are that his poetry is an indirect but the powerful form of ideological resistance in which a divine morality justifies the causes of social justice.

Lastly, through the eight tables, one key finding comes up; Shah does not divide between the social and the spiritual. The injustice is idealized to be worldly oppression and spiritual devastation and justice is portrayed to be un avoiding through the vengeance by God. This combination reinforces the ideological connotation that spiritual responsibility is inexplicable without moral conduct in the society.

## 6. Discussion

The critical discourse analysis of Heer by Waris Shah shows that the text is way more than a romance story; it is a cultural artifact in which social norms, the relationship of power and moral codes are reproduced, contested and redefined. Following the Fairclough (1995) ideology that claims that language is both reflective and constructive of culture, the verses by Shah become the arena where the institutional power, the agency of an individual and spiritual ethics continuously inform each other.

As seen in Tables 1, 4, and 5, the individualistic points in a struggle between individual will and group honor in the Punjabi context, but more so, that Punjabi cultural ideology itself is soundly organized around the axes of kinship and collective identity. The agency Heer tries to place on herself in her dialogues with the patriarchal discourse (“عشق نال جڑیا”) is violently suppressed, suppressed or otherwise contextualized as deviant (“من مانی”). This conflict reveals the principles of symbolic power, proposed by Bourdieu (1991) family, community and choices prevail over the will of an individual, authorizing authority as tradition. According to Van Dijk (2006) the matters of ideology such as us and them creates a form that individual autonomous status becomes a hazard to the team connection. These results provide an answer to the research questions research question 1 and 2, they demonstrate how language choices are able to reproduce patriarchal norms in the Punjabi honor system and challenge/resist them.

Tables 3 and 6 reveal the overall dominance of the feudal authority where the decree of rulers, the lord, the village head (the claims were practically interchangeable) collapse mutual agreement into the administrative power. This is consistent with a Gramsci conception of cultural hegemony in which hegemony involves the naturalization of inequality by the ruling classes who exercise moral discursive power (Gramsci, 2020s). Vulnerability to violence and to social isolation are used to consolidate obedience, and coercion and consent work together here. These structures bring to fore ways of research question 3 because Heer, as a cultural space, normalizes the use of authority, but it is ingeniously challenged by those of the lovers, whose voices are silenced.

Heer and Ranjha oppose the deterministic cultural scenarios, which are depicted by the table 7 as well as the previous dialogues. Heer is saying, love is beyond fate, and this is a part of the counter-hegemonic pronouncement that disagrees with the Punjabi nature of fatalism and the very power of kinship institution. One can see here the importance in discourse as a point of resistance that Wodak (2001) emphasizes: the lovers create another ideology, in which the truth of the heart is superior to social adherence. Their language is however, respectful of national boundaries which means resistance is conditional and tactical but not revolutionary. Such a discovery falls in line with Research Question 2 because it unveiled the process of negotiations and resistance of dominant discourses in the dialogs.

Table 8 places Shah as a cultural critic as well as a poet. His use of imperatives and metaphors of economic punishments instates an Islamic-Punjabi moral order that lies above economic or social rankings with divine justice as the final judgment. This shows the assertion by Van Dijk (1998) who states that texts carry ideological arguments by being informed with moral statements. Through his defense of the weak and threats of divine punishment to the oppressors, Shah criticizes not only the extravagance of feudalism, but also the egalitarianism ethos, which is a spiritual corrective to worldly violence. This aspect directly interplays with Research Question 3 because Heer conserves, challenges and reconstitutes the ideology of Punjabi as far as that of fate, morality, and divine responsibility is concerned.

The eight tables together present a consistent discursive formation: love and personal will are impossible to separate outside of the larger systems or the category of honor, authority and

morality. The linguistic ruses of Shah (reversal, repetition, parallelism, metaphor) create a story in which individual conflicts are never detached against the background of communal and godly interests. This is twofold with the understanding of the fact that South Asian literature at the same time has united communities in the umbrella of tradition yet provided them with in-prescription of disagreement and re-definition (Rahman, 2011).

In this sense, the analysis reveals that Heer creates spaces between authority, agency and spiritual love, stages conversations that represent and resist the patriarchal and feudal discourses, and functions as a space of flexible ideology where Punjabi ideology is maintained and challenged alike. The CDA evidences that Shah text can be understood as both compliance and critique not only because it buttresses the prevailing hierarchies but also because it speaks on behalf of the emotional and moral counter-discourses. Such ambivalence indicates the nature of the Punjabi cultural ideology- which is very much anchored in its traditions but never impervious to change.

To the extent that discourse constructs dominance in the context of Punjabi cultural ideology, the results of the current research confirm and expound most of the available scrutiny of Heer Ranjha, albeit with a greater focus on how discourse at once affirms and challenges that cultural ideology. A critical interpretation of the text as a cultural storehouse of the narrative and oral tradition of Heer (Chitra, 2017; Abbas & Janjua, 2021) has been augmented with an understanding of the text in the context of socio-political changes in Punjab through history reading (Suri, 1966; Nazir, 2001). The present paper is related to these views as it demonstrates that Waris Shah incorporates kinship honor, feudal authority and divine justice into the text which helps to keep social memory. But unlike literature that considers Heer mainly as a cultural encoding or a historical reflection, the linguistic processes, such as imperatives, negation, metaphor or parallelism involved in reaffirming or challenging such norms have been brought out by CDA in this study. When compared with Dhanju and Saroj (n.d.), who read Heer as maintaining the fictions of patriarchal passivity in society, the research indicates that the text also says something more in favour of Shah and how Heer and Ranjha or their presentation presented subtle counter-discourses of resistance, which were more appealing to Grover (2024) and Ali (2016), who interpret the text as one that is engaged in opposing spiritual and cultural authority.

Set against the three-dimensional CDA model of Fairclough, the present study offers a multi-faceted account of Heer that positions language within a context of hegemony as well as a space of counteraction. Both textual analysis and the discursive practice dimension portrays textual encoding of ideological between metaphors on divine justice and kinship honor as a form of ideological positioning, and how the verses were both consumed and reinterpreted in the overall oral culture of South Asia, in both Sufi and Punjabi contexts. Intractable patriarchal, feudal and religious structures of power relations that constitute the quilt, meanwhile, have been highlighted through socio-cultural analysis but also create room to dissent, which are provided through love, fate, and moral interrogation. By so doing, the paper contributes to previous gender-focused research (Masood et al., 2024; Maqsood, n.d.) by showing that the poetry of Waris Shah is not merely marginalizing to women, but positions them in a contentious discursive space in which subservience and defiance are both present simultaneously. Converging elements of earlier historical, cultural and gendered readings with the CDA of Fairclough, the results indicate that Heer Ranjha is an active text that mediates power, identity and morality through temporal and ideological registers, and serves to expand an earlier theoretical argument that discourse is itself always a product and a producer of culture.



Although previous scholarship has exuberated Heer Ranjha, specifically, in the narrative tradition in which it orients, historical circumstances under which it is written and symbolic representations of it, it has failed to look at the micro-linguistic elements that have perpetuated the power relations it exposes. Majority of the past literature has engaged in either praising the poetic genius of Waris Shah (Suri, 1966; Nazir, 2001) or cultural and historical aspects (Chitra, 2017; Abbas & Janjua, 2021) without elaborating on the ideology-creating aspects of discourse in a systematic manner. It is with the application of Fairclough CDA model that the gap in this study will be filled to foreground the reproduction of feudal hierarchies, gender roles and religious authority through the use of metaphors, modality markers, imperatives and evaluative language even as these forms of expression provide sites of resistance. This article builds on the body of work previously written by demonstrating that Heer Ranjha is not merely a cultural text, but it is a discursive battle ground on which opposing ideologies of love, honor, spirituality, and social justice clash with one another and negotiate through the language itself.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that Heer Ranjha works not only as the masterpiece of Punjabi literary heritage but also as a complicated discursive space where the conflicting ideologies of power and love coupled with that of resistance are negotiated. The systematic analysis of the linguistic decision of Waris Shah on the basis of the proposed CDA model suggests that within the dialogues and narrative interactions, Waris Shah both affirms and disrupts the prevailing socio-cultural orders.

First, the results reaffirmed that linguistic practices developed by Waris Shah create between institutional authority, individual agency and spiritual love. The constant repetition of modal markers, imperatives and evaluative turns of speech in the speech of feudal, religious and parental figures modeled them as guardians of honor and of social order. But the voice modelled by Heer, through metaphor, resistance and invocation of spiritual justice, is resistant to such institutional control, and privileges individual initiative over the burden of patriarchal and feudal power.

Second, the discussion of conversations and narrative interactions showed ways of how gendered power relations had been reproduced, challenged and re framed. On the one hand, language constructs women as representations of family reputation and objects of social regulation, resonating with the patriarchal rules of 18th century Punjab. Conversely, Heer not submitting, her employment of irony which is as calculated, and Shah extending a sympathetic frame to her standing epitomizes into an agentive character, subversive to dominating discourses. This observation is consistent with previous research that emphasizes the cultural tenacity of Heer but steps beyond it to demonstrate the discursive processes', including direct speech, metaphor, and evaluative commentary, through which the resistance speaks.

Lastly, Heer Ranjha as a cultural and literary product is thus shown to be a location where the ideology of the Punjabis is shared, challenged and re-orchestrated. The text is representative of the moral economy of that epoch and honor, fate, and religious authority comprise discovers moorings. However, these anchors are shaken by the presentation of love as a lofty spiritual power portrayed by Shah where there is another ideology where human passion and God in his justice is given precedence over stiff social codes. Through this Heer Ranjha maintains the Punjabi identity and yet questions its hierarchies, and gives a dialogical space to readers in which to negotiate common values. By making these dynamics central concerns, it makes its contribution to the prior study of the poem in which the thematic and cultural multiplicity of the poem has usually been applauded, the study shows how such multiplicity is constructed discursively as linguistically expressed. The findings stress the relevance of CDA in the

unraveling of the cultural work of literary texts as not only reflections of culture, but as the places of ideological conflict. Therefore, Heer Ranjha is not merely a story of tragic love but rather a battleground in the field of language where the issues of power, gender, ethics, and spirituality relentlessly pose new questions to the Punjabi socio-cultural life.

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