

The Autobiographic Discursive Construction of Immigrant Identity: A Discourse Historical Analysis of ‘My Life’s Journey’

Fouzia Rehman Khan

Assistant professor, Department of English, Sardar Bahadur Khan Women's University, Quetta Baluchistan, Pakistan.
Email: fozia.wu@gmail.com

Sumaira Shafiq

Assistant Professor, Institute of Kashmiri Studies, University of Azad Kashmir, Pakistan.

Ayaz Qadeer

Assistant Professor (English), Department of Management Sciences, COMSATS University, Wah Cantt, Punjab, Pakistan.

Abstract

The present critical discourse study explores the discursive construction of immigrant identity of Mohajir/Urdu Speaking people in Pakistan through the analysis of an autobiographic discourse in the form of ‘My Life’s Journey’ by Altaf Hussain. Discourse Historical Approach of CDA serves as the theoretical and analytical framework for this study. This framework is based on themes and discursive strategies. The analysis

Key Words:

Mohajir; identity; CDA; DHA; Discourse

of the selected discourse reveals that the interview based autobiography of the political figure is based on the recurring theme of political transformation and reconstruction of immigrant identity. The discourse is also constituted of several discursive strategies; the most prevalent ones are those of victimization, topos of history, topos of definition and positive self and negative other presentation. The autobiographical discourse highlights the transformational phases the immigrant identity of *Mohajirs* has gone through. The readers of this discourse under analysis often encounter terms like parochial difference, biased attitudes, and discrimination.

Introduction

The present study explores the development and transformation of immigrant identity of Urdu speaking *Mohajir* from a group of people who strongly identified themselves with Pakistani national identity to a small segment of the society who define themselves as an ethnic community. This is done through autobiographical analysis of “My Life’s Journey”.

‘Mohajir’ is an Urdu term, which means someone who decides to leave his homeland with the aim of preserving his faith. Also it is an Arabic derivation that means ‘emigrant, evacuee or refugee’ (Mohajir, 1998, p.50). The term has a historic and religious connotation and refers to the holy migration of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Madina. Such a reference exalts the term with an implication of sacrificing everything for the sake of faith. Hence this becomes a defining feature for Mohajir/immigrant identity.

After the historic partition of the subcontinent, the term Mohajir was used for people who immigrated to Pakistan sacrificing their hearth and home for the new Muslim state. The holiness of the term obligated the local population to look after the immigrants. But the situation became ironic when the majority of immigrants who migrated from East Punjab (India) to West Punjab (Pakistan) stopped calling themselves Mohajir while the word stayed associated with the minority who came to join Pakistan from other Muslim minority provinces of India. The former group of immigrants got absorbed with the neighborhood populace of Punjab for the reason of similitude in societies, though the later settled in urban pieces of Sindh, remained unassimilated because of disparity of societies. But this population identified themselves as Pakistanis and were proud of their struggle and sacrifices for the newly formed country. The Mohajir identity was politically revived in the 1980s with the birth of Mohajir Qomee Movement (MQM) by Altaf Hussain, who wanted to unify the immigrants specially those residing in urban parts of Sindh. Therefore the term developed a restricted use for a particular community, with the commonality of language. Hence ‘Mohajir’ became a linguistic and a political identity (Baig, 2005, p.8) for people without the identity of land.

The immigrant identity has been differently approached by the researchers such as in the form of life histories, testimonies and biographies where the idea of place and location in terms of identity has been problematized.

Literature Review

The identity situation of immigrants is a complex one as it is a combination of three identities as ethnic; national and immigrant. These identities find the expression depending on the context that may still include their own cultural background, which keeps on impacting their identity. They also do identity work, by doing activities in order to sustain their personal identities, which are supportive of their self-concept (Snow & Anderson, 1997 p.1348) (cited in Killian & Johnson, 2006, p.64)

The immigrant identity has been differently studied. Few of the linguists have worked on labels given to the immigrants. For example Chinese Americans and Mexican Americans seldom call themselves as Chinese or Mexicans and often times use the single common label of Americans. This new label shows their affiliation with the new society and develops a positive attitude among people. The selection of such identity labels is context dependent. This context may include home of the immigrants, the host community and the attitude of both. For instance the government of Netherland treats Antilleans as non-Dutch, which compels them to keep a separate identity. Russians in Israel are a similar case. Every context comes with a different implication (Hellgran, 2007 p.4).

The children and grandchildren of immigrants continue to carry an immigrant identity, although they are born in the new country and speak the new language but still are not accepted as the bearer of the mainstream identity. Such circumstances lead to the strengthening of other different identities such as religious and ethnic or even a distinguishing immigrant identity. The identity issues faced by the immigrant population are of varied nature depending on the time and reason of migration and the age of immigrants. Less research is done on the factors affecting immigrant identity. The affiliation with the home country is stronger among the new immigrants as compared to the subsequent generations (Hellgran, 2007).

Biographies are one of the approaches to study immigrant identity, with the qualitative perspective and a belief that humans are influenced by and they influence their social world where they are embedded as socially intentional agents (Findlay & Li, 1997).

Migration discourses have political undertones, which can influence the migration policies due to their dominant and hegemonic nature. Talks on relocation, multiculturalism and combination are identified with national identities and self-definition (Androvcova, 2010, p.10). Androvcova data on migration discourses was gathered from multiple sources such as debated in the Slovakian parliament, daily media discourses and discourses related to migrations that were of political nature. Androvcova analyzed this data and found that different frontiers of friends and foe, us and them are developed in the migration discourses. Some of these discourses might be ignored but many help in structuring of policies.

The narrative identities constructed through biographies develop over a period of time during which these can be revised rewritten. The version of self through biographies is polyphonic rather than monolithic. Autobiographical narratives do not only represent and express self but also constitute it (Grad & Rojo, 2008). The pervasiveness of Ethnicity in the narratives of these undocumented immigrants can only be analysed in the wider social perspective specially the ideological pressure of race and ethnicity, through public discourses in American society (Finna, 1999).

Narrative shape identities, which can be constructed by the person himself, by the ongoing discourses or by the group of people around. Similarly, the migration discourses have their role in the construction of immigrant identity. It is these narratives that form the perception of immigrants as well as other people in the society. These narratives let the immigrants to construct a recognizable self and with that give meaning to their lives. Such identity narratives have all the elements of any other narrative like the plot, character and importantly the time sequence. People engage in different roles and manifest various identities. Autobiographical and biographical narratives show identity as a whole (Grad & Rojo, 2008).

Research Methodology

Discourse historical approach of Critical Discourse Analysis serves as a theoretical and analytical framework for this study. Discourse historical analysis is selected among all other frameworks of CDA because it takes a historical perspective of the discursive practices and events under study. For the present study, the historical and contextual dimension is the migration of Muslims from Muslim minority provinces of India to the newly formed state of Pakistan in 1947. These immigrants set up their homes in the urban parts of Sindh. This group of people lacked identity of the land and a part of their immigrant identity was discursively constructed. Methodologically, the current paper takes up and autobiography as a discourse under analysis as a '...discourse is both constructive and constructed (Pottar & Wetherell, 2007). The role of discourse in the construction of immigrant identity is explored with the help of themes and discursive strategies as given by Wodak in the framework of Discourse Historical Approach. Among these strategies, the most common ones are those of argumentation, which consists of several topoi. These topoi connect a premise to a conclusion and they as such justify the transition from one argument to another and finally to the conclusion in a discourse (Wodak & Meyer, 2001).

Analysis of Excerpts from ‘My Life’s Journey. The Early Years (1966-1988)

Introduction

Safar e Zindagi, an Urdu book compiled by Khalid Attar looms to be translated in English as “My life’s journey”. Mathew A Cook writes the preface of the book that is under keen analysis; Robert Nicholas and Brigadier A.R Siddique are the ones who contribute in its introduction, and its publication is of Oxford University. Altaf Hussain who founded Mohajir Qomi Movement later on appeared to be Mutahida Qomi Movement carried a political agenda based on providing national identity to those who abandoned India, migrated to Pakistan and started living in Urban Sindh, is the center of discussion in this book. His autobiographical account is discussed based on his interviews. Nonetheless, he has not authored the book “My life’s journey” himself. Altaf Husain throughout his political career kept a firm manifesto to struggle for the rights of immigrants who shifted to Pakistan during partition in the year 1947 (Hussain, 2011). Among his set targets to chase, giving identity to Mohajirs seemed to be of great interest. He is also famous and renowned for highlighting the identity issue of those speaking Urdu and most importantly of settlers residing the urban areas of Sindh. In addition, his deep interest of becoming a political figure and making political party was to advocate and assist immigrants to be able to raise slogan for their constitutional rights. His contribution proved prolific for infusing political awareness and cognizance to the group of people who had not had a tinge of power and were staunch seekers of identity in that era. This group of immigrants consisted educated and politically aware people, who with unwavering determination, called in question the deeply delved iniquitous system of government and financially stable feudal who enslaved the power to their knees in the country. They for carrying political wisdom toiled to sternly oppose the unjust and unlawful formulae apropos of wealth and power distribution.

The opted text is of paramount importance because it heralded the new political movement that resulted in the appearance of third most popular political party after PPP and Muslim League. The party and its followers identified themselves as the fifth nationality (p, ix) along with the residents of the other four provinces of Pakistan.

Thematic Content

Despite being a script of autobiography, Chapter 1 readily comprises the theme of transformation, with the account of metamorphosis of Mohajir identity from a whole Muslim identity to a distinctive ethnic community. Within the discourse, historical moments are demonstrated as being observed by an individual who conducted re-evaluation on his identity after he noticed political and social change. In accordance with Altaf Hussain, the 1964 presidential elections, in which Ayub Khan had greater mandate than Fatima Jinnah and competed her, resulted into ethnic violence between Pakhtun and Muhajir for advocating and supporting two different political icons such as Ayub Khan and Fatima Jinnah (Goulbourne, 2004). Those were the times when the relation between ethnic group and political alliance turned out to be very noticeable. The unity based on the commonality of religion started to lose its vigor with the rise in provincialism.

The roots of politics in educational sector were cultivated in late 70s and early 80s; it furthered every political party to construct their wings such as Tribal students Federation, Punjabi Students’ Association, Pakhtun Students’ Federation in the premises of colleges and universities. It made the immigrant think of their own ethnicity because they found themselves not to be a part of any of these ethnicity based political wings.

The coined term ‘son of the soil’ addressed in chapter 4 (Hussain, 2011), referred to the inhabitants of localities constituting Pakistan that remained the part of country even before partition. The inclusion of this word awkwardly shunned the writ of immigrants leading to a visible distinction and discrimination against immigrants at numerous grounds of life such in education and employment. Apart from this Muhajir populated areas were set to ‘burst of firing’ (p.30). Chapter 7 thoroughly abounds with themes depicting Muhajir/immigrants being victimized and marginalized.

While shuffling the pages of history, the partition of Sindh in Urban and rural in terms of quota after political decision and the bill regarding Sindhi language passed by Sindh cabinet are significant dots for provoking rivalry between the potent ethnicities of the province. There are multitudes of happenings cited in autobiographical discourse giving rise to the emergence of a political party reasoned by students and then with the passage of time, it loomed to be a fully stable and organized party in the form of Mohajir Quomi Movement. This eruption led to the wide recognition and fame of Mohajir identity and it strengthened with a sweeping victory of Mohajir Quomi Movement in local body election and in general election conducted in the years of 1987 and 1988 respectively. Owing to this victory, Mohajir identity got established.

There are innumerable places found in the discourse that shows the theme of linguistic construction of identity based on using linguistic items like personal pronouns in the form of “our workers insisted, our central problem

was, no doubt, funds". "every single unite funded us with donations, we announce our next meeting at Nishter Park", "media gave us no importance", "the eight years struggle of our colleagues bore fruits..." (p.63).

The theme of transformation and reconstruction of immigrant identity is established by the author of the selected biography through tracing the Muhajir identity to the historic Two-nation theory of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan. He states that Mohajir as nationality poured out from the Two Nation theory in the form of inception as Muslims and Hindus were two different nations prior to the partition (p.132). The two nations (Muslims and Hindus) segregated on the grounds of practicing two religions, which were poles apart. After two scores and a decade of inter-partition, intra-partition inception with in the region of Pakistan that terminated in the emergence of a newly born state Bangladesh. Since then, the concept of identity has bisected in minor lines giving rise to ethnic roots deeply delved in the country. Owing to that, they were in grave need of flourishing a campaign to politically assure their identity by producing a political group so as to contest in the election held for both provincial and national cabinets.

Discursive Strategies

The construction and changing perception about the Muhajir identity has been reflected in the discourse by the use of historical references and discursive strategies. In his discourse of autobiography, the two leading and fitting strategies in use are collectivization and specialization. These basically refer to the parochial differences addressed by him and inception to appear quickly after Pakistan surfaced as an autonomous state on the world's map (p.4). His identification to a middle class initiated turning into an identity sign and an extremely salient feature of Mohajirs political and geographical identity. Pakistan despite emerging in the name of Islam and Islamic principles and doctrines terminally distributed in terms of ethnicities that discriminated people on ethnic lines (p.4).

The initiation of the discourse originates with the Topos using the strategy of argumentation. The strategy of singularization is utilized by the writer in order to elucidate Mohajirs sacrifices rendered in the making of Pakistan. He mentions that during partition a considerable number of Muslims residing the Muslims minority sections of India devoted their lives to sacrifice and even being massacred and slew. Fighting for Pakistan led them to pay heavy just for being so attached to essence of Islam and Pakistan (p.23). His autobiography amply abounds with the patriotic themes of his or his family. They were forced and exiled from their homes and displaced and dislocated by Hindu at the time of partition. The sad events of partition followed by migration instill in them a greater and a deeper sense of patriotism and the selected discourse abounds in such expressions (p.23). Such a discourse infers that Mohajir felt it necessary to demonstrate their patriotism to the state by using such discourse as unlike other ethnicities who lived here before the partition and whose patriotism was not questionable.

The strategy of victimization used in the discourse is widespread and common in multiple places exemplified by the following examples, "Pashtoons were on the rampage..." (p.4). "...Pakhtuns had attacked Mohajirs" (p.4). "... Mohajirs were being punished because they had supported Fatima Jinnah against Ayub Khan in election" (p.4). "there was a parochial bias in the environment" (p.4), "...targets the Mohajirs", "victims were the Mohajirs", "who suffered atrocities" (p.23), "suffering from discrimination", "treated unfairly" (p.24), "injustices have been done" (p.25), "victim of bigotry & prejudice" (p.25). When the sweeping victory of All Pakistan Mohajir Organization clamored, the strategy of victimization was once again used while reporting the reaction of political parties in the premises of Urdu Science College and the University of Karachi against Mohajir students for being tossed and beaten by Jamiat Thunder Squad (p.55). The strategy of victimization emerged claiming that "...on all APMSO an armed ambush was launched. Our workers were attacked using firearms and knives ... APMSO flags were torn down and stamped upon" (p.56). Form the prevalence of strategy of victimization the author wants to prove that Muhajir were victims being tyrannized by the followers of other parties. Discourse elucidates, "We have put up with so many taunts, criticisms, and accusations that forgiving and forgetting have become second nature to us" (p.51).

The discourse topic continues to remain the ethnic and linguistic differences and discrimination on the same basis in chapter two of the book titled 'Education'. Autobiographer uses the strategy of victimization to keenly and constantly observe and analyse the discrimination on parochial grounds (p.14). This chapter comprehensively deals with the discourse expressing the victimization and deprivation of Mohajir community.

In accordance with the autobiographer, Mohajirs despite devoting their energy and advocacy to any of the political parties were kept disappointed and were given cold shoulder. Their support and efficiency never bore fruit of dignity and honour for them but in return, they would get eliminated from the chapters of prosperity and development. The emergence of Altaf Hussain as a political leader flourished a ray of hope in Mohajirs to assemble to secure their constitutional rights. This appeared to be the epoch of political eruption of Mohajir identity that started in the University of Karachi and spread to other educational institutions. The use of the word Mohajir at innumerable places in the discourse shows the strategy of construction of inclusion and continuation, which stresses

on similarity. There are numerous places in the discourse that encounter the word Mohajir such as “Mohajir boys” (p.12), “Mohajir students” (p.18), “Karachi Students” (p.20).

The active political organizations on the premises of universities are highlighted in Chapter 13 on using the strategy of Political Alignment of micro strategy of politicization as a discourse. Between the margins of these lines, the parties elucidated are “... Pakistan Liberal Students, Progressive Students' Organization, Jiya Sindh Students' Federation, Baloch Students' Organization, Pakhtun Students' federation, Punjabi Students' Association and Islami Jamiat e Taulaba” (p.55). The utilization of Referential Strategy of Politicization as party political alignment clearly manifests the political transformation of the Mohajirs by including the discussion of political parties Jamat e Islami and Pakistan National Alliance, to which Mohajirs had had ties with before bringing their own political identity into being. Mohajirs rendered their support to these parties owing to their manifesto, which had to struggle for bringing Nizam E Mustafa, and implementing Islamic system, which they thought would serve some justice to them and treat them equally.

Although they received fatal threats and menaces from rival political parties, Mohajirs decided to use the strategy of Continuation of Perpetuation in order to act upon the principles of persistency and perseverance and carry on their struggle regardless of any unpleasant circumstances. At the end of the first section comprising 14 chapters, the Topos of Definition of Argumentative Strategy is for the second times brought into process with a vision to describe its members based on class patterns by saying that all the members of his party had no influence in the press or with the elites because of their being middle class (p.61). Connecting to the same stance, the text is conveyed addressing that elite had never elevated themselves to join the organization because MQM could not enhance their status (p.65). Mohajirs are defined repeatedly at several places apropos of the workers who remained politically active and working, belonged to middle class families.” (p.65). Mohajir as a mono unit and group is quite clear from the use of deictic text and the discourse of referential strategy, which is the sub strategy of Collectivization. The phrases depicting Mohajir as group are as followed. “...while our procession was marching’, as we proceeded further...” (p.66), “our message to the center is that” “... our procession had been fixed upon...”, “their enthusiasm had to be seen to be believed” (p.67), “we respect all communities, our struggle was not against a particular community...” (p.75). Mohajir emerged to be a different ethnicity and was reckoned as distinctive political identity by the end of 1980s. During this period, their identity was thoroughly established and a struggle for their rights began.

Mohajirs have been supplied with a definition through the Topos of definition along with the strategy of Classification of Politicization (Resigl & Wodak, 2001) promoting Hussain to declare in autobiographic discourse that MQM was not only an ethnic based political party but it emerged for a class of people who were oppressed and exploited (Hussain, 2011, p.102). He continues that, Mohajirs share unique cultural values, distinct history and a different language and represent the "fifteen million of the country's population" (p.105).

The term ‘fifth nationality’ is introduced in chapter 4 of the book by using topos of definition, and making the term a part of Muhajir identity and their struggle. Four provinces constitute the Islamic Republic of Pakistan constitutionally and these four provinces are named after the four majority ethnic groups. The Mohajir desired to be identified as the fifth nationality since they believed themselves to form a sizable population in the urban centers of Sindh. The title of chapter 4 ‘The idea of fifth nationality’ makes use of the topos of definition that gives a political definition to Mohajir identity.

In his autobiographical account, Altaf Hussain in the margins of Chapter 9 has used Topos of threat in order to justify the foundation of Mohajir student organization. Their political essence was always deterred and hindered despite the fact that Mohajir were in considerable number. Beside political parties who had a clear manifesto to work for the promulgation of religious principals and doctrines, there acted sub ethnic federations and unions too to achieve their means. There are countless discursive strategies noticeable in the discourse to prove the threat to Muhajir identity and justification and the need for making of APMSO to protect their identity. He expresses the contradictions prevailed between the statements of religious parties and what they acted upon with the use of discursive strategy of comparison and difference He clarifies by saying that “On speaking to the Islami Jamiat e Tulaba’s members, they replied that we all were the seekers and followers of one religion that made us brothers.” On the other hand, the Progressive had an unwavering belief and trust on humans’ equality but everything proved theoretical and nothing practical” (p.37).

The discourse has the topos of definition being utilized time and again but with various meanings so as to present differently. Mohajirs identity was extremely elevated and backed up by the middle class members as transparently mentioned saying that “most of our members came from middle-class families and paid for their education by giving tuitions and were too poor to contribute financially” (p.38). The places in the text where the formation of APMSO is mentioned the text is found to be awashed with the utilization of deictic such as ‘we’ and strategy of collectivization.

- We set up units in NED...
- We needed more and more literature
- Each of our member paid at least Rs 25 but it was insufficient for our expenses
- We finally decided to approach the public
- We made teams
- Usually, we get only one or two rupees
- ... we would attend to other responsibilities
- All of us used to travel by bus
- After the launch of APMSO, we had to work very hard for our first campaign during admission time.
- We also had to get the posters and banners
- We did what we could
- We paid scant attention to such allegation

Conclusion

The word Mohajir despite its loud and audible tone being heard by public and by the staunch followers of Muttahida Quami Movement in the year of 1986 during a successful political congregation in Nishtar Park Karachi, had been on the pitch of public tongues since the 1947 partition. The identity of Mohajir from then onward reappeared and promulgated in print media; it then was established. It is quite obvious from the discourse that the identity of Mohajir for the first time politically came into being during the emergence of students' organization representing Mohajir as a completely autonomous ethnic class of the state. In the same era the political leader as autobiographical account shifted from 'I' to 'We'. Throughout the discourse the reader experiences several terms such as parochial differences, biased attitudes, and discrimination while using the discursive strategy of victimization along with topos of definition wholesomely, which depicts the transformational phases of immigrant identity of Urdu speaking Mohajir in Pakistan.

References

- Androvicova, J. (2013). Immigration in current political discourse- The case of Slovakia within the European Union. *Annual of Language and Politics and Politics of Identity*, (7), 5-28 Retrieved from <http://alppi.vedeckecasopisy.cz/publicFiles/00531.pdf>
- Baig, N. (2005). *From mohallah to mainstream: The MQM's transformation from an ethnic to a catch-all party* (Master's Thesis). University of Victoria
- Findlay, A. M., & Li, F. L. N. (1997). An auto-biographical approach to understanding
- Finna, A. D. (1999). Immigrant identities: A discourse analysis of narrative told by told by Mexicans in the United States.
- Goulbourne, H. (2004). *Race and Ethnicity: Critical concept in Sociology*. London.
- Grad, H. & Rojo, L. M. (2008) Identities in discourse. In Dolon, R. & Todoli, J. (Eds.), *Analysing identities in discourse* (pp. 3-28). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamin Publishing Company.
- Hellgren, Z. (2008): "(De) constructing European Citizenship. Political Mobilization and Collective Identity Formation among Immigrants in Sweden and Spain" in Bondebjerg, Ib & Madsen, P. (eds) *Media, Democracy and European Culture*, Bristol: Intellect.
- Hussain, A. (2011). My Life's Journey: The Early Years (1966-1988). Oxford: Oxford
- Killian, C., & Johnson, C. (2006). I'm not an immigrant: Resistance, redefinition and the role of resources in identity work. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 69 (1), 60-80
- Mexicans in the US*, PhD Dissertation, Georgetown University
- Mexicans in the US*: Oregon State University migration: the case of Hong Kong migrants. *Area*, 29(1), 34-44.
- Mohajir (1998). In *Ferozson Urdu English Dictionary*. Lahore: Ferozsons (Pvt.) Ltd
- New York: Routledge
- Potter, J. & Wetherell, M. (1987) *Discourse and Social Psychology*. London: Sage Publications
- University Press.
- Wodak, R. & Meyer, M. (2001). *Methods of critical discourse analysis*. London: Sage
- Wodak, R., Cillai, R., Resigl, M., Liebhart, K. (2009). *The discursive construction of national identity*: Edinburgh University Press.