

## **Resistance and Resilience in Disability Discourse: A Critical Analysis of Preeti Monga’s “The Other Senses”**

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### **Abstract**

Language functions as a potent medium for expressing power, ideologies, and resistance. This paper employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyze \*The Other Senses\* by Preeti Monga, focusing on how the narrative resists stigmatization and systemic inequality towards visually impaired individuals. Drawing on Fairclough's textual and sociocultural analysis, the study explores how language challenges dominant narratives around disability and constructs new paradigms of empowerment and resilience. Monga's narrative repositions disability from a lens of pity to a realm of potential and independence, making a significant contribution to disability studies and critical discourse theory.

### **Introduction**

Language, far from being neutral, is a tool wielded to sustain or subvert power structures. Historically, disability has been stigmatized, with societal discourse and literature often portraying disabled individuals as either objects of pity or villains. Disability, as Barnes, Mercer, and Shakespeare (1999) note, has historically been shaped by industrial capitalism, which views able-bodiedness as the norm. In this context, Preeti Monga's \*The Other Senses\* offers a personal narrative that resists these oppressive structures. By recounting her journey as a visually impaired individual, Monga demonstrates resilience and reframes disability as a dimension of human diversity.

This study employs Fairclough's (1997) CDA framework, which examines the relationship between text, power, and ideology. Van Dijk (1993) emphasizes the critique of dominance in societal discourses, which perpetuate inequality, particularly around race, gender, class, and disability. Monga's narrative, analyzed through this lens, becomes a site of resistance against oppressive ideologies and a celebration of resilience.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis of \*The Other Senses\***

#### **1. Resisting the Language of Pity**

Monga's narrative actively confronts the societal tendency to view disability through the lens of pity. Her description of being treated as a 'pitiful object' by friends and neighbors (p. 27) highlights the pervasive marginalization of disabled individuals. However, she resists this narrative by asserting her self-worth and capabilities: "As far as I was concerned, I felt no different from the other girls" (p. 44). This rejection of societal pity aligns with Fairclough's (1992) assertion that discourse can be a tool for challenging dominant ideologies.

#### **2. The Role of Education and Skill Development**

Education emerges as a transformative tool in Monga's journey. Despite being rejected by mainstream schools, her enrollment in a school for the blind and her subsequent achievements in Indian Classical Music through the Gandharva Maha Vidyalay (p. 47) illustrate her resilience. Education serves as a means of challenging societal barriers and asserting economic independence. Shakespeare and Watson (2001) argue that social and physical barriers, rather than impairments, marginalize disabled individuals. Monga's success exemplifies this argument, showing that access to resources and opportunities enables empowerment.

### 3. Intersectionality of Gender and Disability

The narrative also sheds light on the compounded discrimination faced by women with disabilities. Monga recounts the rejection of marriage proposals once her visual impairment was revealed (p. 93). After marriage, her husband perpetuated verbal abuse, referring to her as a 'blind bat' and reminding her of his perceived charity in marrying her (p. 105). These experiences echo Van Dijk's (1993) critique of social dominance, which often intersects across multiple axes of identity, including gender and disability. Despite these challenges, Monga's resilience shines through as she carves a successful career, offering a critique of societal biases.

### 4. Redefining Disability as Strength

Monga redefines disability not as a limitation but as an opportunity to develop unique strengths. She writes, 'I have been fortunate in having succeeded in leaping into the unknown, in pursuit of my dreams... clutching onto the rope of faith, depending upon the wings of 'the other senses' (p. 177). This reframing aligns with Barnes et al.'s (1999) argument that disability should not be viewed through a deficit model but as a form of diversity. Monga's adaptation and success challenge the traditional dichotomy of 'abled' versus 'disabled.'

### 5. Disrupting Dominant Ideologies

Monga's narrative critiques the societal structures that perpetuate inequality. As Fairclough (1997) notes, CDA examines how language reflects and reinforces societal power imbalances. Monga's experiences of being denied admission to regular schools (p. 46) and her eventual triumph as an entrepreneur and trauma counselor disrupt the dominant discourse that equates disability with incapacity. Her story serves as an example of how personal narratives can challenge and transform societal ideologies.

## Discussion

Through CDA, Monga's *\*The Other Senses\** emerges as a powerful critique of societal attitudes towards disability. Her narrative not only resists the stigmatization of disability but also redefines resilience and agency. The interplay of textual representation and lived experiences demonstrates the potential of language to reshape societal ideologies.

Monga's narrative aligns with Van Dijk's (1993) assertion that discourse is central to both the reproduction and resistance of dominance. By foregrounding her personal experiences, she challenges the 'negative portrait' of disability that has historically dominated literary and cultural representations (Singh, 2024). Her journey illustrates the importance of empowerment through education, skill development, and economic independence, providing a roadmap for challenging systemic barriers.

## Conclusion

Preeti Monga's *\*The Other Senses\** exemplifies how personal narratives can resist oppressive ideologies and advocate for systemic change. Through a critical discourse analysis, this study has demonstrated how Monga's narrative challenges the stigmatization of disability, highlights the intersectionality of gender and disability, and redefines resilience as a core component of the disability experience.

Monga's story underscores the importance of language in reshaping societal perceptions, aligning with Fairclough's (1992) argument that discourse is both a reflection of and a tool for social change. Her narrative contributes significantly to disability studies by providing an empowering perspective on disability, emphasizing the need for an inclusive and equitable society.

### **References**

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