

## **Representation of the Non-West: An Analysis of Patricia McCormick's *Sold* from Critical Discourse Analysis**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study analyzes Patricia McCormick's novel *Sold* using Critical Discourse Analysis, specifically employing "Building Tasks" by James Paul Gee and "Social Actor Theory" by Theo Van Leeuwen. Both theories aim to interpret discourses through a critical lens. The study examines the use of language in the text and suggests that the author has employed an Americanized perspective when portraying non-Western people, places, and cultures. It asserts that the author has activated a Westernized mentality while shaping the novel, potentially politicizing her notion of the superiority of Westerners and the inferiority of Easterners. The study concludes that such linguistic representations significantly maintain power, dominance, and social inequality in non-Western regions disguised in humanitarian acts.*

**Keywords:** Critical Discourse Analysis, Representation, Orientalism, Non-West

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### **Introduction**

Set in the Himalayan village of Nepal and the Red-Light area of Calcutta, India, the novel *Sold* by Patricia McCormick depicts the tough luck of a 13-year-old schoolgirl, Lakshmi, the protagonist of the novel. Written in the first-person voice of the girl, the story is disclosed in a series of crisply edited vignettes of free verse. Born in a desperately poor Nepali family, she

is sold into a brothel in India by her stepfather. Believing that she is going to work in the city and earn a handsome salary, Lakshmi hopes that her mother will finally have a tin-roofed house and enough money for joining hands to mouth. However, it is explicit to the readers that her stepfather will spend the money extravagantly at the tea shop or buy another useless contraption or the defunct motorcycle which he had bought when her mother pawned her earrings.

Further, sold only for 800 rupees, Lakshmi is escorted by "aunts and uncle-husbands" across the Indo-Nepali border, and into the teeming heartland of India. The adolescent is lastly re-sold at a remarkable profit, to a "Happiness House", a brothel in Calcutta's red-light district. After that, Lakshmi is locked in a room for several days. Her hair is shorn. She is beaten badly and starved for days, but she will not give in. A vignette titled "After Five Days" is written in one line: "After five days of no food and water, I don't even dream." Finally, a drugged glass of buttermilk does what hunger and confinement could not, and her first customer "rolls off" her. Drugged for several days, imprisoned in the room, men come and go. Even so, Lakshmi's spirit is not entirely broken and she still carries some hope in her inner heart. In "Happiness House," she also maintains a good friendship with eight-year-old Harish, the awe of watching *The Bold and the Beautiful*, the sparkle of Coca-Cola, and the liberating joy of a yellow pencil. Eventually, she is rescued by an American.

McCormick exposes the bitter realities of the life of Nepalese village people (Khanal, 2020) and the brothel of Calcutta in India to her reader. At the surface level, the writer has contributed more to the abolition of women's trafficking, the establishment of justice and equality, and the dissemination of Eastern norms and values. But in reality, her Americanized version of superiorizing the Westerners and inferiorizing the Easterners is reflected in the use of language and her constructed ideology (Joshi, 2019). In the novel, the novelist pictures the people, Nepalese mountain society, and Indian society as so miserable, slummy, and full of pangs and panics. Hence, it becomes imperative to apprehend the motifs of the writer behind such depictions and representations.

Lakshmi is portrayed as a dreamy, money-minded, meek, and non-resistant woman confined in the traditional norms and values of society. The writer develops her Orientalist perspective by using the American characters to rescue Nepali women from the 'Happiness House'. The Americans carry with them the 'burden' of rescuing the victims as they come with promises of safety, freedom, and enlightenment. This is the

writer's discourse, which she presents through characters – “you must carry yourself with modesty, bow your head with the presence of men and cover yourself with the shawl. Never look a man in the eye. Never allow yourself to be alone who are not family” (21)<sup>1</sup>. These are the words spoken by Ama while instructing Lakshmi on the social and cultural norms and values of society. By projecting the non-Western culture, tradition, place, and people negatively, she reflects the tendency of Western writers to inferiorize the Orientals (Talbot, 2005). Thus, the “Stereotyping and Othering” representation reinforces Western supremacy, dominance and ultimately dehumanizes Eastern cultures.

The writing of Eastern societies by Western author McCormick necessitates careful investigation of her cultural position. From her position as an outsider, she uses her narrative voice to potentially establish a patronizing attitude that upholds racist stereotypes. Essentialism of Eastern identities occurs because Western observers tend to position themselves at a distance from Eastern communities. According to Said (1978), power differences between Western and Eastern cultures generate these types of Depictions, particularly when the representations come from humanitarian concerns.

McCormick tries to characterize the position of Eastern women, place, and culture in a discriminatory, stereotypical, and manipulative way. She has written a series of novels that marked her as one of the major writers in the literary area, not only as a mere writer but also as a lady with multiple facets of her intellectual horizon (Rogers, 2010). As the writer relayed in her novel, even if the girls somehow get out of the brothel, their families nearly always reject them if they can find them again. In this context, this book is a powerful statement about the sex trade and a girl's ability to survive under desperate circumstances. Written in a series of almost poetic vignettes, this novel relays the confusion and immediacy of Lakshmi's situation and her ultimate decision to allow herself to be rescued. The writer has served the colonial interest portraying woman in the East as passive and unable to take decision while trying to establish that the Western intervention is necessary.

Commenting on its overall thematic structure and contents, The National Book Awards remarks: “...told in a series of hunting, *Sold* is a harrowing account of sexual slavery. Alternating lyrical imagery with

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<sup>1</sup> Such a number in parenthesis, here and in the forthcoming sections, indicates the page number of the novel, *Sold* from where the quoted statement is taken.

precise detail, McCormick gives voice to the terror and the bewilderment of a young girl of childhood, but who finds the strength to triumph” (24).

Similarly, Monika Subi Lakshmanan, a critic and researcher, also argues that “Yet, while analyzing *Sold*, I became aware that power circulates ubiquitously, both within the text and in the interpreter.... all exercised power over her identity...the third-world, the educator, and the researcher” (89). In the mentioned lines, she analyzes *Sold* as a site of the power circulation. According to her, power circulates universally and McCormick does the same in the novel. Since the identity of Lakshmi is at stake, Subi is caught up in the chain of her loss of identity. She further says that “...it is the awareness of the multiple and frequently conflicting sites of our identities that strengthens how we analyze, learn and interpret. Weaving into the text and out of ourselves, we can bring context and complexity to the way we look at the world” (89).

Again, Hazal Rochman talks about women who know no other way than to obey and serve men and their family; “Lakshmi is a young village girl lives with Ama, baby brother and greedy stepfather in family, soon after she gets her first blood/period, her stepfather starts looking her as a thing to sell her for a profit, not as a human being” (52). Rochman has viewed women in the text as commodities and regarded that females are compelled to sell their bodies soon after they get their first menstruation period. In the same manner, when Lakshmi feels mature, she wishes to share some of the responsibility for her family. She says “I am not a child anymore” (78).

Likewise, according to Glantz Shelly, McCormick reveals her gradual awakening to the harshness of the world around her. Even in their poverty-stricken rural home, Lakshmi finds pleasure in the Himalayan Mountains, the sight of Krishna, her betrothed, and the cucumbers she lovingly tends and then sells at the market. After a monsoon wipes out their crops, her dream of going to the city rises, and at the same time, her profligate stepfather sells Lakshmi for 800 rupees to an “auntie”. McCormick presents her as a dreamy girl, running after money and exaggerating the situation. Again, Shelly quotes: “In her village, Lakshmi had rebelliously purchased her first Coca-Cola for her mother, after her stepfather sold her; later in Calcutta, she overhears two men and realizes the price of a bottle of Coca-Cola at Bajai Sita’s store. That’s what he paid for (in turn) me” (79).

Although the study makes significant use of the concepts developed in Critical Discourse Analysis, particularly by James Paul Gee and Theo

Van Leeuwen, it does not offer a comprehensive analysis of the discourse beyond that.

As a Western author, McCormick's depiction of Eastern societies requires careful investigation of her cultural position. From her position as an outsider, she uses her narrative voice to potentially establish a patronizing attitude that upholds racist stereotypes. During interviews, McCormick describes herself as a witness to Eastern distress, which suggests she positions herself apart from her research subjects. Essentialism of Eastern identities occurs because Western observers tend to position themselves at a distance from Eastern communities. According to Said (1978), power differences between Western and Eastern cultures generate these types of Depictions, particularly when the representations come from humanitarian concerns.

The remaining parts of the study are structured as follows: Section 2 portrays the methodology used in the study. Section 3 discusses the representation of the non-West through the cover page, following Gee's Building Task Model, whereas the novel is analyzed from Leeuwen's Social Actor Theory in the fifth part, and the conclusion.

## **Methodology**

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is the methodological tool used to analyze this study's investigation. It looks at language items to examine, evaluate and judge cultural, social, and political items. It intervenes and tries to make a change. Most importantly, it presupposes every discourse as political, even the language. It endeavors to find the answers to the questions related to discursive analysis in the social, economic, and political world. It seeks to explain why the texts are the way they are and why they change the way they do (Gee, 2011a).

The study analyses the novel through the theoretical framework of James Paul Gee's semiotic system of "Seven Building Tools and Tasks". Gee divides the building tasks into seven tools: 1) Significance, 2) Activities (Practices), 3) Identities, 4) Relationships, 5) Politics (the distribution of social goods), 6) Connections, and 7) Sign systems and Knowledge. Gee asserts that language-in-use is not a tool, not just for saying, but also used alongside other non-verbal tools, to build things in the world. Further, he claims, "We use language to make things significant in certain ways". As the saying goes, we make "mountains out of molehills. Things are not important and unimportant all by themselves. We, humans, make them trivial or important or something in between" (67) (Gee, 2010b). Here, Gee

claims that things are as they are, but it's we who attribute the high and low significance while perceiving. Therefore, the question for the discourse analysis, at this point, according to Gee, is – how is the piece of language being used to make certain things significant or not, and in what ways?

In the same manner, the study is based on Leeuwen's Social Actor Theory. From this theory, we have selected some models: 1) Exclusion, 2) Role Allocation, 3) Generic Reference, 4) Association, 5) Indetermination and Differentiation, and 6) Nomination and Categorization. Leeuwen argues that critical discourse analysts do not just use discourse analytical methods; they also work with Critical Social Theory. So, it is based on the idea that text and talk play a key role in maintaining and legitimizing inequality, injustice, and oppression in society. He argues that his discourse explains Social Actor Theory as a systematic socio-semantic framework of the way humans can be represented in English (Farias & Veliz, 2016; Farias & Veliz, 2019; Leeuwen, 2010).

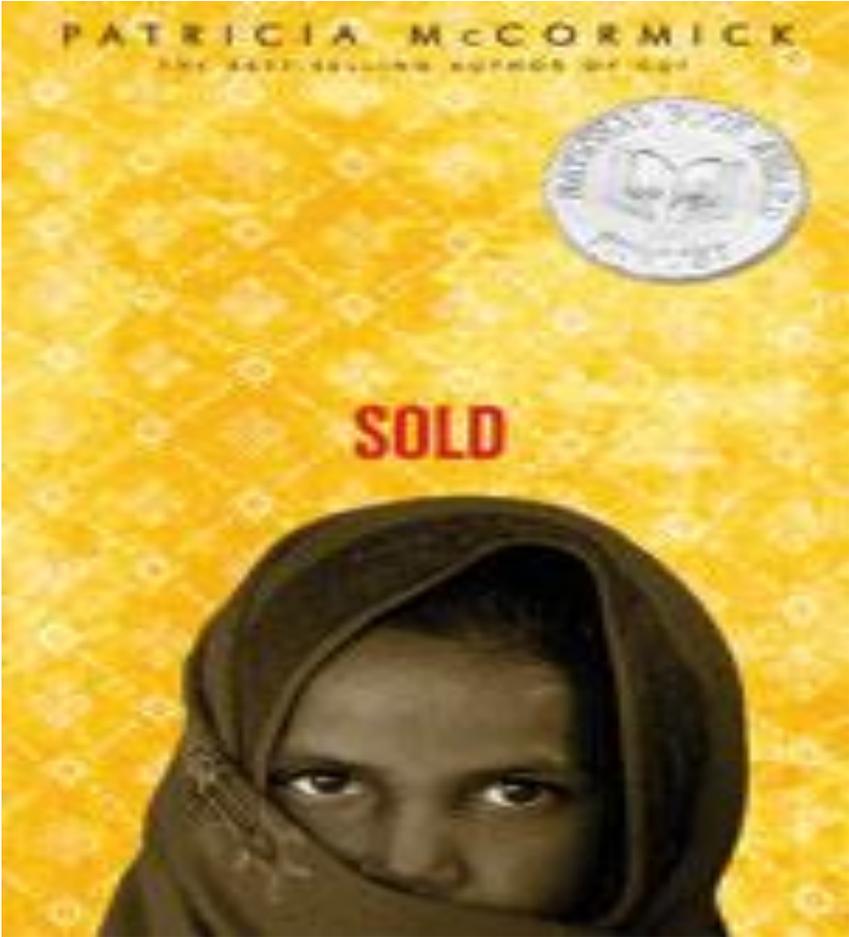
In addition to Gee and van Leeuwen's contributions, other theoretical perspectives can enrich the interpretation of *Sold*. Edward Said's Orientalism may be brought to the discussion of *Sold* to better describe how the East is commonly depicted in Western accounts as being poor, helpless, and in need of rescue. According to Said, the Western world constructs Eastern civilizations and peoples as strange and primitive beings that occupy a subordinate position to Western dominance (Scott, 2010). Through the narrative in *Sold*, McCormick potentially depicts Nepal and India as sites of endurance that ultimately lead to despair, thus creating favorable conditions for an American character to assume the role of rescuer. The narrative of a "White Savior" exists through as well as within Orientalist discourse. This reflects the "White Savior" narrative and fits within Orientalist discourse. Analyzing *Sold*'s ideological biases would become more evident through an intensified linkage to Said's theory. The analysis of *Sold* can reach deeper levels of critique by applying the interdiscursivity framework from Fairclough along with discourse and ideology theory from van Dijk to the text. Interdiscursivity as described by Fairclough lets individuals' study how different discourses such as humanitarianism and feminism together with postcolonialism and Orientalism merge throughout the novel to build intricate power relationships. Through this analytical method the reader can observe that beneficial-sounding stories frequently maintain existing social ideologies. The connection between social power and discourse along with ideology which van Dijk describes provides valuable tools to analyze how linguistic

elements in the novel foster hegemonic systems and maintain East–West religion disparities.

### Representation of the non-west through the cover page

#### Figure 1

*Cover page of the novel*



Showing a photograph of a girl with 'Sold' written over her head (Fig. 1), the writer intends to reflect a distorted reality of the non-West (Hall, 1997). Here, we can ensure three participants in the communicative interaction: the photographer, the subject of the photograph, and the

onlooker (Rose, 2001, p. 188). The elements of design are expressions of a discourse that is 'bound up with the social institutions within which the pictures are produced, circulated, and read. They are ideological (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 45). With an understanding that discourse constructs subjects and social practices, we try to analyze how the photograph and text generate discourse in the non-Western region, produce effects of truth, and convey a power relationship between the image/text and the viewer/reader.

The girl's covered head and mouth on the cover page is part of an archive of representations of the repressed Oriental woman (Bradford, 2007). Hence, the *provenance* of clothing and an embodied gesture has become the vocabulary for a discourse on repressive cultural practices and female disenfranchisement (Said, 1979). Her shawl has become a cultural signifier of oppression.

The photograph also triggers certain kinds of social relationships between the viewer and the viewed. The girl's gaze is powerfully experiential, arousing empathy, engagement, or at least, a voyeuristic curiosity. It is *not* the dreamy, long-distance gaze of reverie. It is a middle-distance "out of the frame" gaze that verges on the stare. The girl is not eyeing the future, but at *us*, holding the onlooker's attention in a relationship. Her gaze appears to speak, instead of the shielded mouth. There is a variety of literature written about the gaze (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; Tagg, 1988). If the selection of the photograph is conceptualized based on various literature on gaze, then the image on the cover goes beyond its exteriority entering a discourse on how identities and characters are interpreted within certain practices of social relationships.

Though at first glance, the cover photograph has a narrative function, when we dismantle the discourse visual system, the construct of a 'third world' woman's identity is evident. She is not a modern, voiceless subaltern who *demand*s (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996) a relationship of engagement and *evaluation* (Tagg, 1988). Here, the power is exercised in the viewer's response as an "evaluator". We can also draw a connection between the image and text. Both the image and the novel's use of first-person and present tense provoke the reader's identification and involvement in a contemporaneous reality, suggesting affective and participatory ways of knowing, understanding, and interacting with the world (van Dijk, 1995). Thus, emotive empathy with the protagonist motivates understanding and action, just like the photograph compels interpersonal engagement.

## Gee's Building Task Model in *Sold*: An Analysis

The concept of *significance* is the first model in Gee's Building Task Model. In *Sold*, the writer has built the reality as significant and insignificant at the same time as per her intentions. All the events and things in the novel are her imaginary creations. So, whatever is made more important or less important is the matter of the writer's desire/intention. The writer has a project that gives a kind of negative connotation to the Eastern people (Lakshmanan, 2009). The photo of an Eastern girl has been made significant as it has been given space on the front page of the book, but at the same time, the writer has the aim to represent Eastern people and culture in a derogatory way. The girl is shown as innocent and uneducated in her appearance. Not only that, she is presented as covering her face with a "burkha" (veil). On top of her, there is written the title in block letters "SOLD", which means she has been sold, meaning a girl in Eastern society is sold like an animal. So, the writer has given negative significance to the eastern girls and they are interpreted stereotypically (Magalhaes, 2005).

Not only the cover page but also the woman character's role is also built as *insignificant* in the novel. They are made lowly, poor, powerless, incapable, submissive, and vulnerable. The females in the novel have been shown that they have to perform tasks made under patriarchal norms (Magalhaes, 2005). The writer has signified the concept of Eastern people that "if you have a daughter, feed her at your breast for just a season so that your blood will start again, and you can try once more to bear a son. If your husband asks you to wash his feet, you must do as he says, then put a bit of the water in your mouth" (17). It shows the traditional and patriarchal norms working actively in Eastern society. The writer has tried to give significance to the superstitious behavior of the Eastern people. She intends to hide the practical and modern ways of thinking of these people. The writer writes that in her playing days, Lakshmi had to work "each morning as I go about my chores straining the rice water, grinding the spices, sweeping the yard" (5). She further writes that "all day, she trudges up and down the mountain, a heavy basket braced on her back and held fast by a rope around her brow, she is bent under the weight of her children..." (7).

Likewise, the writer presents the city's luxury under the title "New World" which makes the non-Western society and people inferior and forced to be ruled. She expresses those through Lakshmi and generalizes the condition of the Orient, which is emotional, to achieve city luxury. She writes, "A river that runs white. A man with teeth entirely of gold. It is a new world. But there is one thing constant: the mighty swallow-tailed peak.

It grows smaller the farther we walk, but still, it is always there, waiting to guide me back” (60-61). Thus, the writer has built the significance and insignificance of the things as her ideology is constructed (Bownas, 2019). *Activity (practices)* is the second building task in Gee’s Building Task Model. At this point, Gee opines that the function of language is not only *to communicate* things but also to make someone act the actions. It makes us do something. Here, the things that are meant to act include informing, encouraging, suggesting, etc. He further says that we humans use language to get recognized as engaging in a certain sort of practice or activity. We use language to carry out actions like promising and engaging and a great many others. However, we humans also enact what Gee calls larger activity, using the word in a special and restricted way. While arguing about *the activity*, Gee points out, “By *activity*, I mean socially recognized and institutionally or culturally supported endeavor that usually involves sequencing or combining actions in certain specified ways. Encouraging a student is an action, mentoring the student as his or her advisor in a graduate program is a practice” (45).

The novel opens with the innocent childhood of the main character, Lakshmi. She is a village girl living in a mountainous region. Everything changes after her “first blood”. Now, women, her mother schools her in “EVERYTHING I NEED TO KNOW”: “*Before* today, Ama says, you could run as free as a leaf in the wind. *Now*, she says, you must carry yourself with modesty, bow your head in the presence of men, and cover yourself with your shawl” (15). Recalling the picture of a shawl-covered girl on the cover page, her look of demand or evaluation is now changed to a downcast gaze of submission. The axis of time (before, now, never) is accompanied by varying degrees of modal verbs. *Before* she “could”, *now* she “must” and the future is locked in the assertion of a categorical, unconditional and non-modalized “never”. In this how-to-behave list of rules, Lakshmi must: “Never look a man in the eye. Never allow yourself to be alone with a man who is not your family and never look at growing pumpkins or cucumbers when you are bleeding, otherwise they will rot” (33). Once she is married, the mother's socio-cultural rule book adopts conditional if/then sentences, in which every *activity* is conditioned by males. The concept of male ideology is exercised to govern the different practices that are functioning in society. In this case, the reader knows that the antecedent (if) is not hypothetical, nor is the consequence (then) contingent on a previous event. Instead, the conditional clause alludes to a given causality of the circumstantial context. “*If* he burps at the end of the

meal, it is a sign that you have pleased him. *If he turns you in the night, you must give yourself up to him, in the hopes that you will bear him a son*” (15). After a series of instructions on breastfeeding a son as against a daughter, the vignette concludes with Lakshmi asking her mother: “Why,” I say, “must women suffer so?” “This has always been our fate,” she says. “Simply to endure,” she says, “is to triumph” (16).

When the mother gives the sequence of instructions that are bound by the male-dominated ideology, it shows some effect on the *activity* of Lakshmi. Because of these instructions, Lakshmi’s reaction/involvement is caused. Her engagement is evident in the above lines. Just Lakshmi asked “Why must women suffer so?”. The text demands the reader’s engagement and evaluation of the codes of behavior. At this point, Lakshmi’s *activity* is seen since she is engaged in the discourse. The mother’s reply becomes emblematic of the book’s representation of culturally determined female suffering. The sentence “*simply to endure is to triumph*” appears italicized on the inner jacket of the book. Evoking the stereotypical notion of Hindu passivity, determinism, and fatalism, temporality (before-now-always) and causality (if-then) are imprisoned in a socio-cultural system that obliterates the experiential difference between passivity (“to endure”) and agency (“to triumph”). This timeless obliteration of the human actor is linguistically endorsed by the statement “simply to endure is to triumph” in which a categorical universality is rendered by the present tense “is” (Said, 1979), and the implicit nominalization of endurance and triumph shifts the discourse from one of the conditional human agency to the collapsing of the actor into the action itself (Kress and Hodge 1993). In this way, the engagement and the involvement of the characters in their activities can be built by the use of language.

**Identity** is the third building task in Gee’s model. According to this model, we use language to get recognized as talking about a certain identity or role: that is, to build an identity here and now. For example, I talk and act in one way and I am speaking and acting as the chair of the committee; at the next moment, I speak and talk differently, and I am speaking and acting as just one peer/colleague speaking to another. Even if I have an official appointment as chair of the committee, I am not always taken as acting as the chair, even during meetings. At this point, Gee claims, “we often enact our identities by speaking or writing in such a way as to attribute a certain identity to others, an identity that we explicitly or implicitly compare or contrast to our own. We build identities for others as a way to build ones for ourselves” (24). In the novel *Sold*, the writer has a biased

mentality while building the *identities* of the characters. She has given a kind of negative identity to females, village life, and the whole Eastern world, whereas Western people and their way of thought are identified as worthy.

In the novel, the main character, Lakshmi, is compared with Tali (a dog); it means Lakshmi is *identified* as a dog. Not only that, the writer has identified the Eastern culture and tradition negatively. The name of the protagonist is given “Lakshmi”, the goddess of wealth and property in Eastern religious culture. But the character Lakshmi in the novel is portrayed as penniless and is compelled to sell even her flesh to earn money. Here, the writer provides the degenerated and negative identity of Eastern religious culture. Along with that, the writer has presented the females of the eastern region behaved as the commodity/property to use: “A son will always be a son, they say. But a girl is like a goat. Good as long as she gives you milk and butter. But not worth crying over when it’s time to make a stew” (41).

When Lakshmi was in the brothel in Calcutta, she was treated inhumanely, and her suffering was out of her control. Even in such a situation, the writer creates a positive image of the Western people in her mind and reader. Lakshmi, at this point, says: “The American lady is kind. Anita is wrong about the Americans, they do not shame the children of the brothels. Everyone there is as rich as a king. The birds there are as big as men. They eat a sweet treat made from snow” (112). In the given lines, the writer’s project is no other than *identifying* the Western people and place as superior and showing the Eastern people and place as inferior. In this way, at a majority of the times, the writer has *identified* her people, place, and culture as superior and others all inferior and outsiders.

**Relationship** is the fourth building task in Gee’s model. According to this tool, we use language to build and sustain relationships of all kinds. The language is used to signal what sorts of relationships we have, want to have, or are trying to have with our listener(s), reader(s), or other people, or organizations about what we are communicating. We use language to build relationships with other people and with groups and institutions. Moreover, we use language to build social relationships as well. Sometimes the relationship can be built relatively formal and deferential or sometimes relatively informal and less deferential. For the analysis of *relationships* in the discourse, we posit the following discourse analysis question and further the analysis: “What sort of relationship or relationships is the piece of language seeking to enact with others (present or not)?

The novel, *Sold* has a lot of examples that show the *relationship* between and among the characters, among the characters and the writer/narrator, etc. The writer has shown a relationship that is distanced and non-dialogic. In her webpage interview, she says: “It helped that I was a foreigner on the busy streets of Kathmandu and Calcutta because I was as bewildered and awestruck by these places as Lakshmi in the novel.” In the novel, Lakshmi, the author, and the reader view Nepal and India as outsiders. Moreover, the relationship between father and daughter in the Nepali village life is also represented negatively in the novel. The relationship between Lakshmi and her stepfather is not cooperative, lovely, and helpful. The stepfather, who is the representative of the whole eastern region, is shown as a cruel father who sells his daughter to earn money. The intention of the writer behind showing such a relationship between a daughter and father is no other than the internalization of Eastern people.

Along with the above-mentioned relationship, the relationship between Eastern people and Western people has also been shown as if these two are opposite to each other. The distance is shown between them. In the novel, when the American comes to have sex with Lakshmi, he does not become much closer to her rather finishes his intended act and moves.

*Politics (the distribution of social goods)* is the fifth task of Gee’s model. This tool argues that we use language to convey a perspective on the nature of the distribution of social goods, that is, to build a perspective on social goods. Gee uses the term “politics” in a special way. By “politics” he does not mean government and political parties; rather, he means any situation where the distribution of social goods is at stake. By “social goods” he means anything a social group of society takes as a good worth having. We use language to build and destroy social goods. For example, treating people with respect in certain circumstances is a social good and treating them with disrespect is not. Speaking and acting respectfully and deferentially in these circumstances creates and distributes social good. There are other circumstances where people want to be treated not deferentially, but with solidarity and bonding.

The novel *Sold* is full of politics. The writer has political motivation in the creation of this novel. Though she seems to be doing something good for the abolition of girl trafficking by publicizing the pangs and panics of the trafficked women, she has her own internalized intention behind showing such a pitiable and pathetic situation. The representation is not actual/true; rather, things are sometimes exaggerated overtly and sometimes underestimated as per the need or the writer's mentality. The

ending of the novel is political. In the end, she brings an American to rescue Lakshmi, who has been suffering so inhumanely in the prostitution house in Calcutta. Once, he came to her for his own business, and after fulfilling his thirst for sex, he behaved somehow nicely with her because of which impressed Lakshmi is impressed much. At the same time, he promises her to take in a clean place and she waits for him eagerly, believing that he will rescue her. After “days of waiting for the American” who has promised to liberate her, the book concludes with a raid, and Lakshmi’s reassurance that “her” American has arrived has been written as “I know this voice. It is my American...My American is leaving...Something inside me breaks open, and I run down the steps...I see my American. There are other men with him” (263). In this brief concluding episode of three pages, the word “American” occurs nine times. Thus, the ending of the novel is political.

### **Reading *Sold* from the Lens of Leeuwen’s Social Actor Theory**

Van Leeuwen (2008) identifies the choice between generic and specific representation as an important factor in the representation of social actors. According to Leeuwen, it's a framework for describing the representation of social action in English discourse, attempting to relate sociologically relevant categories of action to their grammatical and rhetorical realization in discourse. Departing from Halliday's theory of transitivity (Halliday, 1994), it begins by describing 15 types of action and their typical grammatical realizations. It then describes the transformations which social actions can undergo in discourse—transformations such as exclusion, objectivation, deagentialization, generalization, abstraction and overdetermination, assimilation, association, generic reference, indetermination, and differentiation. Among them, five are taken for the analysis in this study.

**Exclusion** is the very first framework of Leeuwen’s Social Actor Theory. While defining this frame in the book's coda of acknowledgments, McCormick writes that “Some social actors who are in reality part of an action and event or practice, may be left out, and remain unrepresented, excluded...deemed irrelevant in the context- or problematic, preventing a full understanding of what happens or has happened” (72). This can be analyzed through Leeuwen’s point that in some of the discourses, the active participants are not given the proper space, but rather are abandoned or left out. Sometimes such exclusion is done intentionally and sometimes it is done unknowingly. Systematic exclusions are always of interest.

In *Sold*, we can see ample evidence that the writer has intentionally excluded. The role of Nepali and Indian human rights activists or those fighting against women trafficking in rescuing Lakshmi from the brothel is intentionally excluded. In one of her interviews, McCormick says, “This book could not have been written without the help of Ruchira Gupta and Anuradha Koirala, who paved the way for me to visit the Maiti Nepal shelter for women and children in Kathmandu...” (20). Though McCormick points out that the people from Nepal and India have helped her in writing the novel and actually they have done a lot in fighting against women trafficking, she provides a negligible role to them. It is more evident when she brings an American to rescue Lakshmi at the end of the novel. What would it be if she had shown Lakshmi being free from Nepali human rights activists? Not to show such a scenario in the novel is no other than her exclusion theory. That’s why it is the writer’s systematic intention to exclude and belittle the concepts of Easterners.

**Role allocation** is the next aspect in Leeuwen’s theory. He says social actors may be “activated”, given an agent role, or “passivized”, given a patient role. The same thing can indeed be allocated highly, and the same thing can be made dependent on others. This all depends upon the intention and interest of the language users. In *Sold*, different intentional roles are allocated by the writer. The women and Eastern characters are given the role of the patient, whereas the people from the West are given the role of the agent. In the novel, Lakshmi is sold by her stepfather. It means the stepfather has possession of Lakshmi. So, Lakshmi is shown as a passive character, and her stepfather is shown as an active (perpetrator). Later, she is rescued by an American or the American is made an agent, given an active role. He is shown as a rescuer. But all other eastern human rights activists are not only excluded but also given a passive role. In this way, it can be claimed that how social actors are “activated”, “passivized” and “valorized” is determined by the discourse.

**Generic reference** is the next aspect of Social Actor Theory. In this case, social actors are generalized, referred to as classes of people rather than as specific, identifiable individuals. All the social actors are assimilated or represented as groups: stepfathers, mothers (Ama), aunts, uncles, and Americans. Stepfathers are presented as if they sell their daughters to brothels. They are all grouped into one and generalized. It is an overgeneralization because all people do not do that. Not only city aunts but also other men are shown as if they help the trade of sex slavery. To generalize them all in one category is a mistake because some of these

people have helped to end girl trafficking, too. Moreover, Americans are shown as they are the people to rescue and protect others. Lakshmi, in the novel, has suffered much from Mumtaz, but at last, she is freed by an American. Hence, McCormick is trying to generalize that the Americans are the people who rescue and provide freedom for those who are helpless, tortured, and have suffered much. Thus, the generalization is evident in the novel.

**Association** is the next aspect in Leeuwen's "Social Actor Theory" Associations are groups formed to engage in a common activity or pursue a common interest. Often they are impermanent, lasting only as long as the faint activity, and the text they may and un-form as the text proceeds. In the novel, all the characters/actors are associated with something. Lakshmi's stepfather, city aunt, a man, and Mumtaz are all associated with the process of women trafficking. Lakshmi and Gita are about a group who work as slaves in brothel houses.

Leeuwen's next tool is *indetermination and differentiation*. He argues that indetermination occurs when social actors are represented as unspecified, "anonymous" individuals or groups whose identity does not matter. It is mostly realized by indefinite pronouns such as somebody, someone, some people, etc. On the other hand, differentiation explicitly differentiates an individual social actor or group from a similar actor of the group, again creating a "us" and a "them". The dichotomy between us versus them is exercised in the novel. The presentation of non-Western people as outsiders and strangers illustrates the differentiation of the writer.

Thus, the writer has used a lot of examples of indetermination. Mostly unidentified people are involved in the sex trade. She names them any man, everyman, dirty man, fat man, ugly man, etc. By giving anonymous names, she intends to hide the real identity of the people. Not only that, but differentiation also has occurred in the novel. She has created "we" for the Americans and she has identified them as the rescues, whereas "they" is identified for non-Americans. They are represented as the perpetrators.

As the novel largely presents Eastern characters as passive victims, a careful analysis of the novel demonstrates subtle moments of resistance and agency. Through her developing friendships and moments of rebellion and decision to place trust in the American agent, Lakshmi displays an inner strength. These events in the narrative present opposition to the prevailing story, which dramatizes rescue, whereas they disrupt the simplistic division between victimhood and saving actions. By not including these significant

moments in her work, the writer fails to recognize the opportunity to present Eastern women as complex beings with multiple layers of experiences.

*Nomination and Categorization* are the next aspects of Leeuwen's Social Actor Theory. At this point, Leeuwen says those social actors may be represented in terms of their unique identity, by being nominated, or in terms of identities and functions they share with others. On the other hand, the nomination is of course realized by proper nouns, which can be formal (surname only, with or without honorifics), semi-formal (given name and surname), or informal (given name only). While nominalizing the characters, McCormick provides only the name of the character, not the surname. For example, she gives the name of the main character as Lakshmi only; she has not given her complete identity; rather, she is partially identified by her name.

### **Conclusion**

Thus, taking impetus from Building Tasks and Social Actor Theories, the study comes to the point that the "lens" used by the writer while gazing over the non-Western discourses is colored with her intention. The fundamental point of the study is that the creation of this piece of literature is the outcome of McCormick's perspective and her latent Americanized lens. Her work seems to be informative for people, but it does not make any difference in the size of women trafficking in Nepal, as this type of literature is not read or accessed by the stakeholders in rural Nepal. McCormick presents Lakshmi as a beautiful object of the voyeuristic male gaze. On the surface level, McCormick seems to do something good by publicizing the pangs and panics of an innocent, uneducated girl. Not only that, but she also seems to add an extra stone to the process of elimination of the burning problem of women trafficking in non-Western regions. But the hidden reality is different. McCormick has her political strategy in the creation of this piece of literature. She is trying to prove the Orientalist version of 'Whiteman's burden' to teach, civilize, and rescue the uneducated Eastern people. Moreover, it also explores the discriminatory execution of power politics, i.e., the domination of the powerful over the powerless.

The main purpose pursued by McCormick shifts between teaching and political activism. Through her straightforward poetic writing style and straightforward story structure, McCormick seems to want to help Western youth clearly understand modern slavery. However, this pedagogical motive, couched in a politicized portrayal of the East, blurs the line between education and ideological reinforcement. When educational goals serve as

McCormick's main purpose her use of political elements, including White Savior stereotypes, might obscure the intended learning experience by recycling dominant Western perspectives. Thus, the author's representation of the subject in the text is questionable. The intention is to cater to the oriental realities to please the Western readers and construct truth. Her representation of Nepali societies is her politics of misrepresentation. She misrepresents oriental societies to establish the superiority of the Western world that functions as 'an emancipatory role.' Pondering these findings, the study claims that such linguistic representations have an important role in maintaining relationships of power, dominance, and social inequality in non-Western regions.

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