

Discursive Resistance to Orientalism: A Critical Approach to an Ideological Justification

Ms. Ghulam Hifsa¹, & Dr. Tabassum Saba²

¹ PhD Scholar, Department of English Language and Literature, University of Lahore, Lahore, Pakistan. E-mail: hafssashah@gmail.com

² Assistant Professor, PhD Advisor, Department of English Language and Literature, University of Lahore, Lahore, Pakistan. E-mail: tabassum.saba@ell.uol.edu.pk

Correspondence: Ms. Ghulam Hifsa, PhD Scholar, Department of English Language and Literature, University of Lahore, Lahore, Pakistan. E-mail: hafssashah@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study seeks to investigate the use of language to justify an ideological stance. It uses a qualitative and an interpretive research paradigm. It aims to foreground the ideological role of discursive strategies, explore the dichotomous construction of 'us' and 'them' in a socio-political context, and determine the ideological positioning of the author. It further seeks to foreground the importance of critical reasoning to challenging discursive hegemony and preserving identity in the contemporary world. Said's Orientalist Theory (1978) and Wodak's Discourse Historical Approach (2001) are used as the theoretical perspectives. DHA provides distinct discursive strategies of nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, intensification, and mitigation for the analysis of 'us' vs. 'them' construction. These strategies are used as methods for data collection. Muhammad Asad's book 'Islam at the Crossroads' is selected as the sample for the current study. The study supported foregrounding the ways in which ideological stance is justified and subjective positioning is neutralized through the strategic use of language. The results also revealed the importance of critical reasoning to understanding religious thought in the contemporary world. It further supported highlighting a counter-narrative to the Orientalist perspective about Islam and raising consciousness about the Islamic identity.

Keywords: strategic use of language, ideological construction, subjective positioning, dichotomous construction, critical reasoning

1. Introduction

Language is a sociocultural practice that plays an important role in the production, change and maintenance of power relations. Language and social cognition are intertwined, as all the grammatical features of the language shape cognition (Maass *et al.*, 2022). According to Fairclough (1989), consciousness is the first step towards emancipation. In the 21st-century globalized world, language functions have become complex. Formal analysis of language as a socio-cultural practice overlooks ideological functions. According to Mahalingappa (2024), awareness about the strategic use of language requires a critical approach to raise consciousness to safeguard one's cultural and religious identity. The present study is a critical approach to the discourse of Muhammad Asad (1900–1992) in the broader paradigm of critical discourse analysis. In the modern era of transformations, cultural assimilation, religious pluralism and ideological imposition, it is imperative to draw the attention of new generation to the significance of critical reasoning in ideological constructions. Muhammad Asad, formerly named as Leopold Weiss at birth, was a European intellectual and an Austro-Hungarian-born Muslim scholar of the 20th century. The current study aims at foregrounding the ideological role of discursive strategies, exploring the dichotomous construction of 'us' and 'them' by Asad in a socio-political context, and determining his ideological positioning. It further seeks foregrounding the importance of the intellectual conception of Islam in the contemporary world.

The over-emphasized theological conception of Islam has raised confusion about the basic Islamic thought at national and international levels. This religious void in a technologically globalized world is paving the way for cultural assimilation and blind westernization. The growing impact of Western culture has leveled the remnants of Islamic culture to the ground, and the Muslim community is left with little energy to provide sufficient resistance to this process. The post-9/11 socio-political landscape has deepened misunderstandings about Islam and Islamic identity. Orientalist discourse, reinforced by traditional scholars' focus on theology, has led to widespread misconceptions about Islam and the Muslim Ummah. Meanwhile, globalization, cultural assimilation and the intellectual stagnation of Muslim scholarship have intensified concerns about preserving Islamic identity. Given this context, examining how discursive constructions shape perceptions of Islam, and how critical reasoning can counter ideological hegemony, is essential to addressing these challenges. The identity crisis of contemporary Muslim Ummah, in general, and Pakistani community, in particular, is because of unresolved intellectual conflict between modern epistemology and Islamic (tawhidic) epistemology. Therefore, the revival of Islamic thought to foreground the critical and evaluative vision of Islam is required seriously in the modern world. The intellectual revival may lead the Pakistani community to safeguard their Islamic identity in the modern world (Rosli & Lubis, 2021).

Said's *Orientalist Theory* (1978) and Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (2001) form the theoretical perspective of this study. Orientalist Theory provides only a conceptual lens for understanding ideological constructs; therefore, the methodological framework is based on DHA, as it offers practical tools for analyzing discourse that Orientalist Theory lacks. The results proved that language plays a significant role in the ideological construction of discourse. Further, the critical approach to the discursive constructions raises consciousness about the power imbalance embedded in the discourse. Fairclough (1989) and Wodak (2001) argue that awareness is the first step towards emancipation. The ideological benefit of the current study is the foregrounding of a counter-narrative to the Orientalist perspective, and raising awareness about the cultural and religious identity of Muslim Ummah, in general, and the Pakistani community, in particular. The study further supported raising awareness about the importance of critical reasoning, to a better understanding of religious philosophy, and the ideological positioning of the writer.

1.1 Research Objectives

- To critically examine how the dichotomy of us/self and them/other is discursively constructed and naturalised.
- To foreground the ideological positioning of Asad within the broader discourse on Orientalism.
- To highlight the role of critical reasoning in challenging hegemonic Orientalist Ideology.
- To emphasize the significance of critical reasoning in preserving Islamic identity in the contemporary world.

1.2 Research Questions

- 1 What language choices and discursive strategies does Muhammad Asad employ to construct an ideological divide between 'us' and 'them'?
- 2 How does Muhammad Asad position himself ideologically within the broader discourse on Orientalism?
- 3 What role does critical reasoning play in challenging hegemonic Orientalist ideology?
- 4 To what extent does critical reasoning contribute to preserving Islamic identity?

2. Background to the Study

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) serves as the overarching theoretical and methodological framework for this study. It views language as discourse central to social processes and in constant interaction with other elements (Fairclough, 2001). In this context, language reflects ideology (Wodak & Meyer, 2009), functioning as a tool for analyzing political and ideological agendas (Liando & Tatipang, 2022), rather than merely as a linguistic object (Rahardi et al., 2020). CDA thus enables examination of the politics of language (Hidayat, 2022). Ideology, as embedded in discourse, is not exclusive to dominant groups; marginalized voices also carry ideologies (Belsey, 2003; Van Dijk, 2005). The core aim of CDA is to reveal both transparent and hidden power relations such as dominance, discrimination, and control encoded in language (Wodak, 2011). This study adopts Said's Orientalist Theory (1978) and Wodak's Discourse Historical Approach (2001) within the CDA paradigm. Said (1978) argues that the Orient has historically served as both a colonial prize and a cultural counterpoint to Europe, shaping self-definition of the West. Orientalism, he suggests, reflects a Western desire to dominate the East. Drawing on Gramsci's concept of hegemony (Gramsci, 1971; 1999), Said (1996) critiques this entrenched worldview, advocating critical thinking to resist oversimplified binaries such as West, Islam, and America. His call is particularly relevant to humanities scholars, as he believed in the power of intellect, and individual vision, to transcend cultural and historical limitations.

The Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) by Wodak is employed as both a theoretical and methodological framework. Asad constructs a dichotomy between Islam and Western civilization, and DHA offers discursive strategies for analyzing this construction: referential/nomination, predication, perspectivization, argumentation and intensification/mitigation strategies. These guide the data collection process through examination of textual, socio-political and ideological elements. Referential strategies represent social actors, actions, and processes. Wodak and Reisigl (2001) note that personal references often depict groups disapprovingly. Predication strategies assign evaluative characteristics, often through adjectives, particularly in discriminatory discourse (p. 45). Perspectivization sets the discursive stance, revealing how power and ideology are shaped through language. Argumentation strategies use topoi (rhetorical warrants) to justify positive or negative attributions (Wodak, 2006; 2009). Topoi provide quasi-argumentative links between arguments and conclusions, often legitimizing policy claims without strong evidence (Wodak & Reisigl, 2001; Wodak, 2011). They help frame blame and reinforce desired perceptions. Intensification and mitigation strategies adjust the epistemic force of utterances (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016). In this study, these strategies are applied through detailed analysis of textual, contextual, cognitive, and ideological dimensions.

2.1 Postmodern Epistemology and Asad's Thought

Muhammad Asad (Leopold Weiss), born in Livow, Austria (later Poland) in 1900, was one of the most influential Austro-Hungarian-born Muslim scholars of the 20th century. He was a traveler, journalist, linguist, writer, political theorist, and diplomat (Harder et al., 1998). Asad, having witnessed the shortcomings of the Enlightenment, offers a critical perspective on modern Western civilization and its spiritual vacuum. The relationship between religion and politics in the post-postmodern era emerges as a key theme (Benedikter, 2022). Postmodern epistemology challenges objectivity and asserts that comparative accounts are shaped by the scholar's ideological aims. At the dawn of the 21st century, the necessity of absolute truth, objective knowledge and development is questioned, leading to an identity crisis. The demolition of both micro and macro structures deepens this sense of rootlessness. Consequently, any study of religion without cultural perspective risks becoming speculative or disjointed (Paden, 2005). Embedded in this postmodern socio-political and intellectual context, the current study critically examines Asad's discourse within the broader context of postmodernity, emphasizing the significance of

scientific reasoning in understanding religion.

2.2 Available Literature on Muhammad Asad

Muhammad Asad was a prominent 20th-century activist, modernist and diplomat-scholar. Most studies on his work are thematic and descriptive, focusing on his spiritual transformation, political insights, and critique of Western materialism. His English Qur'anic exegesis, addressing Western intellectuals, is regarded as the best in its category. Asad promoted a rationalist interpretation of the Quran to emphasize dynamic spirit of Islam and relevance to modernity (Ahmad & Amir, 2016). He advocated reviving Islamic values in governance, education and society, presenting Islam as a holistic way of life (Hassan, 1998). Andrabi (2007) praised Asad's integration of Islamic tradition with modernity and his balanced critique of the West. Asad (2012) describes his father, a European intellectual who embraced Islam to liberalize it, and portrays Islam as a diverse yet coherent tradition. He believed non-Muslims are best persuaded through reason.

In *The Road to Mecca*, Asad narrates his journey as an assimilated European Jew rediscovering his Oriental roots, a paradox central to European Jewish Orientalism (Rubin, 2016). Asad (1993) reflects on his father's conversion to explore religious identity, secularism and modernity. Thasneen (2008) compares spiritual quests of Asad and Das, both resolving modern existential crises through Islamic monotheism. Mayberry (2024) highlights Asad's *ijtihad* and rationalism, positioning him between traditionalism and modernism. Rosli and Lubis (2021) emphasize his transformation and intellectual impact on 20th-century Islamic thought. Rubin (2016) explores his conversion through Jewish identity politics, while Mohd and Embong (2017) identify the main challenges Asad highlighted for Islamic civilization; pseudo-scholars, Orientalism and Western influence.

2.3 Research Gap

Existing literature on Asad is largely descriptive, with limited critical analysis of his intellectual legacy. Despite his impact on 20th-century Islamic thought, his contributions to the intellectual philosophy and interfaith dialogue remain underexplored. While his critique of Western materialism and spiritual journey have received attention, less focus has been given to how his counter-narrative addresses contemporary challenges such as Orientalism, globalization and identity concerns especially post-9/11. Examining these dimensions offers valuable insights into the modern relevance of his thought.

3. Methodology

The present study is analytical and qualitative with the ontology and the epistemology of constructivism, post-structuralism and critical theory. Multiple aspects as the nature of the study, objectives, questions, nature of the data, reflections, analysis and application etc. have been considered before the decision on research methods. The study is critical and needs to be related to the social, political, religious, and cognitive contexts for the elicitation of appropriate and valid data, and the systematic and procedural analysis. Castellan (2010) states three principles to judge the efficacy of a research paradigm i.e., a clear and pervasive commitment of scholars to the conceptual framework, the network of shared assumptions and sources of research questions.

3.1 Theoretical Underpinning and Methodological Framework

Within the broader paradigm of Critical Discourse Analysis, Said's Orientalist Theory (1978) and Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (2001) form the theoretical perspectives. Orientalist Theory provides a conceptual lens for understanding ideological constructs, but it lacks a methodological framework. Therefore, DHA is used as the methodological foundation, offering macro strategies for practical for analysis of discourse.

3.2 Data Collection Methods

Discourse Historical Approach provides discursive strategies which include referential/nomination strategies, predication strategies, perspectivization strategies, argumentation strategies, and intensification/ mitigation strategies. These strategies are used as methods for data collection and are realized by scrutinizing the textual elements, socio-political contextual elements, and ideological elements for the elicitation of relevant data.

3.3 Data Analysis Tools

Discourse Historical Approach does not delineate the data analysis tools; therefore, from the broader critical discourse analysis paradigms, generalized data analysis tools proved instrumental in analyzing Asad's discursive strategies, such as nouns, adjectives, adverbs, assertions/denials, question/answer pairs, topoi, amplification, personal pronouns, metaphors, modality, framing, hedging, intertextuality/ interdiscursivity, inferences, and presuppositions etc.

3.4 Sample of the Study

Asad, a Jewish converted to Islam, authored several English prose works, attributing his conversion to scientific inquiry and self-reflection. His discourse is selected using purposive sampling that is a non-probability technique ideal for selecting relevant units based on uniqueness, precision, and procedural relevance (Thomas, 2022). This method suits the focus of the study on relativism, ideological constructs, identity, and existential concerns. His book *Islam at the Crossroads* is chosen for its socio-political relevance, and the selected extracts align with the discursive strategies of Wodak's Discourse Historical Approach.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

Qualitative research can be reliable only when the opted procedures and strategies are explicit and a detailed account of contextual settings

is given (Brink, 1993). The validity and reliability are ensured with the procedural and systematic progression. The results are based on researcher's critical reasoning about the interrelatedness of the textual, socio-political, contextual, and ideological aspects of the discourse.

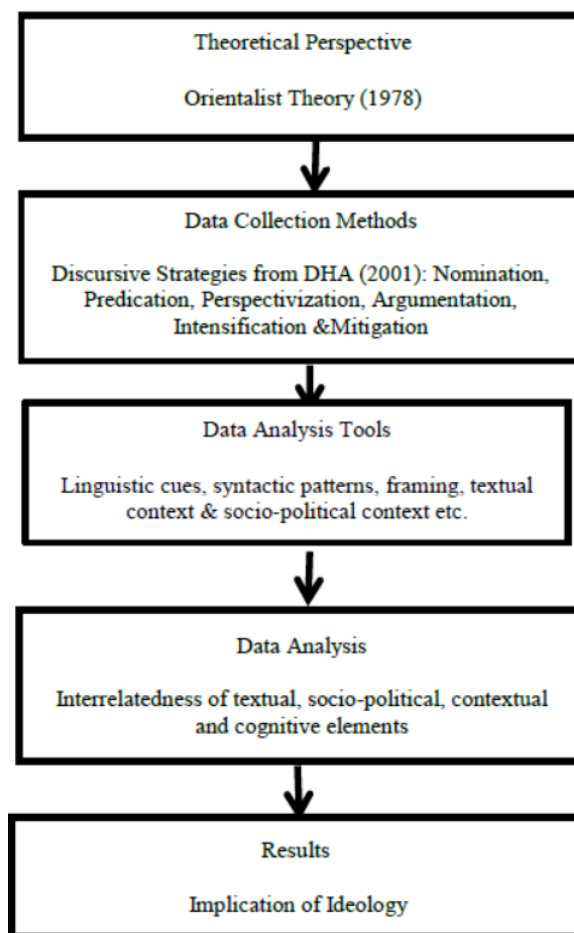


Figure 1. Methodological Framework

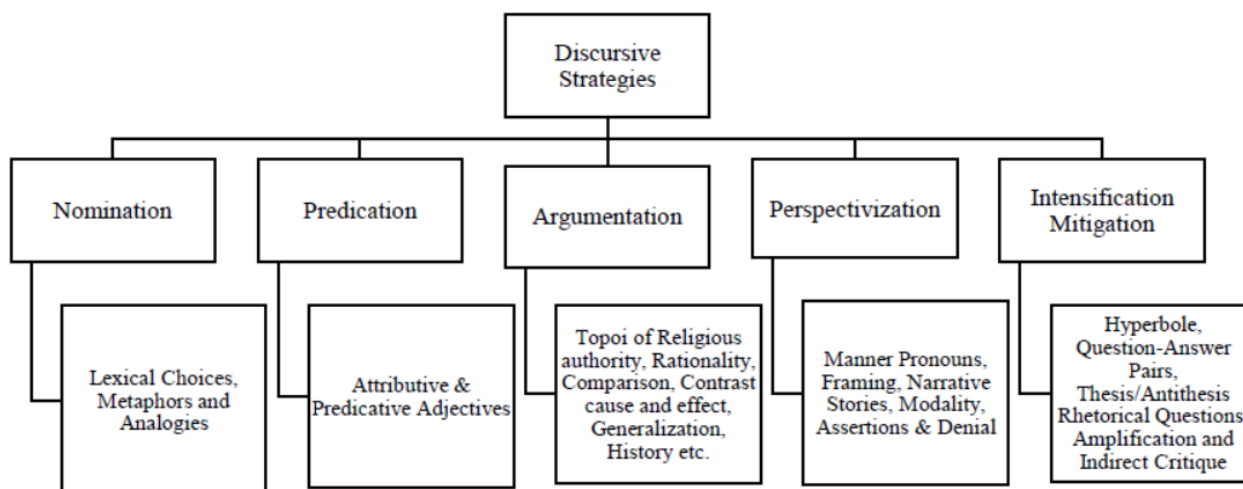


Figure 2. Discursive Strategies with Linguistic Realization

4. Data Analysis

4.1 The Broader Socio-Political and Ideological Context

The socio-political contexts of the book are technological development, globalization, and cultural assimilation. Asad states the one-sided cultural impact of politically and economically virile nations on weaker communities is a natural process. The addressees of Asad are the

Muslim Ummah in particular and the Western community in general. The ideological background is the dichotomy of Occidentalism and Orientalism, with special concern about the counter-narrative to preserve Islamic identity in the contemporary world.

Extract 1:

"We readily realize that Islamic civilization was the most complete form of theocracy that history has ever known. In Islam, spiritual considerations stand above everything and underlie everything. If we compare this attitude with that of Western civilization, we are impressed by the vast difference in outlook. The modern West is ruled in its activities and endeavors almost exclusively by considerations of practical utility and dynamic evolution. Its inherent aim is the experimenting with the potentialities of life without attributing to this life a moral reality of its own. For the modern European or American the question of the meaning and purpose of life has long since lost all practical importance." (Asad, 1934, p. 29)

Table 1. Discursive Strategies with Linguistic Realization

Main Theme	Discursive Strategies	Linguistic Realization	Objective
Fundamental Divergence of Islam & the Modern Western Civilization	Nomination/Predication	Theocracy, the modern West, Islamic civilization, central aspect, practical utility, spiritual considerations, inherent aim, practical importance, moral reality, meaning and purpose of life & vast differences etc.	To assert the moral supremacy of Islam over the modern Western utilitarian approach to life.
	Argumentation	The topoi of history, human nature, moral judgment, comparison, loss, human progress & destiny.	
	Perspectivization	Contrastive, logical & ideological framing, explicit assertions & denials, inclusive we, modality with declarative sentences.	
	Intensification/Mitigation	Adjectives i.e., spiritual, modern, moral, practical, vast, dynamic, inherent etc., adverbs i.e., readily, exclusively, diametrically etc., rhetorical questions, amplifications, euphemism i.e., dynamic evolution, inherent aim.	

In this extract, Asad employs discursive strategies to construct the dichotomy of Islam vs. the modern Western civilization. The nominalization of Islamic civilization as *'the most complete form of theocracy that history has ever known'* expresses the comprehensive nature of the societal structure of Islam. The degree of religious influence in a theocracy varies in theocratic systems. The use of the superlative *'the most complete'* intensifies the assertion about Islamic civilization as the only comprehensive form of theology that is superior to other theocratic systems of the world. Moreover, the topos of history authenticates this assertion (Abbas, 2011; Nasr, 2002). The denial of any possibility of a progressive moral and social improvement of mankind, based upon the Western utilitarian outlook, expresses the ideological perspective and cognitive leverage of Asad towards Islamic civilization. The topoi of history, morality, comparison, human nature, progress, and loss evoke scientific reasoning to authenticate the argument. The conditional statement *'If we compare this attitude with that of the Western civilization, we are impressed by the vast difference in outlook'* asserts that reasoning, through contrastive and comparative lenses, leads towards a better understanding. This contrastive perspectivization accentuates the prioritization of spiritual values in the Islamic moral framework. Spiritual considerations are predicated as the most important foundational principles of Islamic civilization that *'stand above everything and underlie everything'*. Moral considerations are set against the Western *'considerations of practical utility and dynamic evolution'*. The topos of divergence contrastively highlights the superiority of Islam over the Western outlook. The use of inclusive *'we'* with declarative sentences and adverbs such as *'readily, exclusively, evidently, diametrically and definitely'* etc. intensify the assertions and the denials with high modality and explicitly express the ideological perspective and positioning of Asad with Islam. The nominations with positive connotations as the *'central aspect'* of Islam and the *'inherent aim'* of the West mitigate the critique. The *'inherent aim'* of the modern West, *'the experiment with the potentialities of life without attributing to this life a moral reality of its own'*, draws on the commonplace that morality should be intrinsic to human pursuits. Moreover, the topos of the loss of existential significance in the modern West, where *'the question of the meaning and purpose of life has long since lost all practical importance'*, draws on the commonplace that utilitarian modernity may lead to a loss of deep existential reflections. It prompts readers to reflect rather than imposing a definitive statement. The euphemisms as practical evolution and inherent aim mitigate the critique by acknowledging certain aspects of the modern West.

Extract 2:

"There can be no doubt that this attitude, so characteristic of modern Western civilization, is as unacceptable to Christianity as it is to Islam or any other religion, because it is irreligious in its very essence. To ascribe, therefore, the practical achievements of modern Western civilization to the supposed efficacy of Christian teachings is extremely ridiculous. Christianity has contributed very little to the powerful scientific and material development in which the present civilization of the West excels all others." Indeed, those achievements emerged out of Europe's age-long intellectual fight against the Christian Church and its outlook on life. (Asad, 1934, p. 37)

Table 2. Discursive Strategies with Linguistic Realization

Main Theme	Discursive Strategies	Linguistic Realization	Objective
Materialistic Foundations of the Modern West.	Nomination/Predication	Christianity, Islam, Christian teachings, the modern West, practical achievements, attitude, Europe's intellectual fight, Christian church & outlook on life etc.	To highlight the incompatibility between modern Western values and Christian teachings.
	Argumentation	The topoi of history, moral judgment, Generalization & comparison/contrast,	
	Perspectivization	Contrastive, causal & ideological framing, explicit assertion & denials, modality with declarative sentences.	
	Intensification/Mitigation	Adjectives such as practical achievements' excel, supposed & powerful etc., adverbs i.e., no doubt, indeed, extremely etc., amplifications & metaphorical expression.	

After outlining the epistemological divide between Islam and modern Western civilization, Asad highlights the incompatibility of modern Western values with Christian teachings. In the expression *'this attitude is unacceptable to Christianity as it is to Islam or any other religion.'* The term *'attitude'* is used to nominate a specific characteristic or disposition of the modern Western civilization. The predication here ironically asserts the incompatibility of such attitude with the very teachings of Islam. This aligns the Islamic viewpoint with multiple religious perspectives, emphasizing a shared rejection of the entirely materialistic attitude. Here the topoi of generalization and religious judgment are used to strengthen the claim about the non-religiosity of the modern West. The nomination/predication *'modern Western civilization'* that is *'irreligious in its very essence'* expresses a specific cultural, social, and political entity unacceptable to Christianity itself. The adverb *'very'* intensifies the assertion. On the contrastive continuum, Islam, Christianity and other religions stand on one side while the modern West on the other side that expresses binary opposition, highlights the non-religiosity of the modern West and authenticate the moral foundations of Islam as a general religious attitude. In the expression *'to ascribe, therefore, the practical achievements of modern Western civilization to the supposed efficacy of Christian teachings is extremely ridiculous'*, the adjective *'supposed efficacy'* expresses the wrong ascription of modern development to the Christian teaching. The phrases *'extremely ridiculous'*, *'there can be no doubt'* and *'very little'* Intensify negative evaluation of the religious attribution proving it highly absurd and unreasonable. The adjectives such as *'unacceptable'*, *'irreligious'*, *'ridiculous'*, and adverbs such as *'extremely'* *'indeed'* *'very'* serve as intensifiers. The use of *'therefore'* introduces a causal connection that evokes reasoning rather than a direct attack. In the expression *'material development in which the present civilization of the West excels all others'* the verb *'excels'* having a positive connotation mitigates the force of explicit critique. The acknowledgement of the material aspect lends neutrality to the critique. Further, being the spokesman of Islam, Asad's acknowledgement of material development expresses that Islam is not against scientific development but the nonreligious essence of material development. Assertion and denial techniques support the intensification and mitigation. The metaphorical expression *'Europe's age-long intellectual fight with Christianity'* further authenticates the claim by drawing on the historical phenomenon of conflict between Christianity and intellectual efforts. The metaphor of *'fight'* intensifies the assertion about the conflict. The topoi of history and cause and effect support the argument. The adverb *'indeed'* further asserts the truth of historical reference. The author concludes by asserting that the material achievements emerged from the exclusion of Christianity from intellectual efforts.

Extract 3:

"The only possible conclusion is that a civilization of this kind must be a deadly poison for any culture based on religious values. Our original question, whether it is possible to adapt the Islamic way of thinking and living to the exigencies of Western civilization, and vice versa, must be answered in the negative. In Islam, the first and foremost objective is the moral progress of the human being: and, therefore, ethical considerations overrule the purely utilitarian ones. In modern Western civilization, the position is exactly reversed." (Asad, 1934, p. 46-47)

Table 3. Discursive Strategies with Linguistic Realization

Main Theme	Discursive Strategies	Linguistic Realization	Objective
The incompatibility of the Islamic and the Western civilizations.	Nomination/Predication	deadly poison, moral progress, material utility, utilitarian, original question, religious values etc.	To warn the Muslim community against the deadly effects of Western imitation.
	Argumentation	The topoi of consequences, opposition generalization, moral judgment & comparison	
	Perspectivization	Contrastive, critical and causal framing, inclusive 'we', modality with superlative 'must be' & declarative sentences.	
	Intensification/Mitigation	Adjectives i.e., only, possible, original, deadly etc., adverbs i.e., purely, exactly etc., euphemisms, explicit assertions/denials, metaphor of poison & question-answer pair.	

Asad gradually constructs the discourse to warn the Muslim community against blind imitation of a civilization that is itself non-religious and reductionist in approach. The amplification *'only possible conclusion'* underscores the certainty and finality of the statement,

emphasizing that there is no room for debate. The metaphorical expression *'deadly poison'* implies the severity of the drastic impact of Western imitation on any culture with religious foundations, particularly Islam. The metaphor *'poison'* literally gives a negative and disastrous connotation, and the use of the adverb *'deadly'* as an adjective further intensifies the severity of the consequences. The topos of consequences strengthens the argument by evoking reasoning. The expression *'any culture based on the religious attitude'* serves as the topos of generalization and puts modern Western values in contrast with all other religions. This generalization mitigates Asad's subjectivity and also stresses the authenticity of Islamic values. Thus, the hyperbolic expression *'deadly poison'* excludes any possibility of convergence. This strong and negative nomination reflects the severity of the danger. The adjective pair *'only possible conclusion'*, the use of the superlative degree in *'must be answered in the negative'*, and the question-answer pair *'our original question, whether it is possible to adapt the Islamic way of thinking and living to the exigencies of Western civilization, and vice versa, must be answered in the negative'* exclude any possibility of convergence by evoking reasoning. Further, the use of the superlative degree *'must'* expresses a high level of modality and the adjective *'original'* stresses the authenticity of the expression. Asad appears to be not only a spokesperson, but a religious authority warning the Muslim community against the deadly effects of convergence. The overall declarative pattern expresses high modality and somewhere the agentless construction implies generalization.

The contrastive framing of *'moral progress'* and *'material utility'* underscore the fundamental differences respectively excluding any possibility of convergence. In the expression *'In Islam, the first and foremost objective is the moral progress of the human being: and, therefore, ethical considerations overrule the purely utilitarian ones'*, the adjective pair *'first and foremost'* intensifies the fundamental and significant importance that can never be changed. The adjective *'purely utilitarian'* intensifies the exclusion of morality from the basis of modern Western development. Further, it indirectly highlights the comprehensive and unique nature of Islamic thought that acknowledges scientific development, but not at the expense of morality and ethics. In Islam, moral considerations *'overrule purely utilitarian'* aspect, while in the Western civilization *'purely utilitarian'* aspect excludes moral considerations from any plan of human progress. The adverbial phrase *'exactly reversed'* emphasizes the binary opposition of values. The contrastive and causal framing underscores the holistic nature of Islam through reasoning. The conjunction *'therefore'* implies cause-and-effect framing to evoke reasoning, the exclusive *'we'* and *'our original question'* sets the positioning of Asad as a spokesperson of Islam, implying shared values.

Extract 4:

"Islam has condemned racial hatred and pointed out the way to human brotherhood and equality; but Western civilization is still unable to look beyond the narrow horizon of racial and national antagonisms. Islamic society has never known classes and class warfare; but the whole of Western history, from the days of ancient Greece and Rome down to our own time, is full of class struggle and social hatred. Again and again, it must be repeated that there is only one thing which a Muslim can profitably learn from the West, namely, the exact sciences in their pure and applied forms. But this necessity for a quest of science from Western sources should not induce a Muslim to regard Western civilization as superior to his own - or else he does not understand what Islam stands for. The superiority of one culture or civilization over another does not consist in the possession of a greater amount of scientific knowledge (although the latter is most desirable), but in its ethical energy, in its greater ability to explain and to coordinate the various aspects of human life. And in this respect Islam surpasses every other culture." (Asad, 1934, p. 72)

Table 4. Discursive Strategies with Linguistic Realization

Main Theme	Discursive Strategies	Linguistic Realization	Objective
Ethical and Social superiority of Islam over Western civilization	Nomination/Predication	Islam, the Western civilization, Islamic society, ancient Greece, Rome, human brotherhood, equality, class struggle, racial hatred etc.	To assert Islam as a balanced, holistic, and well-integrated approach to human life.
	Argumentation	Topoi of comparison, ethics, caution, harmony, necessity, comparative history.	
	Perspectivization	Contrastive, historical, causal & ideological framing, modality with modal auxiliaries must, should & declarative sentences.	
	Intensification/Mitigation	Adjectives i.e., racial, narrow, whole, exact, pure, superior, scientific &, greater. Adverbs i.e., still, never, again, only & profitably etc., explicit denials & assertions such as Islam condemns, Islamic society has never etc., & repetition for intensification.	

Asad logically demonstrates the incompatibility between Islam and the modern West, and encourages the Muslim community to critically reflect on the Western reductionist approach towards life and development. His discourse gradually shifts to the ideological clash as a defensive and counter narrative to the Orientalist ideology. In this extract, Asad emphasizes the persistence of class struggle and social injustice in the West to expose the irony in the Western claim to civilizational perfection. The contrast between Islam and the modern West on equality, brotherhood, and racial hatred challenges the Orientalist narrative of Islamic cultural inferiority. In the expressions *'Islam has condemned racial hatred and pointed out the way to human brotherhood and equality'* and *'Islamic society has never known classes and class warfare'*, Islam is associated with the positive action of condemning racial hatred and reinforcing positive values. The linguistic scheme for the prediction of Islam and the Western civilization, such as *'condemned racial hatred, human brotherhood, equality,*

ethical integrity, surpasses, antagonism, class warfare, and social hatred’ explicitly highlights the sharp contrast in compound sentences with ‘but’ as a coordinating conjunction. The topos of moral judgment lends force to the claim about positive values of brotherhood and equality. The historical absence of class struggle and social division in Islamic society implies its historically consistent harmony as a religious philosophy. While ‘*the whole of Western history, from the days of ancient Greece and Rome down to our own time, full of class struggle and social hatred*’ implies the historically consistent social division in the Western civilization. The topos of comparative history, juxtaposing Islamic and Western civilizations lends significant force to the argument by evoking reasoning. Ancient Greece and Roman civilizations are considered to be the most influential civilizations in history. The negative predication with the phrases ‘*class struggle*’ and ‘*racial hatred*’ exposes the widespread deception about the superiority of these civilizations. In the expression ‘*Again and again, it must be repeated that there is only one thing which a Muslim can profitably learn from the West, namely, the exact science*’, he explicitly guides the Muslims to learn only ‘*the exact science*’ that can be profitable for the development and is the necessity of the time. The phrase ‘*although the latter is most desirable*’ admits the importance of scientific knowledge and highlights the progressive nature of Islam. The topos of necessity simultaneously works as an intensification/ mitigation strategy, intensifying the desirability of the scientific knowledge and reducing the intensity of the explicit critique of Western civilization. The amplification ‘*again and again it must be repeated...*’ heightens the impact of warning, emphasizing its seriousness. The hyperbolic expression implies the strong feelings to emphasize the ‘*necessity for a quest of science from Western sources*’, but this necessity ‘*should not induce a Muslim to regard Western civilization as superior to his own*’, and also intensifies the warning against considering Western civilization superior to Eastern civilization. The use of modal auxiliaries such as ‘*must*’ and ‘*should*’ function as a directive and a moral imperative, positioning Asad as a religious and cultural authority. These terms convey a sense of urgency and obligation, suggesting that Muslims are required to engage critically with Western knowledge while firmly retaining their own cultural and religious identity. Moreover, the rhetorical question ‘*or else he does not understand what Islam stands for*’ challenges the readers’ knowledge or awareness, prompting them to critically evaluate their perception of Islam. This type of rhetorical device is designed to provoke introspection, making readers question whether they truly grasp the essence of their faith. He guides the Muslim community to reconsider and reevaluate their perception of religion and human progress, while maintaining cultural pride and identity.

First, he defines that civilizational superiority ‘*does not consist in the possession of a greater amount of scientific knowledge (although the latter is most desirable), but in its ethical energy*’. Based on this generalized definition, he asserts that Islamic civilization surpasses all other civilizations in its ethical energy and social plan that coordinates various aspects of human life into a complete whole. The assertion ‘*Islam surpasses every other culture*’ in two aspects namely ‘*ethical energy*’ and the ‘*greater ability to explain and to coordinate the various aspects of human life*’ highlights the superiority of Islam by emphasizing a high level of intellectual and organizational skill that is required for social peace and harmony. The topos of history lends force to the remark of the excellence of Islamic thought in coordinating all the aspects of human life. The contrastive framing implies that Islam is historically promoting brotherhood, while Western civilization remains stuck in antagonism.

5. Discussion

The analysis is based on the binary opposition between Islam and modern Western civilization. The contrastive framing suggests a diametric clash, ultimately asserting the superiority of Muslim civilization. This assertion also serves as a critique of the secularization of Western societies that is perceived to have led to a loss of existential reflection. Wendland (2010) defines discursive frames as cognitive schemas composed of interrelated signs that stimulate specific strategies of perception and interpretation in audiences. Within this framework, the contrastive framing, alongside the acknowledgement of diverse viewpoints, highlights the value of scientific reasoning while mitigating the impression of absolute judgment, suggesting a balanced approach. After developing the textual context of fundamental differences, Asad asserts the non-religious nature of modern Western civilization. He adopts a tone of certainty when presenting his perspective on the West’s secular character. The discourse gradually downplays the role of Christianity in the scientific and material development of the West. By establishing a causal link between the Western intellectual struggle with the Church and its scientific achievements, Asad strengthens his argument about the non-religious essence of Western development. He challenges conventional beliefs regarding the contribution of Christianity to Western advancement, acknowledging the Western scientific excellence, while denying the role of Christianity therein. His argument exposes the irony of the incompatibility between Western development and Christian teachings. This recognition of Western material exceptionalism serves as an indirect rebuttal to Orientalist claims portraying Islam as conservative. Asad asserts that Islam supports material development, provided it is grounded in a religious worldview. While he acknowledges the necessity of intellectual progress, he warns against blind imitation. His emphasis on the historical persistence of class struggle and social injustice in the West underscores the irony in Western claims of civilizational perfection. According to Lawton (2016), the topos of history invokes common sense reasoning, implying that what has historically failed is unlikely to succeed in the present. Asad employs this topos to counter the Orientalist perspective through a historical lens. His critique of the contrast between Islam and the modern West, especially concerning equality, brotherhood, and racial hatred, challenges the Orientalist narrative of Islamic inferiority. As a thoughtful and concerned philosopher, Asad offers guidance to Muslims on how to navigate Western influence. His cognitive analysis reflects a deep concern for preserving the spiritual and ethical integrity of the Muslim community. While urging Muslims to recognize Western achievements, he warns against being seduced by superficial progress. Rather than overtly criticizing Western civilization, Asad presents a balanced view that appreciates its strengths, exposing its shortcomings.

As a modernist, he does not reject scientific development but encourages Muslims to embrace it selectively, ensuring their distinct identity is

preserved. He advocates for a balanced approach, wherein Muslims can benefit from Western advancements while upholding the ethical and holistic worldview of Islam. This narrative underscores the capacity of Islam to surpass other traditions, in terms of intellectual and organizational sophistication necessary for human development and social harmony. Through contrastive and historical perspectivization, Asad encourages readers to critically discern reality.

Unlike Orientalists, Asad's objective is not merely to critique, but to foster a nuanced understanding between civilizations. His counter-narrative challenges Western biases and superficial portrayals of Islam, promoting a respectful appreciation of Islamic contributions. This contrastive lens, coupled with historical framing and a balanced tone, underscores Asad's role as a representative of a marginalized group, logically challenging discursive power imbalances. Logical reasoning, as Rahwan and Amgoud (2006) argue, is central to validating arguments, while coherence, consistency, and relevance enhance overall rationality (Verdejo, 2017). Asad's views align with Islamic modernists advocating for intellectual revitalization in response to 21st-century challenges. The discursive strategies employed construct a narrative that elevates Islam's ethical and social framework, while critiquing the West's history of conflict. His perspectivization addresses Muslims in the broader context of postmodern secularism, cultural assimilation, and identity crisis. Van Dijk (2023) asserts that discourse structures are underpinned by frames, which guide semantic interpretations. The overall contrastive and logical framing positions Islam as a civilization, unjustly treated as a mere object of scientific inquiry. Asad highlights the Orientalist bias in framing Islam through an emotionally charged narrative. Metaphors and powerful adjectives intensify the emotional and rhetorical appeal of the discourse. Bolinger (2014) notes that metaphorical language enhances rhetorical force. Asad uses such language to heighten the emotional resonance of his position. According to Wodak (2015), topoi can scapegoat others by assigning blame and legitimizing certain ideologies. Throughout Asad's discourse, topoi such as contrast, comparison, generalization, moral judgment, and history reinforce his argument and naturalize his ideological position. The prevalence of these topoi also signals his role as a spokesperson for a marginalized group who guides reasoning through logic rather than direct confrontation.

Sergeeva and Ninan (2023) argue that the topos of comparison is essential in shaping narratives that influence perception and social change. In Asad's discourse, contrastive framing and argumentative topoi evoke reasoning around the supremacy of Islamic civilization. High-modality, assertive statements, inclusive pronouns, emotive expressions, and metaphors all reflect his ideological commitment to Islam. According to Jasim et al. (2024), linguistic choices are ideologically driven and define writer positioning. First-person plural pronouns (Laukkanen, 2019) reinforce solidarity, delineating in-group and out-group boundaries. As an Austro-Hungarian Muslim convert, Asad emerges as a powerful spokesperson for Islamic civilization against Orientalist narratives. Discursive strategies serve distinct linguistic, social, political, and psychological functions (Hyland & Paltridge, 2011). Asad utilizes these strategies to reinforce his ideological vision, presenting it as logical and commonsensical. In the socio-political context, the ideological intent behind the "us vs. them" dichotomy lies in reviving Muslim identity amid a culturally assimilative world. His critical approach not only highlights fundamental differences between Islam and the modern West, but also exposes the spiritual void in Western civilization.

Thus, Asad presents himself not only as a proponent of Islamic thought, but also as an advisor to the Western world. He encourages reflection on the secular essence of modern civilization. As a mediator, he seeks to foster interfaith dialogue and reduce contemporary tensions and misunderstandings. His critical reasoning supports the idea that scientific reasoning is essential for understanding cultural others and achieving peaceful coexistence. By drawing attention to the holistic nature of Islam, he underscores its unique model for human development; one that is especially needed in the 21st century. Islam does not reject material progress, but promotes it within an ethical framework. It offers a balanced, integrative path that unites the spiritual and material dimensions of life. Hence, it provides a universally relevant code of life. This critical evaluation of Asad's discursive construction illustrates how language can be wielded as a powerful tool for shaping perceptions. Asad's unique authority stems from his identity as a Muslim convert, someone who embraced Islam after thorough intellectual and spiritual inquiry. The critical evaluation of Asad's discursive construction proved how language serves as a strongest tool for desired perception. Asad has been purposefully selected to approach Islam from the perspective of a Muslim convert who embraced Islam after a thorough critical investigation of this religion. In the modern era of cultural assimilation, religious pluralism and ideological imposition, it is imperative to draw the attention of the new generation to Asad, whose personal experience of critical reasoning is exemplary. The conflict between fundamentalism and secularism, materialism and spiritualism, and theoretical and practical aspects of Islam has turned the modern generation indifferent to religion because their minds are equipped with modern scientific knowledge, and they have varied types of empirical experience of the universe. The traditional style of conveying Islamic thought does not satisfy their inquisitive and critical mindset. Asad, through a critical lens, also advocates critical and comparative reasoning towards understanding religious philosophy. He stresses the significance of critical evaluation in challenging presuppositions about the one's own religious reality and the religious reality of others. Asad's fundamental ideological purpose behind such framing is to raise the consciousness of Muslim Ummah about the fundamentally unique nature of Islamic identity, so that they can evolve an Islamic outlook polished by their evaluative and critical reasoning, and can safeguard themselves against the discursive hegemony by consciously realizing the ideological purpose and power imbalance embedded in the Orientalist perspective. Only in this way the Muslims can preserve their Islamic identity while moving ahead with the progressing world. Fairclough (1989, 1992) and Wodak (2001, 2009) emphasize that awareness is the crucial step toward emancipation, enabling individuals to challenge hegemonic structures and ideological dominance. Therefore, a critical approach to discursive constructions needs to be integrated into educational syllabi to equip the Muslim generation with scientific precision in challenging ongoing discursive hegemony. Furthermore, studies on Asad's rationalist ideology and his counter-narrative to Orientalism can contribute to raising Muslim consciousness on preserving Islamic ideology amidst discursive hegemony and cultural assimilation.

through scientific precision.

6. Contribution

Through the provision of practical insights to educators, media analysts and policymakers, this study contributes to scholarly efforts to challenge Orientalist narratives. It emphasizes strategies for advancing nuanced, contextually grounded demonstrations of Islam that resist ideological bias by means of drawing on Asad's counter-narrative. By suggesting the incorporation of critical viewpoints on Orientalism into fields such as literature, history, and media research, the study also contributes to the construction of curricula. Incorporating this research into academic frameworks, we are able to shield cultural identification and promote intercultural knowledge by means of equipping future generations the cognitive tools to understand and confront misrepresentations.

7. Conclusion

Asad's ideological aim behind the 'us vs. them' dichotomy is to awaken the Muslim community to preserve its identity amid cultural assimilation. By critiquing Orientalist narratives, he exposes Western biases that dominate discourse on Islam. However, his core objective is not to condemn the West, but to revive ethically grounded intellectual vision of Islam. Language serves as his strategic tool to naturalize his stance. The findings reinforce a counter-narrative to Orientalism, promoting mutual epistemological reevaluation. Asad warns Muslims against uncritical imitation of the West and urges intellectual revival, while also encouraging the West to embrace ethical values in human progress. He stresses the need for scientific inquiry in religious understanding and critiques traditional methods as inadequate for modern rational minds, calling for a critical revival of Islam to safeguard identity.

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Authors' contributions

This research paper is the collective effort of Ms. Ghulam Hifsa and Dr. Tabassum Saba. Ms. Hifsa carried out the primary research, data analysis and drafting of the manuscript, while Dr. Tabassum Saba provided continuous supervision, scholarly guidance and constructive feedback. As co-author, she contributed valuable insights in refining the background of the study and enhancing the methodology. Both authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

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