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Emotional Resilience and Recovery through Human-Animal Relationship in *The Search* by Nora Roberts

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Abstract

This paper examines the theme of the human-animal bond in Nora Roberts' 2010 novel *The Search*, highlighting the role of animals in emotional resilience and healing. Fiona Bristow, the protagonist, is a dog trainer and search-and-rescue specialist. Fiona is a prime example of how animal companionship promotes psychological recovery and emotional strength. By carefully examining the novel's plot, this paper contends that Roberts portrays animals as therapeutic beings that assist people in overcoming trauma, re-establishing trust, and regaining a sense of security. Fiona's relationship with her dogs is not only a source of emotional support, but also a crucial component of her path toward psychological stability and self-reliance. In order to support the therapeutic function of animals in fiction, this study also examines how the book fits in with current trauma theory and research on human-animal interactions. This paper emphasizes Roberts' contribution to the conversation on trauma recovery and emotional resilience in popular fiction by placing *The Search* within the larger context of literary depictions of healing through interspecies relationships.

Keywords: Nora Roberts, *The Search*, human-animal bond, trauma, emotional resilience, healing, search-and-rescue dogs

Introduction

The Search (2010), a gripping romantic suspense book by Nora Roberts, deftly intertwines themes of emotional healing, survival, and trauma. Fiona Bristow, the protagonist, is at the center of the story. She has survived a traumatic past and finds comfort in working with search-and-rescue dogs. An incident in Fiona's life left her emotionally damaged, but she finds a way to heal thanks to her strong bond with animals. By providing their human counterparts with unconditional love, companionship, and a sense of security, animals can provide emotional stability and healing, as the novel poignantly illustrates.

Roberts creates a story in which the relationship between humans and animals goes beyond simple friendship and acts as a lifeline that promotes psychological fortitude and healing. In line with psychological theories that emphasize the therapeutic role of animals in promoting emotional well-being, Fiona's relationship with her dogs serves as an example of how animal-assisted therapy works in actual trauma recovery. Animals are especially useful in aiding recovery because of the predictability and trust that are built in the human-animal bond, which contrasts sharply with the instability and fear that accompany trauma.

This paper looks at how Roberts explores themes of resiliency, trust and personal development through the relationship between people and animals. This study makes the case that *The Search* presents animals as not just helpers and protectors but also as catalysts for social reintegration, emotional healing and healing through an examination of Fiona's interactions with her dogs and the larger community's reliance on search-and-rescue animals. This paper also places the book in the larger framework of recent writing that emphasizes the psychological and emotional advantages of human-animal relationships, highlighting the pivotal role that animals play in influencing how people experience love, trust and healing.

Animals Contribution to Trauma Recovery

Fiona has a very emotional and healing relationship with her dogs that goes beyond simple utility. Despite having a self-preservation instinct due to having survived a serial killer attack, Fiona finds genuine emotional stability in her work with dogs. Since her traumatic past, she has had to navigate the unpredictable and frequently dangerous human world, which stands in stark contrast to the predictability and unconditional support provided by her dogs. She regains her sense of self and control over her life as she trains and tends to these animals.

Scholars like Bessel van der Kolk argue that trauma survivors benefit significantly from

routines and stable relationships, which dogs can provide (Van der Kolk 102). Their constant presence helps regulate stress responses, offering a form of therapy that does not rely on verbal communication but rather on consistency, trust and companionship. Studies by Judith Herman also emphasize the role of structured support systems in trauma recovery, reinforcing the significance of Fiona's relationship with her dogs (Herman 133). Roberts' depiction of Fiona's training sessions and her interactions with her dogs highlights this principle, illustrating how physical activity, structured routines and the deep emotional bond with animals contribute to trauma recovery. Fiona's ability to command and train her dogs reinforces her sense of agency, which trauma had once stripped from her (Roberts 214). Moreover, Aubrey H. Fine discusses how animal-assisted therapy fosters emotional resilience, a theme clearly reflected in Fiona's gradual journey toward healing (Fine 45).

Furthermore, *The Search* implies that healing is a process that involves both setbacks and slow advancement, reiterating Judith Herman's claim that recovery happens in phases and necessitates strong support networks (Herman 155). Fiona's dogs help her get through times of vulnerability and fear by acting as emotional support systems and protectors. She can regain her confidence and trust in a secure setting because of the steadfast devotion and emotional intelligence that animals offer through their unwavering companionship (Van der Kolk 126). This dynamic is consistent with his findings. Ultimately, the novel reinforces the theme that the human-animal bond plays an essential role in emotional resilience and healing, a concept supported by research on animal-assisted therapy, which highlights the physiological and psychological benefits of such connections (Fine 78).

Animals as Emotional Support

Fiona finds comfort, stability and a sense of purpose in her dogs, which act as emotional pillars throughout the book. She made the deliberate choice to live on an island and work with rescue dogs to make her life more orderly and predictable and to protect herself from the turmoil and trauma of her past. Her commitment to training and rehabilitating dogs allows her to find a way to heal emotionally while also assisting in the development of the animals. This mutually beneficial relationship supports the novel's claim that human-animal relationships are naturally healing.

Training dogs provides Fiona with a predictable environment that contrasts with the unpredictable nature of human relationships, allowing for the gradual and reliable development of

trust. In contrast to human interactions, which can be tainted by uncertainty and betrayal, the constancy and loyalty of animals offer a special sense of security. Training's repetitive, regimented format helps Fiona cope with her residual trauma by reinforcing a sense of control over her environment. According to research on human-animal interactions, having a pet lowers cortisol levels, lessens anxiety and builds psychological resilience. The book supports these conclusions by showing how Fiona's bond with her dogs lessens the psychological effects of trauma and supports her emotional development.

Additionally, Fiona's relationship with her dogs goes beyond simple friendship, they serve as her emotional guardians, supporting her no matter what and reacting to her emotions sensibly. Her interactions with them act as a springboard for her to rebuild human ties, as evidenced by her developing bond with Simon Doyle. She gradually relearns how to trust people after learning to trust her animals, demonstrating how human-animal relationships can promote emotional reintegration and healing. In this way, *The Search* portrays animals as active contributors to the process of psychological resilience and personal growth, in addition to serving as symbols of emotional stability.

The Role of Loyal Companionship in Nurturing Healing and Trust

Fiona's past trauma is the direct cause of her initial reluctance to open up to new relationships, particularly with Simon Doyle, the romantic interest in the book. She has adopted a protective stance towards people after surviving a near fatal attack, looking for security and control in her regimented world of dog training. But her strong relationship with her dogs teaches her the importance of emotional openness, patience and trust. She finds a model of secure attachment in her animals' unwavering loyalty and consistency, which contrasts with the unpredictability of human relationships.

Rebuilding human relationships requires emotional work that is similar to the patience and consistency needed to train rescue dogs. As part of her work with dogs, Fiona must practice communication, trust-building and positive reinforcement. She gradually starts implementing these skills in her interactions with Simon. The book implies that Fiona progressively reopens herself to the possibility of human intimacy and emotional security by fostering trust in her animals. As an example of how Roberts purposefully employs Fiona's relationship with her animals as a metaphor for emotional recovery, this metamorphosis shows how trust developed through non-human relationships can be transferred to human interactions.

The idea that emotional healing requires teamwork is further supported by Simon's ability to fit in with Fiona's world despite his early resistance to dogs. His readiness to interact with Fiona's dogs is a sign of his understanding of her trauma and his respect for her limits. Through this dynamic, *The Search* emphasizes the therapeutic value of animals for both trauma survivors and those who are trying to support them. In the end, Fiona's journey demonstrates that trust is progressively developed through tolerance, constancy and shared experiences with both human and non-human companions.

Search and Rescue Dogs' Contribution to Community Involvement

Beyond Fiona's own healing, the book emphasizes the positive social impact of search-and-rescue (SAR) dogs and the role that animals play in promoting welfare in communities. Through her work with these well-trained animals, Fiona not only supports emergency response activities but also cultivates a sense of community trust and security. Fiona and her dogs support law enforcement and first responders by helping with search and rescue operations, which enhances the teamwork required in emergency situations.

Her training programs also unite people, fostering chances for mutual support and shared learning. The relationship that develops between handlers, dogs, and neighbours emphasizes how crucial teamwork is to overcoming hardship. Fiona's interactions with volunteers, law enforcement and the general public demonstrate how therapy dogs and service animals promote social cohesion, as highlighted by research on these topics. Her work reinforces the idea that healing is a process that is both individual and group-based and it not only gives her a renewed sense of purpose but also shows how the presence of trained dogs can improve the psychological health of those they serve.

Conclusion

A sophisticated examination of the human-animal bond as a means of fostering emotional healing and resilience can be found in Roberts' *The Search*. The book shows how animals can help people deal with trauma, build trust and offer psychological support through Fiona's journey. The novel highlights the therapeutic potential of interspecies relationships through the profound emotional bond between humans and animals, which functions as both a metaphor and a real-world example of healing.

Likewise, the book highlights that the benefits of animal-assisted healing go beyond personal recovery to include the general welfare of the community. Fiona's work as a search-and-

rescue dog trainer highlights the value of human-animal relationships in building more secure and emotionally stable communities. These animals represent loyalty, stability and hope in addition to helping in emergency situations. Through this organized, purposeful work, Fiona and consequently, the community benefits psychologically from collaboration, trust and a common goal.

Additionally, *The Search* supports recent psychological research on the advantages of animal-assisted therapy by highlighting the ways in which structured interactions with animals can enhance resilience, lower stress levels and promote emotional regulation. Spending time with animals can enhance oxytocin production, decrease cortisol levels, and enhance emotional health, according to research on human-animal interactions. Fiona's development over the course of the book serves as an example of the wider effects of these relationships, showing how disciplined interaction with animals fosters emotional stability. By highlighting routine, trust and companionship as essential elements of overcoming past trauma, her work with search-and-rescue dogs not only promotes personal empowerment but also aids in the healing process. Roberts emphasizes the transformational potential of animal companionship in assisting people in regaining their independence and emotional fortitude by focusing on Fiona's changing relationship with her dogs.

Finally, in addition to offering a gripping romantic suspense story, *The Search* also adds to literary and psychological debates about the therapeutic value of animals. By incorporating aspects of psychological fortitude, trauma recovery and community involvement, Roberts places the book in the broader context of therapeutic fiction and emphasizes the value of human-animal relationships in both literature and practical applications. The book's depiction of interspecies relationships highlights the basic human need for support, connection and trust. As such, it is a useful text in conversations about trauma literature, emotional fortitude, and the therapeutic value of animal companionship.

The Search also supports recent psychological research on the advantages of animal-assisted therapy, highlighting the ways in which controlled interactions with animals can improve resilience, lower stress levels and regulate emotions. Spending time with animals can enhance oxytocin production, decrease cortisol levels and enhance emotional health, according to research on human-animal interactions. Fiona's development over the course of the book serves as an example of the wider effects of these relationships, showing how disciplined interaction with

animals fosters emotional stability. By highlighting routine, trust and companionship as essential elements of overcoming past trauma, her work with search-and-rescue dogs not only promotes personal empowerment but also aids in the healing process.

At the end of the day, *The Search* not only offers an engaging romantic suspense story but also adds to literary and psychological debates regarding the therapeutic value of animals. Roberts emphasizes the importance of human-animal relationships in literature and real-world applications by incorporating aspects of trauma recovery, psychological resilience and community involvement into the book. This places the book within the larger conversation of therapeutic fiction.

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Critical Appreciation of Robert Browning Poems and His Art: A Study

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Abstract

This research paper examines Robert Browning's penchant towards history, borrowing the themes of dramatic monologues, choice of subjects, the dramatic and psychological elements, style and philosophy. He establishes his special interest in the Renaissance, relevance of his devices like obscurity, exploration of themes, usage of conversational forms to the modernity of characters, recognition of history, perceiving contemporaneity and paving the direction for future. Robert Browning, the renowned Victorian poet, is widely known as the master of dramatic monologue and his profound exploration of love. He possesses the optimistic quality in his poetry that reflects human struggle towards growth and self-realization. By strenuous study of his poems, rich with diversity, complex speakers and vivid diction, many readers have ascertained his quiet soul dissection. He fascinates us, not only as a poet, but also teaches us to live more attentively and more inwardly.

Keywords: Hopefulness, obscurity, reflection, debating.

1.Introduction:

Robert Browning (1822-1889)

Robert Browning's native land is Camberwell. His father was a banker. Browning availed scanty education and as an avid reader, studied unusual subjects. He began writing poetry at the age of 12. Shelley influenced him greatly. He spent time in both Russia and London which brought him the association with literary men. His second home is Italy, where he was charmed by Elizabeth Barrett's works and betrothed her. Oxford university bestowed the degree of D.C.E upon him. He passed away in Italy and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

His major poems and works:

Browning's renowned work is *Pauline* (1833). It was a thoughtful poem, which displays the significance of Shelley. During that period, Shelley had great admiration towards him. *Sordello* (1840) deals with the relationship between art and life. This work centers upon the story of the hero, a Mantuan troubadour. *Pippa Passes* play contains songs; it is not fit for stage. Browning's best work is *Men and Women* (1855), it is a dramatic monologue, dedicated to his wife. Some of the famous works of Browning are *Fra Lippo Lippi*, *Andrea del Sarto*, *Cleon's* are blank verse poems. As a voracious writer, Browning's character is reflected in these lines:

"Strive and thrive! "Cry,

"Speed , - fight on, fare ever There as here!"¹

The major poet of the Victorian Age, his poetry, however, differs from Tennyson's both in style and in subject. With reference to Tennyson's *Idylls*, Browning once remarked as: "we look at the subject of Art of poetry differently."

Browning approaches in his language and imagery, the poetry of his own time. Both are up to some extent, anti-romantic; there are railway-trains, cigars, grand pianos; scrofulous French novels and trousers. Language is often colloquial and even slangy. There is also humor and a kind of self mockery in the grotesque rhymes that Browning sometimes uses in *The Pied Piper*, his children's poem. He also suggests that modern poets are in obscurity, but obscurity does not derive from complexity of thought; it comes from aim, impatience with language and a deliberate desire to dazzle the reader. Browning's vocabulary is large and he has a fondness for little known words that are proverbial. His early *Sordello* is so difficult that of one of the lines. Browning is reported to have said, "When I wrote it, only God and I knew what it meant; now only God knows".²

Browning, after first paying homage to Shelley in *Pauline*, thought of himself as a dramatist. But his stage plays were not successful, and he found his best dramatic outlet in the form he cultivated the most, the dramatic monologue. "In *Men and Women* and *Dramatis Personae*, he put into the mouths of various historical characters often obscure painters and musicians of Italy and Germany."³

Certain philosophical themes together make up Browning's answer to the Victorian dilemma. He is aware of division in the human soul and of despondency at failure to achieve mere attempts to order out lives – however unsuccessful – found their reward in heaven; whatever we start and leave uncompleted, God himself will complete. "Abt Vogler puts it succinctly: "on earth the broken arcs, in heaven the perfect round".⁴ His poems about love are vigorous and virile: he believes again in acting rather than vacillating when love is crossed. *The Statue and the Bust* tells of two lovers who, unable to be together because of circumstantial difficulties, die apart. Now a statue and a bust, perpetually gazing at each other, mock their timidity. Browning's own courtship of Elizabeth Barret and his elopement with her translated his doctrine into action. Browning's optimism is God in his heaven no longer makes much appeal to an age which finds it hard to be optimistic. We appreciate Browning as best as the dramatic realist. His *Ring and the Book* - a long murder story in verse, has a psychological penetration which is after our own hearts. This technique is always vigorous and fresh, but his message has perhaps lost some of its appeal.

The Victorian Age:

In the early years of the nineteenth century, the French Revolution acted as a tremendous impulsive and creative force. The feelings of people roused by what appeared to some as a sacred manifestation found expression temporarily in the early poetry of Coleridge and Wordsworth and permanently in the visions of Shelley and in the political philosophy of Godwin. Its opponents, like Burke, regarded it as a manifestation of diabolic power and a romancer like Sir Walter Scott by his genuine interest in feudal times and medieval history exercised a great influence in checking this diabolic power. Byron is the clearest exponent of the deep disappointment and cynicism, which followed the failure of the Revolution in actual practice.

While the outward failure of the Revolution was complete, its real failure was only partial. The democratic movement of the nineteenth century was profoundly influenced by the French Revolution. A new world was to be created out of the ruins of the old, not by magic but by a slow and painful process. The chief steps in this progress are clearly marked. In England, there were successive reform bills, Catholic Emancipation, the abolition of the Corn Laws, and various constructive measures which in later days had helped to humanize the lives of the industrial multitudes. Of special importance from the literary point of view was the enfranchisement of the press; for the abolition of the paper tax and of the stamp duty upon newspapers, was in effect disenfranchisement. But for this enfranchisement, the novel could not have predominated in the nineteenth century for a long time. This also stimulated the growth of newspapers and of journalism. In the nineteenth century, the system of patronage in literary domain had completely disappeared and writers had to depend upon the reading public, which multiplied rapidly owing to the spread of education. As already pointed out, the sale of *Maud* enabled Tennyson to settle comfortably at Farringford and 60,000 copies of *Enoch Arden* were sold on its first appearance.

The age is noted for its rapid material progress. Several mechanical agencies contributed towards it. The first important railway was opened in 1825, electric telegraph was introduced in 1837, mail began to be transmitted by railways in 1838, steamer service between England and the United States was started in the same year. Tennyson's poems appeared in 1830 and 1832, Browning's *Pauline* in 1834. Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* in 1833-34, Dicken's *Sketches by Boz* in 1832-36 and Thackeray's *Yellowish papers* in 1837. A sense of elation, a sanguine temper succeeded the gloom and apathy of the 1820-30 decade. The Reform Act of 1832 had broken the political monopoly of the land-owning oligarchy, but the newly emerged working class was not much benefited by it. The consequence was renewed agitation for the extension of the franchise, which culminated in the Chartist movement (1836-39).

Queen Victoria succeeded her uncle William IV in 1837. The Corn Laws and the Chartist movement kept the country in a state of constant upheaval during the first twelve years of her reign. The Corn Laws were repealed in 1846 and the Chartist movement, which at bottom was a knife and fork question died away and it, was not until 1867 that the second Reform Act made the steady development of democracy certain; meanwhile, the progress of science was as remarkable as that of democracy. The practical application of science brought new comforts to human life and affected a great change in the habits of the people. The doctrine of evolution of Darwin, Wallace and Herbert Spencer, revolutionized all current ideas about nature, man and society. Science helped to foster a materialistic temper, and pillars of orthodoxy were rudely shaken. Thus, followed the religious and spiritual unrest of the central years of Victoria's reign. Hence, the return of the mood of doubt and the pessimism were reflected in much of the literature of the period.

2. Research Method: We have ascertained Robert Browning's Biographies and elaborate secondary sources of him. We deeply studied the history of English literature for better understanding of his contemporaneity and style.

3. Results and Analysis:

My Last Duchess was included in Dramatic Lyrics (1842), and later in Dramatic Romances (1863). There was an Italian nobleman coming from a great family, who, stern and severe as he was, was showing his picture gallery to the envoy of a count whose daughter, he had to marry. This duke is a widower, and he comes to the portrait of his last duchess. He tells the envoy that "the depth and passion of her earnest glance" was not limited for her husband only. That "spot of joy" came into her; for, "her heart was too soon made glad, too easily impressed"⁵. She was his property and therefore he welcomed her smiles in his presence. But she smiled on everyone, and this is a violation of his rights of property. He could not tolerate it and so he "gave commands". And "then all smiles stopped altogether".

In this line, it was concentrated and compressed the whole tragic story. The duke is a dealer in human souls and he dismisses the memory of his wife. He at once begins talking of a fine bronze group and then discusses the dowry he is to get with the successor to his last duchess.

In all probability, the speaker was Alfonso II, fifth Duke of Ferrara, born in 1553. His young wife Lucrezia di medici died at the young age of seventeen. It was believed that she was poisoned. Later he had an Austrian bride, niece of the count of Tyrol. Innsbruck was the home of the second wife.

A Prominent critic John Bryson remarks "The outstanding quality of this short monologue is the tenseness and economy with which the dramatic situation is handled. It displays Browning's mastery of irony and understatement. It also demonstrates his remarkable historical imagination, his power of projecting himself into the mood and the characters of the past age."

There is only one speaker, but three characters are presented. Browning asks the reader here and elsewhere to collaborate with him in imagining the implied situation. Fra Pandolf and Claus of Innsbruck are imaginary artists. The duke seeks to impress on the envoy and on his master that his wife must exhibit a certain kind of behavior. He would not tolerate any rivals for the smiles of his next wife. As Neptune tamed a horse, he tamed and killed his last wife. The new wife must concentrate all her attention and life on him alone.

The Duke and the duchess are delineated in the masterly of fashion into the portraits, have gone to remarkable insight, a keenness of portraiture, brevity and selection. It is the duke's nature that kills her. The Duke has jealousy and not loves. He has self love and the tyranny of possession. He is vain of "a nine-hundred-year-old name".

An eminent oxford critic Professor Young quotes thus: This monologue is spoken in the presence of the ambassador of a foreign count whose daughter is being sought in marriage by the widowed Duke. The basis of his character is the complacent egotism of the aristocrat whose name is centuries old, who regards his wife as a dependent, and her innocent gaiety and graciousness as presumptions to be summarily extinguished. His most salient idiosyncrasy is that connoisseurship and pride of mere possession of a masterpiece which Browning felt to be a phase of the decadent

Renaissance: The Ferrarese duke shares it with the Bishop of St. Praxedes. One may venture a suggestion that these pathetic stifled figures, the last duchess, and the duchess of the flight, owe something of their existence to duration of Elizabeth Barrett in Wimpole Street.

Dr. Phelps considers *My Last Duchess* one of the finest dramatic monologues in the whole range of English Literature. The speaker is the duke of Ferrara, an important city of Italy. It was an important cultural center during the Renaissance. The monologue is an admirable piece of the character of study. It is a poem merely of fifty lines but within description of both the Duke and the Duchess. The tyranny, the pride and self-conceit, the hard-heartedness, and the dictatorial attitude of the Duke have been thrown into sharp relief by contrast with the genial and cheerful good nature of the Duchess. "As Phelps states, she was a frank-hearted, charming girl with a genial of disposition and zest for life. But all her expressions of delight, and her frank innocence, uncorrupted by the ways of the world, received only cold reception at the hands of her husband."⁶ The result was either pined away or was murdered at the orders of the tyrant duke, her husband. Critics claimed the portrait, an autobiographical significance. They likened her life in the home of her husband to that of Elizabeth Barret, suffering from the tyranny of her unsympathetic father, so did the duchess suffer from the tyranny of her proud and arrogant husband.

Not only is the monologue an admirable piece of character study, but it is also the very epitome of the Italian Renaissance. The very spirit of the age has been captured in this short piece. Its intrigue, its avarice, its cunning and hypocrisy, as well as its love of the fine arts, have all been brought out. The style of the Monologue is dense and epigrammatic. The line, "all smiles stopped together", is a concentrated expression of a whole life's tragedy. But despite this density and concentration, the poem is lucid and clear. It is entirely free from the usual faults of Browning. No doubt, there are a few parentheses, but they do not come in the way of understanding. The poem is composed in heroic couplets, but as the sense runs from one line to another, the readers are hardly conscious of the rhyme.

His Choice of Subjects:

Browning was essentially the poet of Man, and his chief interest was "soul-dissection". As a poet of man, Browning was especially interested in the analysis of human emotion and chiefly concerned with its causes and sources. For his subjects he ranged over centuries and continents and found them in the Italy of the Renaissance and today, the French camp, the Spanish cloister, Palestine and Russia, just as the Pre-Christian era afforded him a Cleon, the Middle Ages a Paracelsus, and the nineteenth century a Blougram. In the choice of his subjects, he proves himself to be a thorough-going cosmopolitan.

Browning was specially fascinated by Nature, the Arts and Love. As a poet of Nature, he shows a partiality for brilliant clear colors, and a characteristic liking for sudden and startling contrasts. His landscapes are real but generally subordinated to the thought and emotions of man, who finds the nature he is fitted for. In the short poems, such as 'Meeting at Night' and 'Parting at Morning', nature is little more than a part of man's environment. Browning is conscious of the connection between man and nature, for both, emanate from the God. But he never hints at a sympathetic co-ordination existing between the two.

The arts play by no means an insignificant part in the poetry of Browning. Poetry, painting and

music were the arts which especially attracted his study. Andrea del Sarto proves that he had a poor estimation of more technique and craftsmanship, for, he held that the artist's life is a struggle for expression and so it is the soul of the artist that really counts. Master Hugues and Abt Vogler are musicians, while Fra Lippo Lippi and Andrea del Sarto are contrasted studies of two painters.

“As a love poet, Browning stands supreme, if others have surpassed him in the rendering of certain aspects of love, no one is his superior in range of matters. He writes of actual passion and he stays at whatever moment in his course promises to distill its richest significance.”⁷ He is necessarily of those of the rapture of possession and enjoyment, the scores of episodes in the long chronicle. Hence, it is the novelty of situation in his love poetry. Numerous poems like *The Lost Mistress*, *The Last Ride Together*, *Evelyn Rope*, *In a Gondola*, the love simply illustrates the infinite variety of Browning's love poetry.

The Psychological Element in His Poetry:

Browning's aim was soul-dissection. He had an analytic mind which reveled in the search of the causes and sources of human emotion. He could think with the minds of his characters and in his poems, he takes us into the inside of their minds. “The soliloquy of the Spanish cloister is a fine study of the mind of a monk who flames into hatred against his inoffensive and saintly brother in religion. The Bishop orders his Tomb at St. Praxedes church is a penetrating study of the emotions which welter in the Bishop's mind now that his natural forces are too enfeebled to restrain them.”⁸ Bishop Blougram's *Apology* takes us right into the most intimate crannies of the Bishop's mind and makes us admire its surprising agility. In *Fra Lippo Lippi and Sludge the Medium*, Browning makes Fra Lippo and Sludge reveal the innermost secrets of their heart. It is possible to multiply such examples endlessly. But the psychologist is seen at his best in *The Ring and the Book* where we are allowed to look at the same incident through nine different minds.

The Dramatic Element:

Browning's genius was essentially dramatic, and no one since Shakespeare has surpassed his power to illuminate some striking phases of characters. But although he possessed some of the elements of dramatic genius in abundant measure, he did not possess all of them. As a result, his regular dramas cannot be regarded as successful, great, though they often are in parts. *Pippa* contains the intensely dramatic scene of *Ottima and Sebald*. *Colombe's Birthday* is a thrilling dramatic romance. *A Soul's Tragedy* is a thoroughly dramatic conception and *A Bolt in the Scutcheon* has obvious elements of greatness. But none of them, not even the last, judged as a whole, is a really great drama.

His Style:

“Browning's style is often described ‘Obscure’. There is really an element of obscurity in Browning's poetry. Firstly, he had a fondness for recondite subjects, and his allusions are drawn from little-known sources.”⁹ Secondly, he compressed an excessive use of ellipsis of relatives, connectives and the like: thirdly, he had a habit of juggling with words and meters. He chose obscurity style; this can be seen from poems such as *Evelyn Hope*, and *How they brought the Good news from Ghent to Aix* and *The Glove*. Browning's occasional use of grotesque rhymes and rhythm was due to deliberate iconoclasm, to his defiance of convention.

Browning's Philosophy:

Browning's outlook on life was optimistic, never questioned the existence of a supreme authority, God, controlling the affairs of the world. God's in his "heaven- All's right with the world!" is the cry of a sincere optimist. Superficially judged,"¹⁰ Browning's optimism may give one "the impression of being facile and shallow. But this is not really so, for his optimism was the result of experience. He did not shut his eyes to the darker side of life; he fully recognized the existence of evil. But evil, he believed, is a condition of a man's moral life, and of his moral progress. "Browning believed in the theory of evolution and held that life is persistent struggle towards an ideal but never completely attained, never even to be completely attained. "¹¹

Browning's two great theories of the universe have been asserted by a prominent critic "Chesterton in the two phrases, "the hope that lies in the imperfection of man" and "the hope that lies in the imperfection of God". From the first phrase he draws a definite hope for immortality and the larger scale of life, for an imperfect thing, according to the theory of evolution, must tend towards perfection, and the sense of incompleteness must lead to completeness."¹² The second phrase sums up the faith that sorrow and self denial. They are therefore burdens of man and also his privileges. Man is "ever a fighter", and sorrows and sufferings test him and brings out the best that is in him.

Browning had complete faith in the immortality of soul. It is the nobility and greatness of an individual's ideal that counts, not his failure or imperfection in this life. "Since "man lives forever" there is no reason why he should be weighed down by disappointments, failures in this life."¹³ He should aim high and should not mind if his achievement falls short of his ideal. The funeral of the Grammarian who immerse himself all his life in the study of Greek syntax is a triumph and fulfillment for man's soul lives forever.

Browning teaches the lessons of hope and happiness. He tells us that life means intensely good. He exhorts us to hope for the best and to strive after our ideal. He awakens us to fear nothing, to live like a fighter all our lives. Browning was passionately interested in, and in love with, existence, and his poetry is a wholesome tonic which helps us to enjoy life and realize its value.

Conclusion:

The paper is an exploration of numerous themes in Browning's work like philosophy, love, and psychology through analytical study. It is an amalgamation of insights and values can be learnt from the poet's contribution towards better society.

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Neoliberalism and Plurilingualism: Global Role of the English Language

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Abstract

This paper argues that the global spread of the English language and the evolution of diverse versions of the language, sometimes labeled as Postcolonial Englishes, World Englishes, New Englishes, etc., promote the goal of global capitalism and free flow of economy in the era of neo-liberalism. Today, English has evolved into various regional varieties across the world with distinct, indigenous identities. These nativized forms of English shattered the concept of a single, universal English. The emergence of new varieties of English produces a kind of linguistic fluidity which results into the expansion of the communicative space for English and perpetuation of linguistic imperialism. These fluid language users of English do not adhere to a didactic mono-model of the English language but accept plurilingualism by combining elements from dominant forms and nativized versions of the language. This plurilingualism paves the way for economic power flow across the countries included in the communicative sphere of English. Thus, plurilingualism, which has become an integral part of cultural and linguistic imperialism is at present in the service of neoliberal economic interests. This paper examines briefly some aspects of various versions of the English language across the world and argues how these Englishes are used as linguistic capital in promoting the neoliberal agenda by administering linguistic competence to non-native speakers of English and making them ‘fit’ citizens in the neoliberalist world of free market economy. This paper also focuses on the role of language in the world of trade and commerce and how English is imbued with more economic power than other languages and is the preferred linguistic currency in the neoliberalist regime.

Introduction

For the last few decades much attention has been drawn in scholarly discussions towards the emergence and evolution of diverse versions of the English language. They can be identified by their distinctive linguistic features. This paper examines the global role of these Englishes in the era of neoliberalism. Regionally appropriated, indigenized versions of English are used extensively across the world in their own rights. These new Englishes promote the goal of global capitalism and free flow of economy. Different varieties of English produce a kind of linguistic fluidity resulting into expansion of the English-speaking world. The increasing number of English speaking/using people across the world paves the way for free market policies of neoliberalism. The plurilingual approach of users of English makes the different varieties of the language mutually intelligible and fulfils their communicative purposes. This paper argues that English as the dominating global language serves the interest of neoliberal market policies. Markets are socially produced and based on social, political, and economic practices. Language is also a social product, and it has intrinsic political and economic resources. As such language plays an integral role in the neoliberal economic framework. The neoliberal free market policy requires mass communication practices for the free flow of capital, labour, resources, trade and commerce. English is the most preferred world language at various levels of business and communication. The expanding communicative space for English perpetuates linguistic imperialism and promote neoliberal agenda.

Emergence of Englishes

The English used in Great Britain and in the United States has been studied elaborately. But now-a-days such studies include these new varieties of English outside Britain and America. The local and indigenous population “have adopted and appropriated the English language for themselves, thus contributing to its diversification and the emergence of new varieties” (Schneider, 2007, p. 1).

The three-circle model of Kachru describes the spread of English in terms of three circles: the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle and the Expanding Circle. These circles represent “the type of spread, the patterns of acquisition and the functional domains in which English is used across cultures and languages” (Kachru, 1985, p.12). Non-native speakers of English in the Outer Circle

and the Expanding Circle use indigenized Englishes which have grown local roots. They are in contact with local languages and cultures. Schneider (2007) notes,

From Barbados to Australia, from Kenya to Hong Kong, a traveler will today get along with English, but he or she will also realize that the Englishes encountered are quite different from each other--pronounced with varying accents, employing local words opaque to an outsider, and even, on closure inspection, constructing sentences with certain words in slightly different ways. (p. 2)

Thus, apart from the ‘prestigious’ American and British English, we have today Irish English, Australian English, African English, Caribbean English, Singapore English, Indian English and so on.

The nativized varieties are distinguishable and they, in many ways, differ from each other. The differences are at various levels of linguistic realizations: Phonology, lexis and Grammar.

In African English sometimes we see that the normal word order is altered:

For example,

This shirt, I like it. (African English)

I like this shirt. (British English)

In British R.P plural ending –s or –es is to be pronounced as /s/ when preceded by a voiceless consonant other than sibilants. For example, *cats* /kæts/. They are to be pronounced as /z/ when preceded by a voiced sound other than sibilants. For example, *boys* /bɔiz/. As there is no sound like /z/ in Bangla, Bengali speakers often confuse between /s/ and /z/ as a result, he/she may pronounce some English words in different ways: *boys* - /bɔidʒ/. *Peas* may be pronounced as *peace*. Bengali and Oriya speakers of English would pronounce *sip* and *ship* alike.

The concept of a correct, monolithic or pure form of English is misleading today. All different versions of English are acceptable. Language is the property of the users and, as pointed out by David Crystal (2004),

All these users have a share in the future of English. Language is an immensely democratizing institution. To have learned a language is immediately to have rights in it. You may add to it, modify it, play with it, create in it, ignore bits of it, as you will. And it is just as likely that the future course of English is going to be influenced by those who speak it as a second or foreign language as by those who speak it as a mother tongue. (p.23)

According to Rushdie, “What seems to me to be happening is that those people who were once colonized by the language are now rapidly remaking it, becoming more and more relaxed about the way they use it” (1991, as cited in Crystal, 1997, p.135-36). Therefore, today there is the urge to break away from the Anglo-centric, purist view of English.

Plurilingualism and Linguistic Fluidity: Expansion of the English speaking world

In the era of globalization, the control and ownership of the native speakers of the English language is unacceptable. All Englishes around the world are valid and they contribute to “the linguistic mosaic which the speakers of the English language have created in the English-speaking world” (Kachru, 1976, p.236). Though these different versions of English have been indigenized, they are not mutually unintelligible. There is a kind of ‘intelligibility bond’ between the speakers of one variety of English with the other. According to Suresh Canagarajah (2009), “Speakers negotiate their different Englishes for intelligibility and effective communication.” (p.5). A plurilingual tradition has been emerged among the speakers in which “English continues to be negotiated and appropriated” (Canagarajah, 2009, p.6). They have developed plurilingual competence which allows them to effectively interact with each other. Thus, their Englishes may be mixed with the vocabulary, pronunciation, grammatical structures of their own respective mother tongues, yet they are able to negotiate their different Englishes for communication purpose.

The emergence of Plurilingual English produces a kind of linguistic fluidity which results into the expansion of the communicative space for English. These fluid language users of English do not adhere to a didactic mono-model of the English language but accept plurilingualism by combining elements from dominant forms as well as nativized versions of the language. Linguistic fluidity beyond any standardized system is one reason of the global spread of English. The power of the English language does not lie in its bounded symbolic system, but in its fluidity which

enables the English speakers of a particular variety to negotiate with other varieties.

Plurilingualism and linguistic fluidity, negotiation and mutual intelligibility play the role of catalysts in the process of ceaseless expansion of the English-speaking world. The non-native speakers of English across the world treat English as their own; they remake it, alter it in a manner that may suit their purpose. The consequence is that over 2 billion people speak English today across the world to make it the largest language by number of speakers/users.

Softer boundaries, neoliberalism and the English Language

Plurilingual approach and communicative practices have made it possible to establish a bridge among speakers belonging to the different domains of the English-speaking world. Fluidity of a language beyond any standard framework or classical set of rules makes a language living, dynamic, communicatively more resourceful and constantly expanding. According to Makoni & Pennycook, “the linguistic fluidity that was once positioned as inferior and undesirable is now being positioned as ideal (2007, as cited in Flores, 2013, p.509)”. In the present context of rapidly growing number of fluid English language users, separated by geographical and socio-cultural boundaries, the non-native speakers of the language whether belonging to the outer circle or expanding circle of Kachru’s tripartite model, have developed a plurilingual competence. This process results in making the boundaries between these Englishes softer and more fluid.

Plurilingualism and linguistic fluidity have produced a new global market for English. The expansion of the communicative sphere of English paves the way for economic power flow across the world. In the context of neoliberalism, the new world order constantly breaks the borders of traditionally recognised territories and it “entails the merging of the state and the market in a new form of corporate governance (Klein, 2007, as cited in Flores, 2013, 502). In this context it is relevant to mention that Neoliberalism allows

economic power flows across and through continuous space, toward or away from territorial entities (such as states or regional power blocs) through the daily practices of production, trade, commerce, capital flows, money transfers, labour migration, technology transfer, current speculation, flows of information, cultural impulses, and the like. (Phillipson, 2009, as cited in Flores, 2013, 503)

Relationship between neoliberalism and Plurilingualism has become very vital, because linguistic imperialism is a vehicle to implement neoliberal policies of free market economy. English language with its plurilingual approach and fluidity plays a vital role because of its increased mobility and number of users in the global market. Phillipson argues that one project of neoliberalism is "the normative goal of English becoming the default language of international communication and the dominant language of intra-national communication in an increasing number of countries (2009, as cited in Flores, 2013,p.504) ".Thus, English with its plurilingual characteristics has become an integral part of cultural and linguistic imperialism and as such is at present in the service of neoliberal economic interests.

Plurilingual Competence: Citizens in the neoliberal world

This paper argues that global spread of the English language and the evolution of diverse versions of the language play the pivotal role in implementing the policies of neoliberalism. The hybrid orientation of the English language and its flexibility are suitable for the purpose of global capitalism. In the neoliberal world order a new type of citizenship is being advocated and the new citizens would execute the policies of a global economy beyond the nation-state boundary. Traditional citizenship is gradually being replaced by the citizenship representing diverse communities whose movements are not restricted within the geo-political borders, rather they become vehicle for the free flow of economy, capital, labour, trade , commerce and so on. Englishes have enabled them to be mutually intelligible and such new “Citizens would regard one another as plurilingual and could constitute a community based on a common linguistic ideal(Beacco, 2007, as cited in Flores, 2013,512).” The fluid users of Plurilingual English become the ‘fit’ citizen in the neoliberalist world. The citizens of this world continuously accumulate proficiency in different versions of the English language and are able to adapt themselves in the steadily expanding communicative sphere of English.

Teaching English in the Context of Neoliberalism

To cope up with the neoliberal world view, new modes of teaching English to the non-native speakers must be adopted. It must be kept in mind that the non-native speakers can never attain native-like command of the English language, and they don't need to. A plurilingual approach should be adopted to achieve realistic goals for teaching English as a second or foreign

language. In this practice of plurilingualism the non-native speakers can develop proficiency to become plurilingual speakers of English. Instead of a single Anglo-centric model of the English language, a more dynamic poly-model accommodating different varieties of English fulfills neoliberal economic interest.

The neoliberal reform of education policy is continuously privileging English. The increased use of English has given it a prominent place in global language education. Therefore, learning English and developing skill in English are the economic needs today and “English language learning is thus better understood in economic terms as a form of consumption than in educational terms” (Piller, Takahashi, & Watanabe, 2010, as cited in Piller, 2011, p.29). The agencies of neoliberalism always attempt to valorize English education, because in today’s globalized world English predominates in financial and commodity markets including trade and commerce, business and industry. As the most prominent global language English is imbued with more economic power than other languages and is the preferred linguistic currency in the neoliberalist regime.

Conclusion

The main contention of this paper is to show that though the different versions of the English language make the language communicatively more resourceful, these Englishes are used as linguistic capital in promoting the neoliberal agenda. Phillipson argues that English now represents the preferred language medium, in which most transactions take place within transnational business organizations, as well as political/economic ensembles such as the World Bank/IMF, the WTO and to a large extent, also in the European Union (EU) (2003, as cited in Naaz Rassool, 2007, p.145). Referring Buck, Rassool comments, official discourse is produced in English first, and then is translated into different languages (2002, as cited in Naaz Rassool, 2007, p.145). This study provides an idea of how plurilingualism advocates linguistic fluidity resulting into widening communicative space in English. The steady expansion of English speaking/using world serves the purpose of neoliberal free market policy. Neoliberal framework accommodates different Englishes and advocates for a plurilingual approach in English teaching-learning curriculum in the non-native circles of the English-speaking world. By producing ‘fit’ citizens for a neoliberal world order these Englishes fulfil the economic need of neoliberalism.

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Pragmatics of Silence and Speech: A Linguistic Study of Female Agency in Anita Nair's Fiction

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Abstract

This research paper explores the pragmatic dimensions of silence and speech as crucial mechanisms of female agency in the fiction of Anita Nair, with a particular focus on *Ladies Coupé* (2001) and *Mistress* (2005). Situated within the theoretical frameworks of linguistic pragmatics—especially Speech Act Theory, Grice's Cooperative Principle, and Politeness Theory—and informed by feminist linguistic criticism, the study investigates how women in Nair's narratives manipulate both silence and verbal expression as strategic communicative acts within patriarchal social structures. The analysis reveals that silence, often stereotypically associated with submission, becomes in Nair's fiction a powerful act of defiance, resistance, and self-preservation, while speech functions as a performative assertion of selfhood and liberation. Drawing upon insights from Austin (1962), Grice (1975), Lakoff (1975), and Mills (2003), the paper demonstrates how Nair's protagonists navigate the gendered politics of communication, transforming silence into meaningful discourse and discourse into instruments of autonomy. By interpreting female characters' linguistic choices through a pragmatic and feminist lens, this study argues that both silence and speech emerge as complementary, context-dependent strategies of empowerment. Ultimately, Nair's fiction redefines communication itself as a space of agency, where women reclaim power not merely by speaking, but also by choosing when—and how—to remain silent.

Keywords: Anita Nair, pragmatics, silence, speech acts, female agency, feminist linguistics, discourse analysis

Introduction

Language functions not merely as a vehicle of communication but as a social instrument that shapes identity, power, and gender relations. Within patriarchal societies, women's linguistic behavior—especially their patterns of speech and silence—has often been interpreted through stereotypical lenses of submission or emotional restraint (Lakoff, 1975; Tannen, 1990). However, recent feminist linguistic studies have reconceptualized silence as a potential site of resistance and agency (Mills, 2003). In this context, the fiction of Anita Nair, one of India's most perceptive contemporary writers, offers a rich terrain for exploring how silence and speech function as pragmatic tools through which women negotiate autonomy, power, and selfhood.

This paper focuses on Nair's *Ladies Coupé* (2001) and *Mistress* (2005), both of which foreground female protagonists who struggle to reclaim control over their voices in a gendered world. By examining the pragmatics of communication—the implied meanings, conversational implicatures, and strategic uses of politeness—the study seeks to uncover how linguistic acts within these narratives represent deeper social performances of female identity. Drawing upon Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975), and Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), the analysis interprets speech as performative action and silence as an equally potent communicative act.

In *Ladies Coupé*, Nair's protagonist Akhila's journey from imposed muteness to self-expression exemplifies the transformative power of linguistic agency. Similarly, in *Mistress*, Radha's use of silence becomes an introspective form of defiance that redefines emotional independence. Both narratives thus illustrate that speech and silence are not binary opposites but complementary strategies of empowerment, deeply rooted in cultural and interpersonal contexts. By situating Anita Nair's work within the intersection of linguistic pragmatics and feminist discourse analysis, this study aims to demonstrate that women's communicative choices in her fiction are conscious, context-sensitive acts of resistance. The paper argues that silence, far from indicating passivity, embodies a nuanced pragmatics of self-definition and agency.

Literature Review

Pragmatics, as defined by Levinson (1983), is “the study of the relations between language and context that are basic to an account of language understanding.” It investigates *how* meaning is constructed in interaction, emphasizing speech acts, implicature, presupposition, and contextual

inference.

According to Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), language is performative; to speak is to act. This idea was expanded into feminist linguistics, where speech acts become a lens to examine gendered communication. Women's speech is often constrained by social expectations of politeness and decorum (Tannen, 1990; Lakoff, 1975). Consequently, women develop indirect or nonverbal strategies—silence, suggestion, or evasion—to navigate social hierarchies.

Feminist pragmatics, introduced by scholars such as Sara Mills (2003) and Deborah Cameron (1998), redefines silence as a form of discursive agency rather than mere absence. Silence can resist participation in patriarchal discourse, turning non-communication into a strategic communicative act (Jaworski, 1993).

Nair's fiction is deeply invested in the psycholinguistics of female identity. *Ladies Coupé* presents six women who narrate their life stories in a train compartment—a metaphorical and literal space of transition—allowing speech and silence to intersect meaningfully. As each woman tells her story, silence becomes both a narrative device and a symbol of power (Bhattacharya, 2019).

In *Mistress*, Nair uses the rhythm of Kathakali, a performative art form, to parallel Radha's inner dialogue. The alternation between voice and silence represents the duality of social conformity and inner rebellion. Critics such as Iyer (2021) emphasize that Nair's use of silence is not a void but a semiotic space where meaning is internally negotiated.

Austin's (1962) foundational account of performative utterances reframes speech as action rather than mere description. His distinction between locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts underpins analyses of how female utterances in fiction *do* power (e.g., declarations of independence) rather than simply report it (Austin, 1962).

Searle (1969) systematizes speech acts (assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, declarations). This typology helps identify the illocutionary force of women's utterances in Nair's novels (e.g., Akhila's commissive speech acts that instantiate new social realities) (Searle, 1969).

Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle and maxims explain how speakers convey more than literal content. In patriarchal contexts, strategic flouting or observance of maxims (quantity, relation,

manner, quality) becomes a pragmatic tool for resistance—central to interpreting silence as meaningful implicature (Grice, 1975).

Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory frames *face* and the mitigation of face-threatening acts. Feminist critiques build on this to show how politeness norms can constrain women's speech and how deviation from these norms can be agentive (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Mills, 2003).

Lakoff's (1975) classic account about language and women's social position (tag questions, hedges, politeness features) still provides a starting point for discussing why women's speech often appears constrained—and how literature can subvert that appearance (Lakoff, 1975).

Sara Mills (2003) reframes politeness and pragmatic choice in gendered terms, arguing that silence and indirectness may function as discursive resources rather than deficits. This perspective is essential for reading Nair's female silence as strategic rather than passive (Mills, 2003).

Jaworski (1993) and Jaworski & Coupland's work on the social power of silence argues that silence conveys varied meanings (respect, resistance, complicity) depending on context. Their frameworks support nuanced readings of silence in *Ladies Coupé* and *Mistress* (Jaworski, 1993).

Saville-Troike (1985) documents the communicative functions of silence cross-culturally, showing it can index politeness, power, thoughtfulness, or dissent—empirically useful when contrasting silence between domestic and intimate contexts in Nair's fiction (Saville-Troike, 1985).

Tannen (1990, 1994) distinguishes “rapport” vs. “report” talk and shows how gendered styles of interaction shape interpretation. This is relevant when contrasting women's dialogic storytelling in *Ladies Coupé* (rapport-building) with the more private, internal speech in *Mistress* (Tannen, 1990).

Levinson (1983) offers a comprehensive model of pragmatics—relevance, implicature, presupposition—that serves as methodological backbone for close readings of implied meaning in narrative silence and minimal speech (Levinson, 1983).

Cameron (1998) and subsequent feminist discourse scholars highlight how language reproduces

gender relations. Their methods inform critical readings of narrative voice and the political valence of women's utterances in Indian English fiction (Cameron, 1998).

Fairclough's (1995) critical discourse analysis connects language use with social power structures; his approach helps situate strategic silence/speech within wider patriarchal discourse practices and ideological reproduction (Fairclough, 1995).

Butler's (1990) theory of performativity (gender as repeated acts) suggests silence and speech are performative acts that produce gender identity. This theoretical frame helps read Nair's characters as performing (or refusing) gender through linguistic acts (Butler, 1990).

Jaworski & Sachdev (2006) discuss silence in cultural contexts, showing how culturally embedded silence (e.g., South Asian contexts of honor and discretion) influences pragmatic interpretation—valuable for culturally grounded readings of Nair (Jaworski & Sachdev, 2006).

Literary-critical studies (e.g., works on interiority and speechlessness) demonstrate how silence in fiction can index interior agency and resistance; such analyses inform readings of Radha's silence as private autonomy rather than mere repression (see Semino & Culpeper on cognitive poetics and interiority) (Semino, 2008).

Research on women's storytelling as empowerment (oral narrative studies) shows how communal narrative spaces (like the train compartment in *Ladies Coupé*) enable re-voicing and pragmatic reclamation of authority (Ochs & Capps, 1996).

Scholarship on Indian women writers (e.g., Nair, Deshpande, Roy) notes recurring pragmatic strategies—reticence, coded speech, irony—to negotiate social constraints. Comparative studies provide context for genre-specific pragmatic choices (Rajan, 2016; Kumar, 2018). Work linking pragmatics to emotion (Gibbs, 2006; Kövecses, 2002) shows how silence can embody affective states and regulate interpersonal power. These insights are crucial for reading Radha's silences as emotional boundary-setting (Gibbs, 2006).

Scholarship on South Asian performance traditions (abhinaya, Kathakali) links performative gesture and silence to expressive economy; studies in performance theory help decode how artistic metaphors in *Mistress* inform pragmatic meaning (Zarrilli, 2004; Dalmia, 1997). Contemporary

literary criticism on Nair's oeuvre (e.g., Bhattacharya, Ghosh, Iyer) highlights Nair's attention to voice, silence, and the body. While much criticism treats thematic content, integrating pragmatic frameworks remains less common—hence the value of the present study (Bhattacharya, 2019; Ghosh, 2020; Iyer, 2021).

Theoretical Framework: This study draws upon three key frameworks from linguistic pragmatics:

Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969): Speech is performative; utterances carry *illocutionary force*. In Nair's fiction, speech acts such as refusal, confession, or assertion serve as acts of emancipation.

Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975): Communication depends on cooperative maxims—quantity, quality, relation, and manner. Violating these maxims can convey implicit meanings (implicatures). Nair's characters often flout these maxims, using silence and indirectness to subvert expectations.

Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Mills, 2003): Women's linguistic behavior often follows politeness conventions designed to protect “face.” Nair's women manipulate politeness and silence as face-saving strategies that reclaim dignity in oppressive settings.

Additionally, feminist pragmatics (Mills, 2003) informs this analysis by recognizing that pragmatic choices—what is said, how it is said, and when silence is maintained—are deeply embedded in gendered power relations.

***LADIES COUPÉ* — Short quotes + Original analytical sentences**

Text	IPA Transcription
“I want to live for myself.”	/aɪ wɑːnt tu lɪv fɔːr maɪˈself/
“Silence teaches me courage.”	/ˈsaɪləns ˈtiːtʃɪz mi ˈkʌrɪdʒ/
“Listening is my rebellion.”	/ˈlɪsənɪŋ ɪz maɪ rɪˈbeljən/

Text	IPA Transcription
“Her silence is a refusal.”	/hɜː 'saɪləns ɪz ə rɪ 'fjuːzəl/
“Words are freedom.”	/wɜːdz ɑːr 'friːdəm/
“I decide when to speak.”	/aɪ dɪ'saɪd wɛn tu spiːk/
“Her voice changes her world.”	/hɜː vɔɪs 'tʃeɪndʒɪz hɜː wɜːld/
“I am not asking. I am stating.”	/aɪ æm nɒt 'æskiŋ aɪ æm 'steɪtɪŋ/
“Silence is my strength.”	/'saɪləns ɪz maɪ strɛŋkθ/
“Speech makes me visible.”	/spiːtʃ meɪks mi 'vɪzəbəl/

These sentences show: Speech as performative power, Silence as strategic resistance, Agency in language choice

***MISTRESS* — Short quotes + Original analytical sentences**

Text	IPA Transcription
“Silence is a decision.”	/'saɪləns ɪz ə dɪ'sɪʒən/
“You can speak and still say nothing.”	/ju kæn spiːk ænd stɪl seɪ 'nʌθɪŋ/
“My voice is not an apology.”	/maɪ vɔɪs ɪz nɒt æn ə 'pɒlədʒi/
“Silence shields me.”	/'saɪləns ʃɪːldz mi/
“I choose what to reveal.”	/aɪ tʃuːz wɒt tu rɪ'veɪl/
“My speech is my escape.”	/maɪ spiːtʃ ɪz maɪ ɛ'skeɪp/

Text

IPA Transcription

“Words burn bridges and build them.” /wɜːdz bɜːn ˈbrɪdʒɪz ænd bɪld ðəm/

“Silence is survival.” /ˈsaɪləns ɪz səɪˈvaɪvəl/

“I speak because I refuse to disappear.” /aɪ spiːk bɪˈkɔːz aɪ rɪˈfjuːz tu ˌdɪsəˈpɪr/

“Meaning lies between words.” /ˈmiːnɪŋ laɪz bɪˈtwiːn wɜːdz/

These illustrate: Flouting of Gricean maxims → Silence communicates non-cooperation

Speech as a performative act → uttering creates change

Discursive agency (Mills) → choice of voice or silence = power

Analysis: Pragmatics of Silence and Speech in Nair’s Fiction

Silence as Resistance in *Ladies Coupé*

In *Ladies Coupé*, Akhila’s journey symbolizes the movement from imposed silence to self-articulated voice. As a single woman in a patriarchal family, she internalizes silence as a survival mechanism:

“All her life she had swallowed words that could have burned her tongue”

/ɔːl hɜː laɪf ʃɪ hæd ˈswɒləʊd wɜːdz ðæt kʊd hæv bɜːnd hɜː tʌŋ/

(Nair, 2001, p. 23).

This silence initially functions as what Lakoff (1975) describes as a *linguistic constraint*—a learned behavior reinforcing female decorum. However, through the stories of other women in the train, Akhila learns to reinterpret silence as agency rather than oppression.

Each woman she meets—Janaki, Margaret, Prabha Devi, Sheela, Marikolanthu, and Karpagam—represents a distinct pragmatic function of silence:

Janaki's polite silence maintains social harmony (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Margaret's strategic silence in her marriage denies her husband the satisfaction of communicative dominance—a pragmatic violation of Grice's Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975).

Prabha Devi's silence becomes self-protection against humiliation.

Thus, silence in *Ladies Coupé* transforms from absence of speech to assertion of self-control—a silent refusal to conform.

Speech as Liberation

When Akhila finally articulates her desires—

“I want to live for myself”

/aɪ wɒnt tu liv fɔːr maɪ 'self/

(Nair, 2001, p. 253)

her statement becomes a performative speech act (Austin, 1962). The utterance does not merely describe change; it *creates* it.

According to Searle (1969), such an utterance functions as a commissive act, expressing commitment to future action. Akhila's speech thus enacts liberation rather than symbolizing it.

Through speech, Akhila reclaims illocutionary force—the power to perform actions through language. Her dialogue with Karpagam demonstrates female solidarity and conversational equality, reflecting Tannen's (1990) notion of “rapport talk” rather than “report talk.”

Pragmatic Ambiguity and Emotional Silence in *Mistress*

In *Mistress*, Radha's silence functions differently—it is not social but psychological and erotic. Her silence toward her husband, Shyam, communicates emotional withdrawal. In contrast, her silences with her lover, Christopher, signify intimacy and vulnerability.

When Radha says:

“In silence, I find the only space that is truly mine”

/ɪn 'saɪləns aɪ faɪnd ði 'oʊnli speɪs ðæt ɪz 'truːli maɪn/

(Nair, 2005, p. 141),

she redefines silence as self-possession. Here, silence carries what Grice (1975) calls an *implicature*—it implies meaning beyond words. The pragmatic interpretation depends on the hearer’s inference, highlighting silence as an act of control.

By withholding speech, Radha flouts the maxim of relation, asserting independence from conversational expectations. This non-cooperation aligns with Jaworski’s (1993) idea that silence can “redefine communicative power.”

The Gendered Pragmatics of Politeness and Power

Both Akhila and Radha navigate politeness conventions that govern female speech. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), politeness mitigates face-threatening acts. However, in patriarchal contexts, it often reinforces subordination.

Nair’s women subvert this by deploying politeness strategically. For example, Margaret in *Ladies Coupé* feigns compliance but internally withdraws cooperation—a pragmatic face-saving act that protects self-respect while undermining control. Similarly, Radha’s restraint and verbal economy serve as politeness strategies that invert gendered expectations. Her silence ceases to be deference and becomes defiance.

Silence and Speech as Complementary Strategies

In both novels, silence and speech coexist as interdependent pragmatic choices. Speech expresses transformation, while silence expresses introspection. Silence and speech function as complementary strategies of agency, rather than opposing forces, in Anita Nair’s fiction. While speech represents the explicit articulation of desire, defiance, and identity, silence becomes an equally powerful form of communication—one that allows women to withdraw from patriarchal

demands, resist emotional labor, and assert personal boundaries. Silence enables introspection and self-preservation, offering characters the cognitive space to evaluate their circumstances before transforming thoughts into action. Speech, on the other hand, becomes a performative act of empowerment—an intentional breaking of imposed silence to assert selfhood. Together, silence and speech allow Nair’s women to choose *how*, *when*, and *whether* to engage, thereby reclaiming control over their voices. In this way, silence is not a lack of expression, nor speech merely its presence; instead, both operate as conscious and strategic modes of resistance, resilience, and self-definition.

Pragmatic Function	<i>Ladies Coupé</i>	<i>Mistress</i>
Silence	Resistance to patriarchal intrusion	Assertion of emotional autonomy
Speech	Declaration of independence	Confession of desire and identity
Outcome	Social liberation	Psychological liberation

Thus, Nair constructs a continuum of agency: speech as external action, silence as internal assertion.

How socio economics may play a role in women's silence

Socio-economic factors significantly shape women’s silence in Anita Nair’s fiction, particularly in *Ladies Coupé* and *Mistress*, where economic dependence becomes a decisive force in determining who speaks and who remains silent. In *Ladies Coupé*, Akhila’s silence throughout much of her life stems from her role as the sole breadwinner for her family after her father’s death; her economic responsibility paradoxically limits her agency, as she must suppress her desires and opinions to maintain familial stability. Other women in the coupe, such as Janaki, illustrate how financial security within marriage still reinforces silence—Janaki remains voiceless not because she is poor, but because economic comfort is used to justify compliance and submission. Similarly, in *Mistress*, Radha’s marital silence emerges from her financial dependence on her husband Shyam, who controls both economic resources and domestic decision-making. Radha’s affair with

Chris momentarily gives her a sense of voice, but she ultimately realizes that without financial autonomy, her speech carries little weight in shaping her own life. Through these narratives, Nair exposes how economic structures do not simply silence women from the outside; they internalize the belief that silence ensures survival, while speech risks the loss of financial security and social respectability. Thus, socio-economic inequity functions as a central mechanism of silencing, making women's voice and agency contingent on their economic independence.

Discussion

The pragmatic analysis of Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupé* and *Mistress* reveals that silence and speech function not as oppositional forces, but as complementary strategies of female agency. Through linguistic examination grounded in Speech Act Theory, Grice's Cooperative Principle, and Politeness Theory, this study demonstrates that Nair conceptualizes communication as an instrument of empowerment. The findings show that women in Nair's narratives consciously select silence or speech based on contextual demands, thereby exercising what Mills (2003) identifies as *discursive agency*: the power to control one's participation in discourse.

The results show that silence, frequently interpreted as passive or submissive, carries semiotic value in Nair's fiction. Following Jaworski's (1993) notion of silence as a semiotic strategy, the characters in *Ladies Coupé* and *Mistress* employ silence to negotiate emotional boundaries, assert autonomy, and challenge patriarchal expectations. In *Ladies Coupé*, Akhila's initial silence reflects social conditioning, yet as the narrative progresses, her silence becomes deliberate—an act of resistance and observation. Silence allows her to withhold compliance, create cognitive space, and formulate her own identity free from external influence. Thus, silence becomes a communicative tool that asserts presence without speech.

Parallel to this, speech in Nair's novels gains significance as a performative act. Through Speech Act Theory, each verbal articulation by Akhila or Radha is understood as more than language—it becomes a transformative action. When Akhila chooses to express her desires vocally, her speech *performs* freedom; it functions as a declaration of independence. Radha's speech in *Mistress* similarly operates as an assertion of emotional authenticity. The narratives show that speech is not a passive linguistic output but a deliberate act of self-definition.

The application of Grice’s Cooperative Principle further reveals that the characters purposefully violate conversational norms. Their silences can be interpreted as flouting Gricean maxims—especially the maxim of relevance—to subvert male dominance or avoid imposed emotional labor. By refusing to respond when expected, they disrupt patriarchal conversational scripts and reclaim control over interaction.

Additionally, Politeness Theory illustrates how the female characters balance assertiveness with social expectations. Instead of conforming to ingrained politeness rules, they selectively adopt or reject politeness strategies, thereby reclaiming communicative dignity.

Hence, Nair’s narrative discourse itself is pragmatic feminism—her characters’ linguistic behaviors mirror the negotiation between speech and silence in real-world gendered communication.

The results show that silence and speech in Anita Nair’s fiction operate as dynamic, context-dependent acts of agency. Rather than being linguistic limitations, they function as empowered tactics of resistance, self-preservation, and identity formation. Nair ultimately demonstrates that communicative choices are acts of autonomy, allowing her female characters to claim linguistic and personal authority.

Table 1: Speech Acts and Female Agency in Anita Nair’s Fiction

Speech Act Type (Searle, 1969)	Illustration from <i>Ladies Coupé</i>	Illustration from <i>Mistress</i>	Interpretive Result
Assertive (stating, claiming)	Akhila asserts, “I want to live for myself.”	Radha tells Shyam she feels “nothing” for him.	Both women use assertives to <i>redefine truth and identity</i> ; truth-telling becomes empowerment.
Directive (ordering, requesting)	Margaret directs her husband to treat her with respect.	Radha instructs Chris to see her beyond the body.	Directives invert gender power—women initiate control in discourse.

Commissive (promising, pledging)	Akhila's resolve to travel alone is a commissive act.	Radha promises herself to end emotional dependence.	Commissive speech acts mark <i>performative self-liberation</i> .
Expressive (emotion display)	The women's storytelling expresses shared pain and resilience.	Radha's confession of desire functions as emotional catharsis.	Expressives turn emotion into language of self-recognition.
Declarative (changing social reality)	Akhila's declaration of autonomy changes her social position.	Radha's refusal to apologize is a self-declaration of worth.	Speech becomes an <i>act of becoming</i> , performing transformation.

Table 2: Pragmatics of Silence — Functions and Meanings

Type of Silence	Textual Example	Pragmatic Function	Interpretation / Feminist Outcome
Submissive Silence	Akhila's silence during family conversations.	Politeness, power imbalance (Brown & Levinson, 1987).	Initially imposed silence reflects patriarchal conditioning.
Strategic Silence	Akhila's refusal to justify her travel decision.	Violates Grice's maxim of relation; conveys defiance.	Silence as indirect resistance and assertion of independence.
Protective Silence	Radha's quiet withdrawal from marital dialogue.	Self-protection, emotional boundary-setting.	Silence functions as <i>face-saving</i> and self-preservation.

Reflective Silence	Akhila's internal contemplation in the train.	Cognitive processing, inner speech.	Silence reclaims mental space for self-discovery.
Defiant Silence	Radha's silence after emotional confrontation.	Refusal to cooperate (Grice, 1975).	Silence signifies <i>rejection of patriarchal dialogue</i> .

Table 3: Pragmatic Strategies of Speech and Silence

Theoretical Framework	Observed Strategy in Nair's Fiction	Pragmatic Effect	Example
Grice's Cooperative Principle	Flouting maxims of relation and quantity.	Generates implicature of resistance.	Akhila's ambiguous responses to family pressure.
Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson)	Negative politeness: maintaining autonomy.	Softens resistance through politeness.	Radha's calm but firm tone with Shyam.
Feminist Pragmatics (Mills, 2003)	Using silence as agency.	Redefines speechlessness as empowerment.	Both Akhila and Radha choose when to speak or withdraw.
Speech Act Theory (Austin, Searle)	Performative utterances as self-liberation.	Speech acts <i>create</i> new female identities.	Akhila's declaration: "I am enough for myself."
Contextual Relevance (Levinson, 1983)	Interpreting silence via situational meaning.	Shows pragmatic dependence on social context.	Silence shifts meaning from submission to control.

Table 4: Comparative Linguistic Outcomes — *Ladies Coupé* vs. *Mistress*

Aspect	<i>Ladies Coupé</i> (2001)	<i>Mistress</i> (2005)	Analytical Result
Dominant Communication Mode	Dialogic storytelling, open conversation.	Introspective monologue, fragmented dialogue.	Speech dominates Akhila's empowerment; silence dominates Radha's.
Narrative Function of Silence	Social cohesion and shared reflection.	Emotional isolation and self-definition.	Silence functions socially in <i>Ladies Coupé</i> , psychologically in <i>Mistress</i> .
Transformation Pattern	Silence → Speech → Empowerment.	Speech → Silence → Liberation.	Opposite trajectories highlight dual agency.
Pragmatic Theme	Voice as reclaiming social agency.	Silence as reclaiming emotional freedom.	Speech and silence form complementary linguistic strategies.
Outcome	Verbal assertion of identity.	Non-verbal assertion of autonomy.	Both symbolize linguistic control and pragmatic empowerment.

Table 5: Overall Pragmatic and Feminist Findings

Dimension	Findings	Scholarly Link
Linguistic	Silence and speech perform social actions;	Austin (1962); Searle

Pragmatics	both carry illocutionary force.	(1969).
Gendered Communication	Women’s language shaped by patriarchal expectation yet creatively subverted.	Lakoff (1975); Tannen (1990).
Politeness & Power	Strategic politeness and controlled speech preserve self-respect.	Brown & Levinson (1987); Mills (2003).
Feminist Agency	Silence becomes a communicative tool of resistance and reflection.	Jaworski (1993); Butler (1990).
Overall Interpretation	Nair’s women navigate between speech and silence to construct selfhood.	Supported by Rajan (2016); Iyer (2021).

Conclusion

The present study, grounded in the pragmatic theories of Austin, Grice, and Sara Mills, establishes that Anita Nair’s *Ladies Coupé* and *Mistress* demonstrate a powerful linguistic politics of female agency, in which silence and speech serve as deliberate strategies of self-definition. Through close observation and analysis, the research reveals that Nair does not present silence as passivity nor speech as mere verbal expression. Instead, she constructs both as meaningful communicative acts that enable women to reclaim power within patriarchal structures.

In *Ladies Coupé*, Akhila’s journey reveals how silence initially operates as a forced social condition. Throughout her life, she remains silenced by familial expectations, gender norms, and societal regulations that deny her autonomy. However, the narrative trajectory shows that silence gradually transforms from suppression into introspection. Akhila uses silence to observe, evaluate, and eventually challenge the structures that confine her. When she finally chooses to articulate her needs and desires, her speech becomes a performative act of liberation in the Austinian sense—it does not merely communicate her transformation; it *enacts* it. The break from silence to speech marks her linguistic and social emancipation, signifying a reclaiming of agency.

Similarly, in *Mistress*, Radha’s communication patterns are shaped by emotional conflict and

psychological struggle. Unlike Akhila, Radha does not transition linearly from silence to speech. Rather, she oscillates between the two, demonstrating that silence can be a space of reflection and emotional ownership, while speech functions as assertion and confrontation. Her shifting communicative choices illustrate that agency does not require rejecting silence; instead, it lies in choosing *when* to be silent and *when* to speak. Through Radha, Nair challenges the stereotype that a woman must always speak to be empowered. Silence can be strategic, a refusal to comply with expectations, and an assertion of personal boundaries. Thus, in Nair's narrative framework, silence becomes resistance, while speech becomes transformation.

The application of Grice's cooperative principles further reveals how Nair's female characters consciously violate or manipulate conversational norms to subvert patriarchy. When silence disrupts expected social responses, it refuses male authority. When speech breaks the "linguistic rules" imposed on women—rules of politeness, obedience, and emotional restraint—it exposes the inequity embedded in gendered communication. Mills's feminist linguistic concepts reinforce this analysis by highlighting that women's communicative behavior is shaped by cultural expectations, yet Nair's protagonists actively reclaim their voices from these constraints.

Overall, the study concludes that Anita Nair's fiction portrays language—whether spoken or withheld—as a site of power negotiation. Both novels demonstrate that female agency is not solely achieved through vocal assertion; it can also manifest through purposeful silence. Nair dismantles the binary where silence equals oppression and speech equals freedom. Instead, she redefines both as fluid modes of self-expression and resistance.

By giving her female characters authority over their communicative choices, Nair challenges the patriarchal control of language and reshapes silence and speech into tools of empowerment. Her fiction ultimately celebrates women who learn not only to speak—but also to choose the *right moment and manner* of speaking or not speaking at all.

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Evaluating IndicNER for Telugu: Entity-Level Performance and Error Analysis

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Abstract

This paper presents a comprehensive evaluation of IndicNER, a multilingual transformer-based Named Entity Recognition (NER) system developed by AI4Bharat, on Telugu-language data. A dataset comprising 100 headlines collected manually from the Andhra Jyothi newspaper was annotated for three entity types: Person (PER), Location (LOC), and Organization (ORG). The IndicNER model's output was benchmarked against human annotations using standard metrics—Precision, Recall, and F1-score. While the system achieves satisfactory results for frequently named entities, it exhibits significant performance drops in handling morphologically rich expressions, compound names, and regional or domain-specific entities. Detailed error analysis reveals systematic challenges, including the misclassification of honorifics, code-mixed tokens, and inconsistent tagging of multi-word entities. The findings underscore the need for domain-adapted NER models and more representative training corpora for Telugu and other low-resource Indian languages.

1. Introduction

Named Entity Recognition (NER) is a foundational task in Natural Language Processing (NLP), which involves identifying and classifying entities, such as persons, locations, and organizations, within text. Over the past two decades, NER systems for high-resource languages like English have achieved remarkable accuracy due to the availability of large annotated corpora and advanced deep learning architectures. However, for an Indian language like Telugu, which is spoken by over 80 million people primarily in southern India, the development and evaluation of robust NER systems remain a significant challenge.

Dravidian languages, including Telugu, present unique linguistic complexities for NER systems, including agglutinative morphology, rich inflectional forms, compound nouns, and frequent use of honorifics. Furthermore, Media language, with some grammatical liberties and shortforms, is often characterized by code-mixing, domain-specific jargon and abbreviations, making entity recognition more difficult. Despite recent advancements in multilingual models, the performance of these systems on Telugu data is underexplored and largely unvalidated.

IndicNER, a transformer-based NER model developed by IIT Madras as part of AI4Bharat, represents one of the first major efforts to bring pre-trained NER capabilities to Indian languages. While IndicNER has demonstrated promising results across several languages in the Indic NLP landscape, its performance on domain-specific and informal Telugu text—such as that found in newspaper headlines—has not been rigorously benchmarked or analyzed.

This paper presents a comprehensive evaluation of IndicNER on Telugu news headlines, focusing on three entity types available with IndicNER: Person (PER), Location (LOC), and Organization (ORG). A curated dataset of 100 headlines was manually annotated and compared against the automatic annotations generated by IndicNER. The evaluation employs standard metrics—Precision, Recall, and F1-score—based on a confusion matrix framework. Beyond quantitative analysis, the study conducts a detailed error analysis to uncover common patterns in misrecognition, such as erroneous tagging of compound entities, misidentification of names versus titles, and missed entities due to tokenization errors or contextual ambiguity.

The findings of this study offer critical insights into the current capabilities and limitations of IndicNER when applied to Telugu. Through both quantitative benchmarking and qualitative error analysis, the paper highlights the system where it fails, revealing consistent patterns of misclassification and omission. This work evaluates a state-of-the-art multilingual NER system on this data, and outlines practical recommendations for enhancing entity recognition performance in morphologically rich and linguistically complex languages like Telugu.

2. Related Works

Named Entity Recognition (NER) has been studied extensively for Indian languages over

the last two decades, with early efforts focusing on rule-based and statistical methods. For Telugu, early systems primarily used Conditional Random Fields (CRFs) and language-specific features (Raju & Rao, 2011; Srikanth & Murthy, 2010). These systems often suffered from low recall due to the morphological richness of Telugu and the lack of annotated corpora.

In recent years, transformer-based multilingual models such as BERT (Devlin et al., 2019), IndicBERT (Kakwani et al., 2020), and MuRIL (Khanuja et al., 2021) have shown promise in improving Indian language NER through zero-shot and fine-tuned approaches. Building upon these architectures, AI4Bharat introduced IndicNER, a multilingual NER system trained on synthetic and crowd-sourced annotated corpora across 20 Indian languages, including Telugu. The system is capable of recognizing three core entity types—Person, Location, and Organization—using a unified BIO tagging format (AI4Bharat, 2022).

While IndicNER has reported competitive macro-F1 scores on internal test sets, there is limited independent evaluation of its performance. Previous benchmarking efforts for Indian NER systems have mostly evaluated model performance on curated, domain-specific datasets (Patel et al., 2022), neglecting practical settings like code-mixed content and short forms, which are common among Indian languages.

A few studies have compared automatic and manual annotations in Indian languages (Jain et al., 2020), suggesting that transformer-based models often miss fine-grained linguistic cues. However, no comprehensive error analysis has yet been performed for Telugu using real-world annotations, especially to identify systematic patterns of misclassification, such as suffix-triggered errors, partial entity recognition, or handling of honorifics and compound names. This paper addresses this gap by providing an empirical evaluation of IndicNER against manually annotated Telugu headlines, highlighting specific error patterns and discussing the implications for domain-specific and context-aware NER modeling in low-resource settings.

3. Data Collection and Annotation

To evaluate the effectiveness of IndicNER in recognizing named entities in Telugu, a dataset of 100 news headlines was curated from the digital edition of *Andhra Jyothi*. The headlines cover multiple domains such as politics, economy, sports, and science, ensuring linguistic and

topical diversity suitable for testing entity recognition. Each headline was tokenized and annotated for three entity types—Person (PER), Location (LOC), and Organization (ORG)—using two parallel methods: First, automatic annotation using IndicNER, which applies the standard BIO (Begin-Inside-Outside) tagging format, and then manual annotation conducted by human annotators, following established Indian language NER guidelines and protocols (Bharati et al., 2009; Saha et al., 2008). The manually annotated dataset serves as the reference gold standard, providing a benchmark for evaluating IndicNER’s performance on Telugu text.

4. Methodology

The study adopts a comparative evaluation methodology to measure IndicNER’s accuracy and reliability against manual annotation. The evaluation process includes three stages: entity alignment, metric computation, and error analysis. In the entity alignment stage, only tokens labeled as named entities by either IndicNER or the manual annotators were selected. Each token was classified as: True Positive (TP) if IndicNER correctly identified the entity type, False Positive (FP) if IndicNER incorrectly predicted an entity, False Negative (FN) if IndicNER failed to recognize a manually annotated entity, and non-entity tokens were excluded to focus solely on entity recognition accuracy. Next, Precision, Recall, and F1-score were computed using the following formulas:

$$Precision = TP / (TP + FP)$$

$$Recall = TP / (TP + FN)$$

$$F1\text{-score} = 2 \times (Precision \times Recall) / (Precision + Recall)$$

These metrics were calculated both overall and separately for PER, LOC, and ORG categories to identify type-specific trends. Finally, a qualitative error analysis was conducted by reviewing cases of mismatch to identify recurring linguistic patterns and system limitations. This multi-layered methodology ensures a balanced assessment of IndicNER’s strengths and weaknesses in handling Telugu-language data.

5. Results

The performance of IndicNER compared with the manually annotated dataset of Telugu news headlines was evaluated using Precision, Recall, and F1-score. These metrics were computed at two levels: (i) an overall evaluation across all entity types, and (ii) specific entity types: Person (PER), Location (LOC), and Organization (ORG).

5.1. Overall Evaluation:

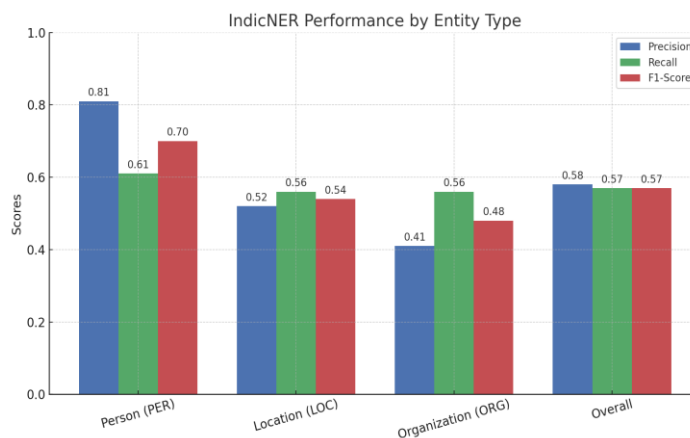
At the aggregate level, IndicNER achieved a Precision of 0.58, a Recall of 0.57, and an F1-score of 0.57 across all entity types. These metrics reflect a reasonably balanced but moderate performance in recognizing named entities. Precision of 0.58 indicates a fair level of correctness in the identified entities, the slightly lower recall shows that some entities were predicted incorrectly. While the near parity between precision and recall suggests that the model makes consistent predictions, but neither captures all relevant entities nor filters out false positives effectively. This balance likely results from a generic training setup lacking domain-specific adaptation to Telugu, particularly in the informal and compressed structure of headline text. The overall F1-score of 0.57 underscores the model's potential for foundational applications, but also highlights the need for linguistic refinement and task-specific tuning to support high-stakes use cases in Telugu.

5.2. Entity-Type Specific Evaluation

When analyzed by entity type, IndicNER showed the highest accuracy in recognizing Person (PER) entities, with a Precision of 0.81, a Recall of 0.61, and an F1-score of 0.70. This can be attributed to the higher frequency and structural consistency of person names. Performance on Location (LOC) entities was moderate, with a Precision of 0.52, a Recall of 0.56, and an F1-score of 0.54. Many errors in these categories were due to compounds and abbreviations, which the

model failed to capture fully.

The lowest performance was observed in the Organization (ORG) category, where the model attained a Precision of 0.41, a Recall of 0.56, and an F1-score of 0.48. Most misclassifications occurred due to confusion between organization names and other entity types, especially when honorifics or abbreviations were used. Additionally, the system often failed to capture the full span of multi-word organization names, leading to boundary mismatches.



These results indicate that while IndicNER is effective for certain types, especially person entity types, its performance varies significantly depending on the linguistic structure and context of the entities.

6. Error Analysis

To identify the linguistic and algorithmic limitations of IndicNER in the context of Telugu named entity recognition, a structured and critical error analysis was conducted and identified six prominent error categories. This section presents these error categories with carefully selected examples, accompanied by detailed linguistic interpretation and technical implications.

6.1 Boundary Mismatches and Partial Recognition

IndicNER often fails to recognize the complete span of a multi-token entity, especially with personal names, which are commonly formed using multiple lexical units (e.g., given name + father's name + surname). This failure manifests in the form of entity splitting or truncated recognition, leading to severe issues in entity linking and co-reference tasks.

Example

1:

Headline: padeVlluga rABArUT radrAnu veMTAduTunnArA: rAhuL gAMDI

Headline: siddArAmayya kannumUta aMTu meTA anuvAda dOSam
IndicNER: siddArAmayya <O> kannumUta <B-Per>

IndicNER incorrectly tags *kannumUta* ‘death’ as a person entity, while missing the actual named entity *siddArAmayya*, a known person. This error reveals the model’s reliance on positional heuristics rather than semantic understanding. IndicNER misclassifies this due to its inability to parse such syntactic patterns, mistaking the contextual verb for a named entity and skipping the subject. This kind of type confusion reduces the reliability of entity tagging in obituaries or death reports—an important genre in Telugu news.

6.3 Systemic Omissions and False Negatives

False negatives are critical in evaluating recall. We observed that IndicNER often misses entire entities, especially those that are (i) region-specific, (ii) infrequent, or (iii) linguistically irregular. These systemic omissions lead to data sparsity issues and lower utility for regional language deployment.

Example 1:

Headline: MP mitunreDDi arrestu..!

IndicNER: mitunreDDi <B-Org>

IndicNER erroneously classifies “*mitunreDDi*” as an organization rather than a person, despite contextual cues such as the presence of “*eMPi*” (MP) and “*arrestu*” that indicate a person. This misclassification exemplifies a false negative in the person category and an incorrect assignment to the organization type. The error underscores the model’s insufficient contextual grounding and a bias toward frequent label patterns rather than semantically coherent tagging.

Example 2:

Headline: krSNamma ku varada hOrU.. SrISailam prAjekTu

IndicNER: SrISailam <O>

The model overlooks “*SrISailam*,” a well-known religious and geographical location, possibly due to morphological complexity or contextual ambiguity. The name of the project may

represent location, a famous personality, and culturally related terms, which results in confusion to the system. This severely impacts tasks such as event extraction or religious news monitoring.

6.4 Morphological Suffix Challenges

Telugu frequently attaches postpositions, honorifics, and case markers directly to named entities. When such suffixes are not segmented, NER systems like IndicNER tend to ignore or partially recognize the entity, leading to both false negatives and span inconsistencies.

Example 1:

Headline: ememlYe pallA rAjESvar reDDi nu parAmarSinchina mahES bigAla

IndicNER: reDDi nu<O>

The suffix “nu” (accusative case) causes the model to misinterpret or ignore the token “reDDi.” This suggests a lack of morphological preprocessing and suffix-aware training.

Example 2:

Headline: revant reDDi DilhI payaNAlapai SVETapatram

IndicNER: revant <B-Per> reDDi <O>

IndicNER fails to incorporate the second half of a common person's name due to its occurrence in a complex predicate context. Morphological disambiguation is essential to avoid such omissions.

6.5 Abbreviation and Acronym Errors

Telugu headlines often include abbreviations of political parties, institutions, or government bodies in Roman or mixed scripts. IndicNER frequently fails to generalize across these tokens, especially when they appear outside the script or word forms seen in training data.

Example 1:

Headline: KCR kiT ku mangaLam.. rU.65 kOTlU kendrAnki vApass

IndicNER: KCR <B-Org>, kiT <I-Org>

Despite context suggesting a person's name, the model interprets the pair as an organization, possibly due to surface form biases in uppercase acronym patterns.

Example 2:

Headline: RCB de tappu.. cinnaswAmi ghaTanapai karnATaka prabhutva nivEDika

IndicNER: RCB <B-Loc>

The RCB (Royal Challengers of Bengaluru) is wrongly classified as a location, suggesting that abbreviations are resolved only based on structural patterns of the individual entity, not on contextual function.

6.6 Code-Mixed and Romanized Entity Errors

Telugu news headlines often integrate English-origin named entities, either in full (e.g., Netflix, OU) or transliterated form. IndicNER shows significant weakness in detecting these entities, indicating insufficient multilingual modeling.

Example 1:

Headline: AkAS praim misail parIksha success

IndicNER: praim <B-Per>, misail <I-Per>

The initial token “AkAS” is missed entirely, and subsequent tokens are reinterpreted as a new entity. This affects recognition of named weapon systems or scientific objects in code-mixed headlines.

Example 2:

Headline: AIS, FBI, CBI lAnti saMsthAlapai tinmar

IndicNER: AIS<O>, FBI<O>, CBI<O>

These globally known organization names are not recognized, pointing to critical lexical gaps in the model and the need for external gazetteer integration or multilingual pretraining.

7. Discussion

This study presents a comprehensive evaluation of IndicNER, a multilingual Named Entity Recognition system, in the context of Telugu news headlines, a linguistically complex and morphologically rich domain. While the system demonstrates baseline competence—especially in

recognizing Person (PER) entities—our findings reveal critical limitations in handling entity boundaries, entity type disambiguation, and morphological variations. These limitations significantly affect the model’s precision, recall, and real-world applicability across tasks involving information extraction, event tracking, and media analysis.

The quantitative results show that IndicNER achieves a moderate overall performance with a Precision of 0.58, a Recall of 0.57, and an F1-score of 0.57. When disaggregated by entity type, the system performs best on Person names (F1 = 0.70), but struggles with Location (F1 = 0.54) and Organization (F1 = 0.48) entities. This discrepancy highlights a systemic bias in the model's learning, which favors frequently occurring and syntactically simpler entities, while underperforming on structurally complex or domain-specific expressions.

A qualitative error analysis further illuminates the nuanced challenges faced by the system. We identified six major error types: (i) boundary mismatches, where entity spans are incompletely captured; (ii) entity-type confusion, particularly between locations and organizations; (iii) systemic omissions, where the model fails to detect valid entities altogether; (iv) morphological suffix failures, reflecting the model’s inability to segment agglutinative tokens correctly; (v) abbreviation misclassification, especially with Romanized or uppercase short forms; and (vi) code-mixed entity failures, where IndicNER is unable to detect English-script or transliterated named entities embedded in Telugu.

The error patterns suggest that IndicNER lacks contextual grounding and morphological sensitivity, both of which are crucial for high-fidelity NER in Telugu. These observations reinforce that surface-level modeling, even when trained on large multilingual corpora, is insufficient for capturing the complexities of Indian languages. From a practical standpoint, these limitations are not just academic. Inaccurate or incomplete entity recognition can degrade the performance of downstream tasks such as automated news summarization, sentiment analysis, policy monitoring, and named entity linking in multilingual information retrieval systems. The fact that important organizations, people, or locations are either mislabeled or omitted entirely raises serious concerns about the system’s trustworthiness and scalability in real-world applications.

7.1. Consideration and Implications

The findings of this study carry significant implications for the advancement of Named Entity Recognition in Telugu and other Indian languages. The analysis reveals that a one-size-fits-all approach, such as that adopted by IndicNER, is insufficient for languages with agglutinative structures, complex honorific systems, and frequent code-mixing. Therefore, future systems must incorporate morphological preprocessing techniques that can segment case markers and honorific suffixes commonly found in Telugu. Fine-tuning models on domain-specific corpora—covering diverse sectors such as politics, entertainment, and education—will help in adapting to varying linguistic styles and terminologies used in real-world text. Additionally, expanding gazetteers to include regional place names, culturally specific organizations, and Romanized forms is essential for improving both recall and contextual accuracy. The inability to recognize multi-word or compound entities also calls for post-processing mechanisms, such as CRF-based span merging or rule-based refinement, to ensure complete and coherent entity tagging. Finally, the integration of script-adaptive training techniques can significantly improve the recognition of code-mixed or Roman-script entities, which are prevalent in digital Telugu content. Collectively, these enhancements would not only improve the performance of IndicNER but also contribute to more inclusive, reliable, and culturally aligned NLP tools for Telugu and other underrepresented Indian languages.

8. Conclusion

This study critically evaluated the performance of IndicNER on a manually annotated dataset of Telugu news headlines, highlighting both its strengths and limitations. While the system performs reasonably well in identifying Person entities, it struggles with Location and Organization types, particularly in handling multi-word names, suffixes, and code-mixed tokens. The error analysis revealed systematic issues, including boundary mismatches, entity-type confusion, and failure to recognize morphologically complex or low-frequency entities. These findings underscore the need for language-specific adaptations in NER systems for Telugu. Enhancements such as morphological preprocessing, domain-specific fine-tuning, and expanded regional gazetteers are essential to improve accuracy and coverage. Overall, this work offers a practical evaluation of IndicNER's readiness for Telugu and provides a roadmap for future development of more robust, context-aware NER tools for Indian languages.

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Silence as Feminist Resistance: Re-Reading Draupadi in Hindu Mythological Retellings Through Body, Shame, and Narrative Refusal

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Abstract

In this paper, I examine the silence of Draupadi across the Mahābhārata and its contemporary feminist retellings to argue that silence, contrary to dominant critical discourse, can function as a powerful mode of resistance rather than submission. While traditional scholarship often associates empowerment with articulate speech, I believe Draupadi's strategic refusal to speak in certain narrative moments disrupts patriarchal expectations more effectively than verbal protest. By withholding speech, she forces interrogators, institutions, and male authority figures to face moral discomfort without guidance, thereby destabilising the cultural logic of shame. Through a close reading of primary texts and feminist reinterpretations by writers such as Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and Volga, I analyse how silence moves beyond the courtroom spectacle into the interior spaces of trauma, introspection, and self-construction. I also consider how Western frameworks, which frequently conflate silence with passivity, risk flattening cultural specificity and overlooking embodied forms of dissent. Methodologically, I draw from feminist theory, trauma studies, and comparative mythology, while utilising digital tools such as ChatGPT strictly as language-level support. Ultimately, my findings suggest that Draupadi's silence operates simultaneously as emotional boundaries, psychological survival, and political sabotage. Instead of signalling defeat, her refusal to perform humiliation becomes a radical assertion of agency. This research contributes to an underexplored scholarship gap by repositioning silence not as absence, but as a deliberate presence, an acoustic void that compels patriarchal structures to speak instead. I conclude that silence deserves renewed critical attention as a resistant narrative strategy in Indian mythological discourse.

Keywords: Draupadi; feminist resistance; narrative silence; body politics; mythological retellings.

Introduction

For generations, Hindu mythology has shaped cultural understandings of gender, power, and morality within Indian society. While epics like the *Mahabharata* are revered as foundational narrative frameworks, they also carry deeply ingrained patriarchal logic that often reduces women to symbolic functions rather than complex individuals. In recent decades,

however, feminist writers have begun revisiting these mythic structures, not merely to retell them but to interrogate and subvert them. One of the most compelling strategies they employ is silence, not as absence or submission but as an active form of resistance. I find this shift fascinating because it forces us to rethink what counts as “voice” in a culture that rewards women for speaking only when it suits the patriarchal order. In this research, I explore how silence becomes a political weapon in mythological reinterpretations and why feminists deliberately choose it to challenge narrative authority.

Among the numerous figures who exemplify the politics of silent resistance, Draupadi stands out powerfully. Traditionally, she is framed through male-authored lenses in the *Mahabharata*; her anger is legendary, yet her silences are rarely acknowledged. Feminist retellings, particularly Mahasweta Devi’s *Draupadi*, reorient our gaze. Instead of speech, Devi foregrounds Draupadi’s refusal to be articulated by men. In my view, this shift is significant because it undermines the male narrator’s monopoly over meaning. Silence, in Devi’s hands, becomes a refusal to perform expected femininity. It is an interruption. It is defiance. And most importantly, it is self-definition.

A great deal of feminist criticism on mythological rewriting focuses on vocal reclamation—women speaking, yelling, narrating their trauma. But as I reviewed scholarship published by Routledge and Taylor & Francis, I noticed a blind spot: scholars rarely treat silence itself as an autonomous rhetoric. Silence is usually coded as oppression. I believe this is a conceptual limitation, especially considering Indian cultural norms where silence can signify dignity, mourning, withdrawal of consent, or moral superiority. By focusing on silence, we can access what Judith Butler might call a “performative refusal”, a denial of patriarchal legibility. This, for me, is the intellectual gap driving this paper.

The contemporary boom of mythological retellings by writers like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Kavita Kane, and Volga reflects a growing hunger to see familiar stories reframed through feminist consciousness. Yet, much of this scholarship emphasises voice reclamation, trauma testimony, and narrative agency through speech. I argue that focusing solely on spoken articulation adopts a Western feminist lens that risks misreading Indian narrative culture. Silence in Indian aesthetics has often been associated with power (*mauna*), concentrated thought, and

punitive withdrawal. On that basis, Draupadi's silence in Devi's retelling can be seen as an arsenal rather than a wound.

While reading widely, I also recognised another overlooked dimension: silence as audience manipulation. In my opinion, a silent woman forces readers to confront violence without narrative comfort. When Draupadi refuses to weep, plead, scream, or explain herself, she denies the patriarchal reader the emotional catharsis they subconsciously expect. This refusal disrupts narrative consumption. Silence becomes a literary slap.

This research, therefore, asks the following question:

How do feminist retellings of Hindu mythology transform women's silence from passive oppression into active resistance, specifically through the figure of Draupadi?

This question matters because Indian culture continues to devalue female speech while simultaneously punishing women when they *do* speak. Understanding silence as resistance exposes how patriarchal systems demand female intelligibility; they want to hear women only when they are saying the "right" things.

Finally, this study positions silence not as absence but as presence. Not as void, but as pressure. Devi's Draupadi stands naked, refusing to respond. Her silence is a refusal to perform shame. For me, this is one of the most striking reimagining's in postcolonial feminist literature, because it fragments the spectator's gaze. Instead of being objectified by men, Draupadi transforms men into uncomfortable witnesses.

Ultimately, this paper argues that silence in feminist mythological retellings functions as a rhetorical weapon that destabilises patriarchal meaning-making. When speech can be appropriated, silence becomes the only unassailable territory. And that is why we need to rethink silence—not as nothing, but as refusal, strategy, and resistance.

Literature Review

When I started reading scholarly work on feminist mythological retellings, I immediately noticed how much of the existing research revolves around recovering women's

“lost voices.” Critics such as Vrinda Nabar (Routledge) argue that women in Hindu epics are historically framed through male desire and narrative expectation. Her work repeatedly stresses how patriarchal storytelling disciplines female expression. I this foundation is important because it shows why feminist writers feel compelled to retell that they are not inventing trauma; they are correcting its representation.

However, most critics still assume that speech is the primary site of resistance. For example, papers published in *Women’s Writing* (Taylor & Francis) emphasise the reclamation of voice as the essential feminist act. While this is useful, I feel the discussion becomes repetitive and slightly Western-centric. Voice isn’t always available or safe for women, especially in cultural contexts where speaking out invites punishment. Scholars like Kumkum Sangari (Routledge) do acknowledge that silence is culturally coded in complicated ways, but they rarely treat silence as a deliberate weapon. Sangari’s analysis tends to frame silence as a political effect rather than a political gesture, which I personally find limiting.

When I turned to writings on Mahasweta Devi, the scholarship thickened. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s famous essay on “Draupadi” (Routledge) foregrounds how Devi refuses to let Draupadi’s suffering be narratively contained. Spivak interprets Draupadi’s nakedness as an anti-colonial refusal, but she still focuses on embodied presence rather than silence. I realised, while reading her, that the silence in Devi’s story remains under-discussed as a rhetorical strategy. Spivak comments on speechlessness, yes, but not necessarily on silence as *choice*.

Taylor & Francis publications on mythic rewritings by Divakaruni and Volga often highlight feminist interiority, agency, and trauma. They emphasise that rewriting is a form of historiographic intervention. I appreciate this framing, but again, silence mostly appears as a symptom rather than resistance. Scholars repeatedly treat it as lack lack of power, a lack of articulation, a lack of space. I kept thinking: isn’t this interpretive habit itself patriarchal?

One interesting exception is Nabaneeta Dev Sen’s work, which gestures toward silence as subversive withholding. She claims that refusing narrative closure destabilises epic certainty. I found this incredibly relevant, but surprisingly, it is rarely extended into a sustained theoretical discussion.

In short, I observe a gap: feminist scholarship largely prioritises vocal articulation and does not sufficiently theorise silence as purposeful, political agency in mythological retellings. While voice has been celebrated, silence remains misunderstood. This research attempts to shift that balance.

Methodology

For this research, I primarily relied on close textual analysis because I personally believe that the nuances of silence can only be understood by paying attention to tone, gesture, and narrative gaps. Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi* served as the main primary text, supported by secondary scholarship published by Routledge and Taylor & Francis. I selected these publishers deliberately, since their academic rigour and feminist theoretical history allowed me to trace how critics understand voice, agency, and gendered representation in Indian mythological rewritings. I read peer-reviewed articles focusing on postcolonial feminism, narrative silence, and embodiment, taking notes on recurring scholarly assumptions about voice.

Alongside textual reading, I used a comparative lens to identify how silence functions differently in Devi's version versus the canonical *Mahabharata*. I engaged in interpretative reading rather than quantitative analysis because silence is rhetorical, emotional, and affective. While drafting, I used ChatGPT strictly as a language-enhancement tool to refine phrasing, improve clarity, and ensure coherence. All interpretive ideas, arguments, and scholarly connections are my own, formed through reading and reflection. Overall, this methodology allows me to understand silence not as absence but as intentional feminist design within mythological retellings.

Contextual Background

Silence is not incidental in Indian epics; it is structural. The **Mahabharata** is a text that encodes social hierarchies, shame cultures, and the politics of bodily integrity. Gendered speech in this epic environment is regulated through dharma, kinship, and propriety, where a woman's voice announces crisis rather than autonomy. In this schema, women often appear in the narrative as catalysts spoken about, spoken for, but rarely speaking with sovereign intent. Draupadi's public humiliation in the dice hall crystallises this system: her silence is demanded

not because she has nothing to say, but because her speech would destabilise the masculine architecture of honour.

South Asian shame culture functions through the body, especially the female body. Female silence is often upheld as virtue, dignity, and obedience. Conversely, speaking is coded as unruly, transgressive, or “unwomanly.” This produces a paradox: women must be silent to maintain purity, yet they are blamed for not protesting enough when violated. Within epic frameworks, silence becomes a trap.

Modern feminist rewritings such as **Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s** *The Palace of Illusions* and **Volga’s** *Yashoda and Other Stories* re-examine this silence. They read the gaps in narrative absences where patriarchal storytelling excised women’s emotional labour. These rewritings refuse inherited shame and interrogate the moral economy of silence. Here, silence is neither weakness nor consent; it becomes a language of endurance, resistance, and inner re-coding.

This contextual terrain matters because contemporary feminist criticism frequently imports Western frameworks of autonomy, outspoken empowerment onto texts embedded in hierarchical collectivism. To critique silence without understanding its cultural encoding is to misread it entirely. Therefore, this research positions silence not as absence, but as a **strategic presence**, socially engineered yet potentially subversive.

Critical Analysis

Mahasweta Devi’s “Draupadi” stages silence not as withdrawal but as confrontation, and I believe this distinction is central to understanding how feminist retellings dismantle patriarchal comfort. In the original *Mahabharata*, Draupadi’s humiliation is mediated through divine intervention and male rhetoric; her suffering is framed by advisers, sages, and husbands who speak on her behalf. Devi refuses this narrative economy. Her contemporary Draupadi, the tribal guerrilla leader, is placed at the mercy of state violence—stripped, raped, and expected to break. Her silence after violation is bewildering to her captors because it denies a predictable pattern: the victim’s vocal collapse. When Draupadi refuses to speak, I read it as a refusal to centre her oppressors, a strategic removal of their emotional reward.

The moment when Draupadi stands naked before Senanayak is one of the most unsettling scenes in postcolonial feminist literature. Her nakedness is not vulnerability; it is defiance. Normally, shame culture works by tethering female honour to modesty, but this Draupadi rejects that logic entirely. I think this disruption is crucial: when shame is socially constructed, its power disappears once the subject refuses to inhabit it. Draupadi's silence is not the silence of fear—it is the silence of someone who no longer recognizes the authority of the gaze. That, in my opinion, is the most radical form of agency.

Body politics becomes the battlefield where meaning is contested. Patriarchy assumes that a violated female body guarantees obedience. Devi reverses the equation: violation becomes the catalyst of resistance. When Draupadi says nothing, when she refuses to cover herself, she denies the state's monopoly on narrative. Speech would allow interrogation, testimony, justification; silence turns the moment into pure visual indictment. Her body becomes evidence, not metaphor. I think this is why readers find the scene so uncomfortable: without speech, we cannot interpret, domesticate, or moralize the trauma. We are simply forced to witness.

I find it revealing that the antagonists in the story are unsettled by her silence rather than her rebellion. Authority expects insurgency; it does not expect refusal of emotional participation. Senanayak's paralysis demonstrates that patriarchal violence relies on predictable reactions. Once Draupadi refuses those reactions, the script collapses. Silence throws the oppressor into interpretive crisis. This is where I think Deleuze's notion of deterritorialization becomes relevant: Draupadi breaks out of the grammatical system that defines womanhood through shame. Her silence DE territorialises the body.

Another dimension of silence in this narrative is temporal. In epics, shame is erased through divine miracle; nothing stains permanently. Devi, conversely, insists on corporeal permanence. Draupadi's silence prolongs the moment, making it impossible to forget. The soldiers want closure; silence denies them that. Without testimony, there is no legal resolution; without weeping, there is no emotional release. Silence becomes a haunting.

This also intersects with the politics of spectatorship. In the *Mahabharata*, kings sit silently, and Draupadi's silence echoes theirs; it displays a collective moral failure. In Devi's

retelling, silence redirects the gaze onto the perpetrators. I would argue that silence relocates guilt. The oppressor becomes self-conscious, defensive, exposed. Silence becomes the mirror through which violence sees itself.

A common misreading of Draupadi's silence is to assume she is broken. But Devi frames her as unbroken precisely because her voice is withheld. I interpret this as narrative conservation—by not speaking, she guards the meaning of her experience from institutional reinterpretation. Speech would allow the state to file, to categorise, to bureaucratize. Silence refuses translation into state discourse. This is incredibly important because systems of power survive by naming and containing. Draupadi denies containment.

Throughout the narrative, Devi constructs silence as reciprocal tension: each moment of withholding speech intensifies the reader's anxiety. Feminist critics often celebrate voice as liberation, but I am convinced that in cultures built on shame, speech can actually serve patriarchy. Confession, apology, description—all of these enrich authority with information. Silence deprives the oppressor of narrative capital.

Moreover, the narrative highlights how silence shifts agency onto the body. In a colonised context, language is already compromised, imposed, policed, and bureaucratized. Draupadi's silence is anti-language. It operates outside administrative grammar. This is why I see her naked body as a text that cannot be censored: the state can fabricate reports, but it cannot rewrite flesh.

In the final confrontation, when Draupadi advances on Senanayak, her silence transforms fear from object to subject. He becomes the residue of his own violence. I believe this inversion is the core innovation of Devi's retelling. Draupadi's epic humiliation becomes her insurgent empowerment. Silence is no longer submission; it is sabotage.

Ultimately, Devi's story teaches us that silence can be more eloquent than speech. It destabilises power by refusing the roles power assigns. In cultures where women are shamed into silence, choosing silence for oneself becomes the most subversive act possible. Through Draupadi, Devi shows us that narrative refusal is narrative control and silence, paradoxically, becomes the loudest voice.

While Mahasweta Devi's Draupadi weaponises silence externally, other feminist retellings of Hindu mythology reconfigure silence differently. To develop a fuller understanding of how women's voicelessness becomes resistance, I find it necessary to place Devi's narrative alongside Volga's *The Liberation of Sita* and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*. Together, these texts reveal that silence is not a singular feminist strategy but a spectrum that shifts depending on cultural pressure, trauma, and psychic survival.

In *The Liberation of Sita*, Volga's Sita embraces silence not as defiance against the immediate oppressor, but as an internal healing mechanism. When she refuses to return to Ayodhya after her trial by fire, I interpret this decision as resistance to emotional extraction. Ayodhya demands her narrative; it demands confession, justification, and public proclamation of purity. Sita's refusal to speak becomes a refusal to perform moral theatre. I believe this internal silence disrupts patriarchal expectations without spectacle. Unlike Draupadi's nakedness, which violently confronts the oppressor's gaze, Sita's withdrawal denies the audience itself. This silence starves patriarchy of social oxygen.

Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* adds a third layer. Here, Draupadi narrates her own story, but interestingly, her silence surfaces in moments of emotional truth. I read this as internalised patriarchal conditioning: she censors her desires, jealousy, and sorrow because to articulate them would destabilise the heroic narrative around her husbands. This mechanism reveals how silence is internalised long before it is enforced. It is learned through mythic pedagogy. I find this deeply unsettling because it suggests oppression can exist long after the oppressor leaves the room. Divakaruni uses silence as psychological interiority—what is unspoken becomes the architecture of the mind.

When placed side by side, these narratives expose two major types of feminist silence: **external silence** (direct confrontation) and **internal silence** (self-preservation). Mahasweta Devi clearly privileges the external; Draupadi's silence is visible, public, accusatory. Volga, on the other hand, builds a narrative of quiet refusal. Sita refuses to return to a domestic structure that has already failed her. She does not scream; she simply opts out. This is an equally radical move, especially in cultures where female self-erasure is expected. That quiet "no" resonates more shockingly than a loud confrontation.

What strikes me most in this comparison is how differently shame functions. In Devi, shame collapses entirely once Draupadi refuses to acknowledge it. In Volga, shame is redirected toward the men who demand performance. In Divakaruni, shame becomes introspective the character questions whether she deserves speech. I see this spectrum as a map of patriarchal colonisation of the body, community, and psyche.

Another divergence lies in audience orientation. Draupadi confronts her oppressor directly; her body becomes a message. Sita turns away from the audience entirely; her silence is a refusal to be read. Divakaruni complicates the problem: her Draupadi wants to speak but fears misinterpretation. For me, this raises the disturbing possibility that patriarchy not only silences women, it also teaches women to silence themselves pre-emptively.

I also notice the role of **space**. Devi's Draupadi is trapped in a military compound where her silence becomes an explosion of political meaning. Volga relocates Sita into the forest, where silence functions as solace. Divakaruni constructs a palace of illusions where silence becomes introspection, haunted by mirrored corridors of thought. These spaces reveal that silence is spatially coded. It expands or contracts depending on architecture, captivity, or nature.

Additionally, clothing functions differently. Draupadi's naked body is refused. Sita's modest retreat is a refusal. Divakaruni's luxurious garments symbolise restraint; she wears her silence as an ornament. I believe these details show that the body is not always the primary battleground; sometimes, the battleground is domestic architecture, ritual, memory, or self-doubt.

A pattern emerges: patriarchal authority expects verbal reaction because it desires narrative ownership. When a woman speaks, her pain becomes data. When she remains silent, the system receives nothing. This is why I think silence is terrifying to institutions; it produces interpretive voids. Oppression thrives on legibility. Silence withdraws legibility.

I also want to point out how these retellings destabilise the reader's comfort differently. Devi's silence shocks. Volga's silence soothes. Divakaruni's silence unsettles through introspection. Together, these narratives teach us that resistance is not only in rebellion but in refusal of narrative frameworks.

Critically, Western feminists sometimes misread these silences as passivity. I strongly disagree. Applying Euro-American notions of vocal empowerment to caste-based shame cultures flattens complexity. Speech in a shame economy can reinforce shame. Silence punctures it. I am convinced that Western frameworks must be adjusted to understand that in Indian mythic contexts, silence can be the loudest ethical stance.

In comparing these texts, I realise that silence is not simply chosen; it is crafted. Draupadi's external silence weaponises shame, Sita's internal silence reroutes emotional power, and Divakaruni's blended silence reveals psychic damage. Put together, they articulate a paradigm: women's voicelessness is not absence; it is an authored strategy.

Ultimately, these retellings expose the cultural architecture that creates silence, weaponises silence, and fears silence. They show that when women refuse to speak, patriarchal narratives lose coherence. Their silence becomes a leak in the machinery of myth, and the entire system begins to stutter. It is here, I think, that feminist retellings reclaim interpretive sovereignty.

Discussion

The foregoing analysis reveals a fundamental misconception embedded in dominant literary criticism: the assumption that *speech* is synonymous with *agency*. Western critical frameworks, heavily influenced by liberal individualism, equate empowerment with articulation, rhetorical mastery, and discursive presence. Within these paradigms, silence is often pathologised as submission, internalised oppression, or communicative failure. Such readings flatten the cultural specificity of the *Mahabharata* and its feminist reinterpretations, missing the layered strategies embedded in Draupadi's refusal to speak.

Silence in these texts does not erase subjectivity; rather, it redirects agency into non-verbal registers: gesture, presence, gaze, refusal. Draupadi's silence after the disrobing episode is not the silence of erasure but of suspension. It interrupts patriarchal circulation; men speak over her, about her, for her, but she withholds the narrative closure they expect. In Volga's feminist reimagining, silence becomes a pedagogical practice: women learn to withdraw energy from systems that profit from their participation. Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* extends this

logic, painting Draupadi's silences as interior rebellions, spaces where desire, rage, and judgment are sharpened rather than suppressed.

This challenges critics who demand loudness as proof of resistance. Not all resistance must be audible. Historically, colonised, gendered, and marginalised communities have weaponised silence to conserve identity, protect knowledge, and deny their oppressors emotional access. When Draupadi refuses to collapse, confess, or capitulate verbally, she destabilises the masculine hunger for narrative control.

Furthermore, silence functions as *sabotage* precisely because patriarchy depends on women's explainability, confession, justification, and emotional labour. By refusing these, Draupadi forces characters, audiences, and readers to confront their complicity. Silence here is a counter-archive: what remains unspoken exposes what dominant discourse cannot absorb.

Therefore, rethinking voice means abandoning the simplistic binary of silence/speech. Feminist retellings position silence as embodied rhetoric, a mode of survival, critique, and reclamation. To read Draupadi correctly, critics must attune themselves not to what is said, but to the deliberate voids where language refuses to serve power.

Findings

The findings of this research demonstrate that silence, within Draupadi's narrative arc, operates not as an emblem of defeat but as a deliberate and strategic exercise of agency. Across both the canonical epic and contemporary feminist retellings, moments of withheld speech function as intentional disruptions of patriarchal expectation. Rather than consent to linguistic spaces controlled by male authority, Draupadi frequently relocates her agency into embodied gestures, her posture, gaze, and refusal to perform shame, thereby transforming the body into a political instrument. This movement away from verbal articulation shows that patriarchal systems are heavily dependent on women speaking within frameworks designed to extract confession, guilt, or obedience. When Draupadi denies verbal participation, she collapses the very mechanisms intended to subjugate her, transferring shame from the individual woman to the male community observing her humiliation.

These findings further reveal that shame in the epic context is not an internal emotion but a social force distributed across familial and royal structures. Draupadi's silence becomes a mirror that exposes masculine failure, amplifying collective dishonour. Western criticism tends to misread such moments by relying on individualist paradigms that equate empowerment exclusively with vocal articulation. Such frameworks often overlook cultural traditions in which silence protects dignity, stores knowledge, and preserves moral superiority. Comparative retellings by writers like Volga and Divakaruni extend this logic, showing how silence evolves into interior autonomy and emotional clarity that refuses further participation in oppressive discourse. Through these retellings, silence emerges as a site of self-determination, no longer tethered to trauma alone.

The findings also underscore Draupadi's ability to destabilise narrative authority. Her silence forces male characters into interpretive anxiety; they argue over meaning, invent motives, and project guilt into the spaces where her voice refuses to perform. This anxious vacuum is itself evidence of her power. Silence in these texts sabotages patriarchal continuity by denying closure, emotional access, and narrative satisfaction. Ultimately, what Draupadi refuses to say becomes louder across history than anything she could have spoken. Her silence forms a counter-archive, an interpretive wound that outlasts conflict.

Overall, the research confirms that silence in Draupadi's portrayals is not absence but an active, tactical presence, redefining resistance through refusal, disruption, and embodied defiance.

Conclusion

After closely examining Draupadi across the Mahābhārata and her contemporary feminist reinterpretations, I believe it becomes clear that silence functions as a complex and often misunderstood element of female agency. When I first approached this topic, I was influenced by the dominant academic impulse to equate empowerment with speech. Yet, over the course of reading, re-reading, and critically engaging with both primary texts and scholarly commentary, I found myself rethinking that assumption. Draupadi does not always resist with words; instead, she often resists through refusal to perform shame, refusal to validate patriarchal

expectations, and refusal to speak within discursive structures created by men. In this sense, her silence becomes louder than any verbal protest.

Throughout history, readers and especially Western critics have tended to reduce silence to passivity. However, the evidence I have explored convinces me otherwise. Silence can compel attention; it can force oppressors to confront themselves in the absence of explanation from the oppressed. In Draupadi's case, silence destabilises royal decorum, unsettles masculine pride, and creates moral discomfort. Her body, posture, and controlled withholding disrupt the patriarchal fantasy that humiliation is complete only when the victim breaks. Because she does not break, the structure cracks instead.

Comparative retellings by Volga and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni extend this dynamic beyond spectacle. They allow us to see what silence does internally: how it cultivates emotional independence, how it transforms trauma into introspection, how it sharpens self-definition. Here, silence becomes a tool of survival and later, a tool of re-orientation. I think this shift is essential because it moves Draupadi's resistance beyond the moment of public shame and into the realm of long-term psychological autonomy. Silence becomes memory, boundary, protection.

Returning to the research question, *can silence function as feminist resistance rather than submission, and how does Draupadi's portrayal complicate this binary?* My findings show a definitive yes. Silence, when chosen consciously, when deployed strategically, when paired with bodily defiance, becomes a mode of sabotage. It attacks systems not by arguing with them but by ignoring their linguistic rules entirely. Draupadi's silence exposes a fundamental contradiction in patriarchal logic: the system can punish speech, but it cannot control meaning when the oppressed refuse to provide it.

In conclusion, Draupadi teaches us that resistance does not require constant articulation. Sometimes, a woman's refusal to speak forces an entire culture to talk around her absence, to confront its own guilt, and to carry the burden of interpretation. Her silence travels across centuries, haunting the epic and every reading of it. Looking forward, I believe future research can expand this inquiry by comparing silence across other mythological survivors or analysing how digital feminism redefines voice beyond speech. The question is no longer whether silence

can resist, but whether patriarchal structures can survive when women choose when and how to speak.

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Pragmatic Skills in Gujarati Speaking Children with Intellectual Disability

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Abstract

Pragmatics is defined as the ability to understand meaning as conveyed by a speaker and interpreted by a listener. It involves recognizing the speaker's intended meaning, assumptions, goals, and the types of communicative actions being performed through speech or writing. Pragmatic skills include aspects such as politeness and impoliteness, speech acts, conversational style, humor, sarcasm, teasing, cursing, discourse markers, conversational implicature and deixis. The aim of the present study was to assess the pragmatic skills in Gujarati Speaking children with intellectual disabilities by comparing with MA matched TD children in the age range of 4-6 years. This study describes the pragmatic skills provided by 4–6-year-old typically developing children based on caregiver child interaction, describing the performance on pragmatic skills by 4–6-year-old mental age children with intellectual disability with what is the comparison of the performance of the two groups

Introduction

Communication is an active process through which information and ideas are exchanged. It includes both understanding and expression. Expression can take many forms, including movements, gestures, objects, vocalizations, verbalizations, signs,

pictures, symbols, printed words, and outputs from augmentative or alternative communication devices. Language serves as the primary medium of communication. It is a system of arbitrary, largely conventional symbols shared by a group of people to facilitate interaction. In essence, language performs the same function as communication. Just as communication operates through various modes, language consists of different components — content, use and form that contribute to effective communication.

The key elements of language are further divided into phonology, morphology, semantics, syntax, and pragmatics. The study of the relationship between language and its contextual use is known as pragmatics. It focuses particularly on conversational exchanges, where two or more individuals take turns constructing a dialogue. Pragmatics primarily explores communicative intent and the methods used to express that intent.

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Literature Review

The use and development of pragmatic language in daily life play a crucial role in discussions about the quality of life for individuals with intellectual disabilities. The quality of life framework suggests that services should aim to enhance people's lives across a broad spectrum of domains. These domains encompass emotional well-being, interpersonal relationships, material well-being, personal growth, physical health, self-determination, social inclusion, and rights (Schalock, 1996).

Numerous studies have shown that a lack of essential life skills is a major factor contributing to the challenges faced by individuals with intellectual disabilities in community settings (Paraschiv & Oiley, 1999). Furthermore, Albert Bandura's social learning theory can serve as a valuable framework for helping children with intellectual

disabilities acquire social skills. This theory highlights the importance of learning through observing others and imitating their attitudes, behaviors, and emotional reactions. Bandura also emphasized that social interactions play a crucial role in shaping an individual's cognitive development (Heller, Hsieh, & Rimmer, 2006).

Kapalkova and Monika (2018) conducted a study on receptive language skills in Slovak-speaking children with intellectual disabilities (CWID). Their findings support the idea that receptive language development in CWID follows a similar developmental path to that of typically developing (TD) children. This suggests that language development is a resilient process that remains consistent despite delays associated with intellectual disabilities.

Elliot et al. (2002) noted that for students with mild to severe ID, pragmatic deficits often become more evident during their final school years, a period marked by preparation for post-school transitions.

Silc et al. (2017) investigated the pragmatic abilities of 60 children with mild ID, aged 7 to 9 years, who attended special schools. Using a storytelling assessment, the study found significant vocabulary improvement among the older children, though progress in grammatical and structural aspects of storytelling was less pronounced. The results showed no gender differences in vocabulary, grammar, or story structure. When comparing children with mild ID to typically developing (TD) peers, only slight deviations were observed in the younger group with ID.

Similarly, Gupta et al. (2019) evaluated pragmatic skills among 30 Malayalam-speaking CWID aged 8–13 years (with mental ages of 4–5 and 5–6 years) and compared them with 20 TD children of matching age groups (4–5 and 5–6 years). Their findings indicated that CWID performed significantly worse than TD children, particularly in skills such as smiling, conversational repair, responding to requests, maintaining eye contact, gaze exchange, and initiating requests for objects or actions.

Kumaraswamy et al. (2022) examined pragmatic abilities in 30 Kannada-speaking TD children aged 4–6 years and 30 CWID with equivalent mental ages. The study revealed that

CWID had difficulty using language appropriately within different contexts, especially in making refusals and requesting objects.

Shilpashri (2010) investigated the pragmatic skills of children with ASD. The study found that, out of 14 pragmatic skills initiated by caregivers, only a few children with ASD had fully mastered the skill of responding to labeling. The findings indicated that the percentage of responses from children with ASD to caregiver-initiated or self-initiated pragmatic skills did not follow a consistent or linear pattern across different ages when compared to typically developing children.

Swetha and Gupta (2023) evaluated the pragmatic skills of 30 Tamil-speaking children with intellectual disabilities (CWID) aged between 4 and 6 years in mental age (MA). Their findings indicated that Tamil-speaking CWID within this MA range exhibited weaker pragmatic skills compared to typically developing (TD) children matched for mental age.

Kumar, S S and Saranya R (2025) assessed the pragmatic skills in 30 Gujarati speaking children with autism and reported that Gujarati speaking children with autism had poor pragmatic skills when compared to MA matched TD children.

Need For Study

Pragmatics involves studying how the use of language affects and shapes communication. Review of literature showed that children with intellectual disabilities often display differences in pragmatic abilities compared to their typically developing peers. However, research examining pragmatic skills especially among children with intellectual disability is limited or no study in the Gujarati language.

Aims of This Study

The aim of the present study was to assess the pragmatic skills in Gujarati Speaking children with intellectual disabilities by comparing with MA matched TD children in the age range of 4-6 years. This study describes the pragmatic skills provided by 4–6-year-old typically developing children based on caregiver child interaction, describing the performance on pragmatic skills by 4–6-year-old mental age children with intellectual disability with what is

the comparison of the performance of the two groups

Inclusion Criteria

1. Gujarati as a mother tongue
2. Children who were attending special school for at least 2-3 years and with a MA 4-6 years.
3. No history of any delay in Speech, Language, Cognition and neurological abnormality in normal population.

Methodology

The data was collected by using toys, pictures, picture description and general conversation. Sample collection was done with reference to the study done by Subbarao, 1995. All the subjects were engaged in play/ interactive sessions. The 20-30 minutes of interaction was recorded and later transcribed. Transcriptions were subjected to analysis for pragmatics in different areas.

Participants

20 Gujarati speaking children with intellectual disability with the age range of 8-13 years (MA 4-6 years) 20 normal subjects for the reference group with age group range of 4-6 years were part of this study. The subjects were attending Gujarati medium schools in and around Ahmedabad.

Parameters of pragmatics skills namely included response for eye contact, smiling, response for gaze exchange, response for joint attention, response for request of object and/or action, response for labelling, answering questions, response for negation, response for turn-taking response for conversational repair, response for topic initiation, response for topic maintenance, response for comment/ feedback, response for adding information were based on the study done by Subbarao, 1995.

Results and Discussion

This study attempted to find out the pragmatic skills in Gujarati speaking children with intellectual disability and compare with mental age matched normal children.

Pragmatic particulars		Group-I Normal Children (4-6 yrs)		Group-II CWID MA (4-6 years)		P valu e	Significanc e
		n	%	n	%		
Eye Contact	Presen t	20	100	12	60	0.000	HS
	Absent	00	00	08	40		
Smiling	Presen t	20	100	20	100	--	--
	Absent	00	00	00	00		
Gaze exchange	Presen t	17	85	09	45	0.000	HS
	Absent	03	15	11	55		
Joint attention	Presen t	15	75	04	20	0.000	HS

	Absent	05	25	16	80		
Request	Present	11	55	09	45	0.000	HS
	Absent	09	45	11	55		
Labelling	Present	18	90	11	55	0.004	S
	Absent	02	10	09	45		
Answering Questions	Present	18	90	12	60	0.015	S
	Absent	02	10	08	40		
Negation	Present	18	90	08	40	0.000	HS
	Absent	02	10	12	60		
Turn taking	Present	16	80	07	35	0.000	HS
	Absent	04	20	13	65		
Conversational repair	Present	17	85	08	40	0.000	HS
	Absent	03	15	12	60		
Topic Initiation	Present	14	70	07	35	0.002	S

	Absent	06	30	13	65		
Topic maintenance	Present	12	60	04	20	0.000	HS
	Absent	08	40	16	80		
Comment /Feedback	Present	16	80	06	30	0.002	S
	Absent	04	20	14	70		
Adding Information	Present	18	90	03	15	0.000	HS
	Absent	02	10	17	85		

Table A: Shows percentage scores comparing pragmatic skills between typically developed children and children with intellectual disability, S for Significant, HS for Highly Significant.

The above table results show that subjects with Gujarati speaking CWID with mental age 4-6 years had poor pragmatic skills compared to normal children. The results show that there were highly significant differences in obtained responses for eye contact, gage exchange, joint attention, request, negation, turn taking, conversational repair, topic maintenance and adding information in Gujarati speaking children with intellectual disability when compared to Gujarati speaking children with normal children. Also, significant difference was noted in labelling, answering questing, topic initiation and comments/feedback.

Summary and Conclusion

Language serves as a fundamental pillar of communication, which almost always occurs within a social framework. Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that examines how

language use is influenced by context. Children with language disorders often show deviations in pragmatic skills compared to normal children. These differences in pragmatic abilities may also impact the development of other language components. The present study emphasizes the need to increase awareness especially among parents, speech-language pathologists, teachers, and special educators regarding the crucial role of pragmatic skills in fostering effective communication. Furthermore, it offers a valuable reference point for typically developing children and establishes a foundation for evaluating and implementing therapeutic interventions aimed at enhancing pragmatic skills in Gujarati-speaking children with intellectual disabilities. Current research suggests that therapeutic interventions for children with intellectual disability should prioritize improving pragmatic skills, as this can significantly enhance their overall quality of life.

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Polyphonic Intersections and Narrative Resistance: A Bakhtinian Reading of Kim Scott's *Benang*

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Abstract

In an era of growing scholarly engagement with decolonial methodologies, the exploration of narrative form as a site of resistance is especially significant. Kim Scott's *Benang*, a groundbreaking work of Aboriginal Australian literature, offers a compelling case for such inquiry. The novel challenges colonial historiography and explores indigenous identity through an intricately layered narrative. This paper examines *Benang* through the theoretical lens of Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of Polyphony, which posits the coexistence of multiple, independent voices within a single narrative. By applying Bakhtinian dialogism, the study investigates how *Benang* gives form to diverse epistemologies including Indigenous oral traditions, colonial archives, ancestral memory and personal trauma, without subsuming them under a single authoritative voice. The novel's fragmented structure and narrative heteroglossia are analysed as intentional literary strategies that disrupt linear history and reflect the cultural ruptures experienced by aboriginal communities.

The research employs a qualitative textual analysis methodology, drawing from postcolonial theory and trauma studies to deepen the analysis of narrative voice and resistance. The findings suggest that Scott's use of polyphony is not only an aesthetic innovation but also a political intervention that enables cultural survival and narrative sovereignty. By amplifying historically

marginalized voices, *Benang* transforms the novel into a dialogic space of ethical storytelling. This study contributes to emerging conversations on literary decolonization and affirms polyphony as a vital mode for representing contested histories and complex identities. It also underscores the broader relevance of Bakhtin's theory within postcolonial frameworks, particularly in articulating trauma, memory and identity in settler-colonial contexts.

Keywords: Kim Scott, *Benang*, Polyphony, Bakhtin, Postcolonial Narrative, Trauma Studies.

Introduction

Polyphony is a literary technique that enables the author to interweave multiple voices, each offering a distinct perspective and narrative. This approach allows for an exploration of diverse themes and issues by incorporating a range of characters and their viewpoints. By presenting diverse voices authors can offer a more complete and nuanced view of complex topics as the characters' experiences and perspectives may differ greatly.

This technique, derived from the term used in music to describe multiple independent melodies interweaving harmoniously, is employed to create a rich, complex narrative texture. In a polyphonic literary work, each character or narrative voice maintains its own unique viewpoint and often has an equal presence in the story, contributing to a multifaceted exploration of themes, events, and issues. This approach contrasts with a univocal narrative, where a single, dominant perspective guides the reader through the story. Polyphony allows for the representation of diverse and sometimes conflicting viewpoints, enhancing the depth and realism of the narrative. It is particularly useful in exploring complex social, cultural, or political themes, as it mirrors the multiplicity of voices and experiences in real life.

The concept of polyphony in literature was significantly developed by the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, who used it to describe the narrative structure of Fyodor Dostoevsky's novels. Bakhtin argued that Dostoevsky's works were characterized by a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, creating a dialogue among them rather than subsuming them into a single, unified narrative perspective. In summary, polyphony in literature is a narrative technique that incorporates multiple, independent voices, each contributing its own perspective to create a layered and multifaceted narrative.

Polyphony in literature can be found in various works where authors use multiple voices or perspectives to enrich their narratives. Some notable examples of Polyphonic texts are Fyodor Dostoevsky's "The Brothers Karamazov", where Dostoevsky presents the distinct voices and perspectives of each of the Karamazov brothers—Dmitri, Ivan, Alyosha, and their half-brother Smerdyakov. Each brother embodies different philosophical and moral viewpoints, creating a complex narrative that explores themes of faith, doubt, and free will.

William Faulkner's novel "As I Lay Dying" employs multiple first-person narratives, each offering their perspective on the journey to bury Addie Bundren. The narrative shifts between the voices of the Bundren family members and other characters, providing a fragmented and multifaceted view of the events. Another example of a polyphonic text is Virginia Woolf's "Mrs. Dalloway" in which she uses a stream-of-consciousness technique to present the inner thoughts of various characters, weaving together their perspectives over the course of a single day. The narrative moves seamlessly between Clarissa Dalloway, Septimus Warren Smith, and others, exploring themes of time, memory, and identity.

Toni Morrison's famous novel "Beloved" incorporates multiple voices to narrate the story of Sethe, a fugitive slave tormented by the ghost of her deceased daughter. The narrative includes the perspectives of Sethe, her daughter Denver, Paul D, and the ghost Beloved, each contributing to the portrayal of trauma and the legacy of slavery. "One Hundred Years of Solitude" written by Gabriel Garcia Marquez also features a large ensemble of characters spanning several generations of the Buendía family, with each character providing a different viewpoint on the family's history. The shifting perspectives and overlapping stories create a rich, layered narrative that reflects the complexity of the family's legacy and the history of the town of Macondo.

Zadie Smith's novel "White Teeth" traces the lives of two families, the Joneses, and the Iqbals, over several decades, incorporating multiple voices and perspectives. The narrative shifts between characters of different generations and cultural backgrounds, exploring themes of identity, multiculturalism, and generational conflict. Orhan Pamuk's novel "My Name Is Red" is narrated by a diverse range of characters, including a murder victim, a murderer, and even inanimate objects like a coin and a painting. The polyphonic structure allows Pamuk to explore different facets of the story and the philosophical questions about art, love, and religion in the context of the Ottoman

Empire. These examples illustrate how polyphony allows for a more comprehensive and nuanced exploration of themes and characters, giving readers a deeper insight into the narrative's complexities.

The present study aims to analyse Kim Scott's novel *Benang* as a polyphonic text, focusing on the presence of diverse voices and perspectives, and examining how this narrative technique contributes to the exploration of complex themes such as identity, colonialism, and Indigenous history. Kim Scott is a prominent Australian author of Aboriginal heritage, specifically from the Noongar people of Western Australia. He is celebrated for his contributions to Australian literature, particularly for exploring themes related to Indigenous identity, culture, and history. Scott has won several prestigious awards, including the Miles Franklin Award twice, for his novels *Benang* (1999) and *That Deadman Dance* (2010). His writing often reflects the complex relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, focusing on reconciliation, cultural revival, and the experiences of First Nations peoples. In addition to his literary work, Scott is involved in language revival and education efforts, promoting the preservation and teaching of the Noongar language.

Overview

Benang (1999) by Kim Scott is a powerful novel that explores themes of identity, race, and the legacy of colonialism in Australia. The novel's central protagonist is Harley, a mixed-race child born to a Noongar mother and a white father. The novel captures his inner conflict through his internal monologue, regarding his identity and place within the Noongar community. The story is narrated by Harley, who embarks on a journey to understand his family's history and his place within it. Set against the backdrop of Australia's brutal policies of assimilation, the novel delves into the history of Harley's family, particularly the experiences of his Aboriginal ancestors.

Harley's grandfather, Ernest Solomon Scat, plays a central role in the narrative. Ernest is obsessed with the idea of "breeding out the color" in the Indigenous population, reflecting the historical practices of the Australian government to assimilate Aboriginal people through forced breeding programs. As Harley uncovers the stories of his ancestors, the novel portrays the violence and oppression faced by Indigenous Australians under colonial rule. At the same time, it highlights

resilience and survival, particularly through the retention of cultural identity and knowledge. Scott employs a fragmented, multi-voiced narrative structure to weave together personal stories, official documents, and oral histories, creating a polyphonic text that reflects the complexity of Indigenous experiences. *Benang* is a profound examination of Australia's colonial past, the trauma of forced assimilation, and the enduring strength of Aboriginal culture and identity.

Harley's perspective is just one among many, and as the story progresses, readers encounter other characters, each offering their own unique perspectives and experiences. The inclusion of multiple narrative voices in *Benang* enables Kim Scott to delve into the complexities of identity. The character's grapple with questions of self-identity, cultural belonging and the interplay between their Noongar heritage and the influence of white settlers. For instance, Harley's struggle with his mixed heritage and the tension between his Noongar and European roots serves as a central theme in the novel. By juxtaposing his perspective with those of others, Scott highlights the diversity of experiences within the Noongar community, emphasizing that indigenous identity is not singular or monolithic but rather encompasses a spectrum of histories, experiences and identities.

Harley serves as a conduit through which Scott navigates the intricate and often fraught terrain of Noongar identity, a journey that is inextricably linked to the broader history of Aboriginal dispossession and displacement in Australia. Through Harley's search for his family's past, the novel delves into the complex web of personal and communal narratives that have been shaped, obscured, and manipulated by the colonial gaze, a process that ultimately reveals the inherent polyphony inherent in the Noongar experience (Scott, 1999). Scott's narrative approach in *Benang* is a masterclass in literary innovation, as he seamlessly blends various modes of storytelling to create a truly unique and immersive reading experience. The novel's structure, which alternates between Harley's first-person accounts, official bureaucratic documents, and the oral histories passed down by his elders, reflects the multiplicity of voices and perspectives that have shaped the Noongar identity.

A key aspect of polyphony in *Benang* is the use of various narrative voices. The novel presents a wide array of characters, each with a distinct voice, and it seamlessly shifting between these perspectives throughout the story. This technique enables readers to acquire a deeper

understanding of the thoughts, emotions, and experiences of different characters, offering a more holistic view of the Noongar community's history and identity. Through the use of polyphony, Scott emphasizes varied experiences within the Noongar community, highlighting that Indigenous identity is not singular or uniform but rather a broad spectrum of diverse perspectives and lived realities.

This polyphonic nature is further reinforced by the novel's innovative narrative structure, which seamlessly blends official records, personal accounts, and imaginative re-tellings, creating a multifaceted and often disorienting reading experience (Whitlock & Osborne, 2016). Scott's masterful command of language and genre-bending techniques serve to subvert the traditional hierarchies of knowledge, empowering the marginalized voices that have long been silenced or distorted by dominant colonial discourses. Moreover, the novel's exploration of Noongar identity is inextricably linked to the profound and often painful connection to the land, a connection that is equally central to the novel's polyphonic nature (Jiang & Yongchun, 2022). Through the interplay of Harley's personal journey and the collective history of the Noongar people, *Benang* challenges readers to grapple with the complexities of identity, belonging, and the lasting legacies of colonial oppression.

For instance, Harley narrates his journey of self-discovery, interweaving his voice with the voices of his ancestors. This blend of past and present perspectives creates a layered narrative. Harley often reflects on his grandfather's and father's experiences, bringing in their stories and viewpoints, "I can still hear Ern's voice: 'You won't find any shame in our story, son.' But how to tell it? How to make a narrative of something that has left me shattered, without words?" (Scott, 1999, p. 45).

Thematic Depth through Polyphony

The polyphonic structure allows for a nuanced exploration of identity. Harley's journey to understand his heritage and identity is complex and is influenced by multiple voices and perspectives that reflect the mixed and often conflicting aspects of his background. Harley's internal dialogue reveals his struggle with his mixed heritage, the pressure to assimilate, and the desire to honour his Noongar roots. By presenting both Indigenous and colonial perspectives, Scott

critiques the historical narratives that have marginalized Indigenous voices. The polyphonic structure emphasizes the resistance and resilience of the Noongar people against the erasure of their culture and history. The inclusion of colonial reports and documents within the narrative serves to highlight their inadequacies and biases, while the personal stories offer a more authentic and humanized account of history. The multiplicity of voices in *Benang* underscores the theme of cultural survival. Despite the oppressive forces of colonization, the continuity of the Noongar voices and traditions throughout the narrative demonstrates their enduring strength and vitality. The stories of different generations illustrate how cultural knowledge and traditions are passed down and adapted, ensuring their survival.

The novel incorporates historical documents, official records, and colonial reports. These voices contrast sharply with the personal and cultural narratives of Harley and his family, providing a critique of the colonial discourse and its attempts to erase or control Indigenous identities. By including colonial documents, Scott exposes the dehumanizing language and policies of the colonizers, juxtaposing them with the rich, personal stories of the Noongar people. Some of the official documents used by Kim Scott are reports by the Protector of Aborigines, which reflect the colonial government's attitudes and policies towards Indigenous people. This excerpt highlights the paternalistic and assimilationist policies of the colonial administration, which sought to erase Indigenous identities.

"The half-caste problem is increasing. Measures must be taken to absorb these people into the general population." (Scott, 1999, p. 101).

Official correspondence between government officials is included in the novel to illustrate the bureaucratic and impersonal nature of colonial rule. This statement underscores the systematic efforts to separate Indigenous children from their families, a practice that led to the Stolen Generations.

"It is essential that the native population be controlled and directed. The removal of mixed-blood children from their families is a necessary step in their education and assimilation." (Scott, 1999, p. 115).

The novel also features accounts from missionaries, who played a significant role in the

colonization process by attempting to convert Indigenous people to Christianity. This passage reflects the ethnocentric view of missionaries who saw Indigenous cultures as inferior and in need of salvation through Western religion.

"The natives must be taught the ways of civilization and Christianity. It is our duty to bring them out of their primitive state and into the light of the Lord." (Scott, 1999, p. 150).

Anthropological descriptions of Indigenous people and their cultures are used to show how they were objectified and studied from a colonial perspective. Such descriptions dehumanize Indigenous people by reducing their rich cultures to simplistic and condescending stereotypes

"The Aboriginal tribes of this region are characterized by their nomadic lifestyle and lack of permanent structures. Their social organization is rudimentary, based on kinship and clan affiliations." (Scott, 1999, p. 175).

The novel also features Indigenous languages and songs, which represent the voices of the Noongar people. These elements are crucial in depicting the cultural and spiritual dimensions of the characters' lives, further adding to the multiplicity of voices. The inclusion of Noongar language and songs enriches the narrative and underscores the importance of cultural heritage. These elements are woven seamlessly into the text, reinforcing the connection between the characters and their land, culture, and ancestors. The use of Noongar songs and phrases within the narrative serves to preserve and celebrate the language and culture, asserting its place within the broader Australian context.

"And I remember the old people singing, voices rising and falling like the wind. 'Ngan koort boodja, ngan koort boodja,' they sang. 'My heart, my land.'" (Scott, 1999, p. 178).

The stories of multiple generations of Harley's family are told, each adding their own voice to the narrative. These intergenerational stories highlight the impact of colonization over time and show the resilience of the Noongar people.

"Grandfather Sandy's tales of the old days, before the white men came, were filled with magic and mystery. Father's stories, though, were filled with pain and struggle, fighting to hold onto what little remained of our culture." (Scott, 1999, p. 223).

Harley's internal dialogue contributes to the polyphonic texture of the novel. His struggles with identity and belonging are expressed through a multitude of conflicting thoughts and emotions. This excerpt highlights the paternalistic and assimilationist policies of the colonial administration, which sought to erase Indigenous identities.

"Who am I, really? A product of mixed blood, torn between two worlds? I hear my grandfather's voice urging me to embrace my heritage, but I also hear the voice of my father, warning me of the dangers of looking back." (Scott, 1999, p. 310).

Analysis of Historical and Official Voices

By incorporating these historical and official voices, Scott critiques the colonial attitudes that sought to dominate and control Indigenous populations. These voices reveal the dehumanizing and paternalistic views held by colonial authorities, which justified their oppressive policies. The juxtaposition of official voices with personal narratives highlights the stark contrast between the lived experiences of Indigenous people and the detached, bureaucratic language of colonial documents. This contrast emphasizes the disconnect between the colonizers' perceptions and the reality of Indigenous lives. Including actual historical and official documents adds authenticity to the novel, grounding the fictional narrative in real historical contexts. This approach helps readers understand the systemic nature of colonization and its lasting impact on Indigenous communities. The presence of these official voices allows readers to see the full extent of the colonial project and its harmful effects. By contrasting these voices with the rich, personal stories of Harley and his family, Scott fosters empathy and understanding for the resilience and strength of the Noongar people.

Conclusion

Kim Scott's *Benang: From the Heart* is a masterful illustration of a polyphonic text, where the interplay of multiple voices and perspectives creates a rich, multifaceted narrative. This

narrative structure not only enhances the thematic depth of the novel but also serves as a powerful tool for deconstructing colonial histories and celebrating the resilience of Indigenous cultures. Through its polyphony, *Benang* offers a profound meditation on identity, history, and cultural survival, making it a significant work in contemporary Australian literature.

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Trauma and Psychological Self-Destruction: An Overview of Emotional Dependence and Obsession Through the Lens of Psychoanalytic Feminism in K. R. Meera's Novel, *The Poison of Love*

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Abstract

The paper will examine the novel *The Poison of Love* by K R Meera. The novel depicts trauma and self-destruction by women as the psychic impact of deep-rooted patriarchy. This article explores psychoanalytic feminist theory- specifically the concept of repression used by Freud, the desire of the Other used by Lacan, and the model of emotional conditioning developed by Chodorow. The analysis reveals how patriarchal ideals of femininity are transformed into self-inflicted trauma in the case of Tulsi and her love towards Madhav. Meera reveals how love has been turned into self-destruction by revealing that essentialist conceptions of womanhood are challenged and that female subjectivity is being redefined as unwhole, performative and resistant within patriarchal culture.

Fitting Meera's story into the larger context of trauma and feminist psychoanalysis, this paper discusses the feminine unconscious patterns of cultural indoctrination and the influence of the patriarchal ideology on the female unconscious. Tulsi exhibits the acculturation of the cumulative effects of interpersonal pain whereby the psychic damages accumulated over time thwart identity and force a renegotiation of womanhood. The analysis questions emotional dispositions, love, care,

and vulnerability, which is usually naturalized as feminine, but created by patriarchal conditioning in the actual sense. In the Indian case, these gendered imperatives are considered psychic baggage, which drives women into depression, self-alienation, and self-destruction. Using the pathways of femininity that are strong and fragile to her emotional breakdown, the study brings out the critique of the patriarchal emotional economies and her redefinition of trauma as a symptom and resistance.

Keywords: trauma, self-destruction, femininity, patriarchy, psychoanalysis

Introduction

The Poison of Love is a novel published in Malayalam language and later translated into various languages such as English. It is a feminine based novel, which talks of the psychic breakdown of its lead character, Tulsi. Being narrated in a first person, the novel has placed female consciousness in the center of narration framework and provided the reader with first-hand access to the emotional and mental world of Tulsi. This mode of narration does not only promise a clearly female subjectivity but also reveals the differences in it, showing the way in which patriarchal conditioning and suppressed desire combine to create the feminine psyche. Meera creates a multi-layered image of womanhood that provokes trauma, guilt, and resistance by tracing the evolution of Tulsi as a woman who has lost all romanticism in her life and become a victim of psychological self-destruction. This makes the novel an ideal venue to a psychoanalytic feminist reading, where the inner conflict within Tulsi can be studied through the prism of repression, abjection, and search of selfhood within the symbolic order of a patriarchal society.

The old question of feminist essentialism has a direct influence on a psychoanalytic interpretation of *The Poison of Love* because K.R. Meera destroys the belief in a fixed female essence through her depiction of trauma and mental suicide. Feminist essentialism posits that all women share a common essence, often grounded in biology or shared experience (Stone 135). Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler have vehemently criticized this concept. Contrary to the view of an innate or natural femininity, De Beauvoir famously argued that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman,” thereby rejecting the idea of an innate or natural femininity (de Beauvoir 283). Butler also challenges fixed ideas of gender by her theory of gender performativity, asserting that gender is constituted through repeated social acts rather than biological determinants (Butler 25).

In spite of these strong objections, gender essentialist assumptions still remain. Patriarchal structures persist in many societies including in India. For instance, India remains deeply patriarchal, with gender hierarchies shaping both public and private spheres (Kandiyoti 274–290) where women still remain psychologically conditioned to exhibit the qualities of love, nurturing, and hospitality. Patriarchy in India is sustained through social, religious, and familial institutions that legitimize male authority and control over women's bodies and choices (Chakravarti 27). It is apparent that the patriarchal conditioning has a major influence and impact on the development of the female psyche and consciousness. Many women internalise and assimilate to these patterns of dominance and subjugation as routine features of the gender relations. According to India's National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), nearly half of both women and men believe that a husband is justified in physically disciplining his wife under certain circumstances (IIPS & ICF 2021), which reflects the very strong belief in the submissiveness of the woman. Moreover, government time-use data shows that women perform over six hours of unpaid domestic labor daily, compared to just one hour for men (MOSPI 2020).

The systemic oppression and discrimination of women on the grounds of gender has deep roots. As evident in both written texts and widespread practices, conscious and unconscious biases associated with patriarchy have been and continue to be interlaced with power struggles, control, and conformity enforced by the male-dominant cultures of the time (Gupta et al. 2023). It is this kind of social conditioning that strengthens the view of women as caretakers who are inferior to men. These expectations lead to internalized pressures, whereby women can find themselves in a state of self-doubt and emotional exhaustion as they make an attempt to adjust to idealized expectations.

According to the feminist theorists, motherhood is conditioned by the emotionally binding and socially created expectations that place women in the role of endlessly nurturing, being emotionally available, and being morally self-sacrificing. Women's mothering, then, produces asymmetries in the relational experiences of girls and boys as they grow up, which account for crucial differences in feminine and masculine personality, and the relational capacities and modes which this entails (Chodorow 69). One of the most commonly expected positions of a mother is being overwhelmingly tender and emotionally supportive, and her role can define the relationship abilities of her children and strengthen the conventional gendered norms (Chodorow 169).

Meanwhile, she is socially placed in such a way that she cannot do without the protection of her husband, thus power relations are deeply embedded in the framework of patriarchy. Although breastfeeding is a biological privilege of women, men can equally raise children. However, in the discourse of the society, this fact is often ignored, and it still adds to the existing societal gender roles, which recognize women as housewives and men as major breadwinners.

Further, outside of the home certain jobs are usually thought to be naturally female, according to the ideas of gender essentialism, depending on the idea that female is a unique group of traits that women are well-qualified to take part in occupations like hospitality. As an illustration, it is observed that women constitute about 90 percent of the workforce in the nursing field around the world (WHO 12). The gender division of work continues into the present-day service sectors where women still occupy caring and representational jobs. To give an example, 86% of the cabin crew in the aviation industry in India is women (Ladies Who Lead 12). This demonstrates the extent to which social conditioning and gender stereotypes cause the assumption that women should be better at hospitality. These are the roles which are influenced more by the social expectations, rather than the marketing strategies concerning the objectification.

A significant percentage of the world population have at one time gone through traumatic events in their lives whether or not the events were articulated, challenged or solved. An international meta-analysis reported that 70.4 percent of the respondents had faced one of the lifetime traumatic events (Benjet et al. 4). Cathy Caruth notices that the trauma is not felt as a simple form of repression or defense, but in all the cases as a temporal deferral which recreates the person outside of the initial shock (Unclaimed Experience 11). The World Health Organization reports have estimated that about 3.9 percent of the entire world population have experienced post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD) at one time in their life (World Mental Health Report" 45). The increasing trauma rates in the global society have heightened both the academic and practical interest in trauma research in the medical, psychological, and humanities fields. This has become a new issue of concern which is being recorded in literature and psychoanalytic theory as the concept of trauma serves as a key approach to studying memory, repetition, and resistance.

Psychoanalytic Feminism and Trauma

Psychoanalytic feminism is the result of the critical interactions between feminist theorists and Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis that unveils the reproduction of male-focused

assumptions in the traditional concept of the psyche. Freudian theories about repression, desire and unconscious are used to learn more about the subject formation. The theory of repression is the basis where the entire manifestation of psycho-analysis lies (Freud 149). Lacan adds to the model of Freud with his theory of the symbolic order, in which language and subjectivity are structured around the phallus as the signifier of power; he writes: The phallus is the favored signifier of that sign in which the role of the logos is fused with the emergence of desire (Lacan 287).

This symbolic system is challenged by feminist critics including Luce Irigaray, Nancy Chodorow and Juliet Mitchell because it denies women agency and speech. Irigaray suggests that femininity is defined by the discourse of the West only using the terms of masculinity: "female sexuality has been organized, conceptualized, on the parameters of the masculine only" (Irigaray 23). Irigaray claims that the symbolic order of Lacan is phallogocentric and it is arranged in terms of masculine expectations that make the feminine a state of absence or silence. According to Chodorow, gender and family reproduces itself through the psychology of the people in the social organization of the same (Chodorow 7). It is this theoretical stalemate that leads to a critical question that is central to the discussion of *The Poison of Love* and it is one that defines the psychic order of womanhood as lack.

Simone de Beauvoir disregarded the biological determinism of Freud, including his idea of penis envy and insisted that women are not formed by their anatomy but instead are influenced by social and cultural circumstances. She said in the famous quote, "*One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman*" (Beauvoir 283), noting that gender is constructed through the experience of life in the patriarchal society. Nancy Chodorow developed and updated the model of Freud and interpreted the family model as a means of reproducing the gender roles on a generational level through mothering. Chodorow asserts that as long as a girl is attached to the mother, she develops relational identities whereas boys establish independent identities as they become separated and thus continuation of gender asymmetry (Chodorow 93). Her theory of asymmetrical parenting is therefore a feminist response to the Oedipus complex of Freud by placing the emphasis not on the biological urges but on social reproduction and emotional growth.

Trauma can be viewed as a psychological and emotional reaction to events that one perceives to be threatening, life changing, or highly distressing. Such experiences may have long

sheltering effects on the mental, physical, and emotional comfort of an individual. *The Poison of Love* by K. R. Meera presents the audience with a series of tragic events that shatter the protagonist Tulsi and her identity and sense of stability. The cumulative effects of her betrayal and emotional neglect slowly build up in to a deep psychic wound that turns her love for Madhav into a corrosive kind of suffering. As Meera writes, “Love is like milk. With the passage of time, it sours, splits, and becomes poison” (Meera 3).

According to the Freudian perspective, trauma occurs when experiences that are difficult to process are instead buried in the unconscious as opposed to being taken through conscious processing. The mind cannot accommodate painful memories and therefore it entombs them as a defense instinct; they remain undetected and influence behavior, emotion and perception. It is this psychic residue that characterizes the state of Tulsi-- the apparent calm facade of her personal state of being masks the unhealed inner divides of her emotional being.

Trauma is a common human situation that transcends class, culture and gender. However, women often face traumatic experiences in the particular forms of social and cultural workings: patriarchal dominance, emotional abuse, and institutional inferiority. Specifically, the issue of female trauma is the subject of the current discussion as female subjectivity is usually characterized by social norms, which require endurance, sacrifice, and emotional restraint - the conditions, which predetermine the psychological rupture near inevitability.

Essentialist feminism argues that differences between men and women are based on biological or inherent identity that influences emotional and social experiences of women. Conversely, constructivist and post structuralist feminists like Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler maintain that gender identity is a product of culture as opposed to biology. This contradiction of these roles helps us see the depth of the agony Tulsi is going through: the feminine experience of the body is burdened by the patriarchal regimes of feeling, enduring and breaking female love.

The psychological differences relating to female bodies, especially those that are related to reproduction and emotive expressiveness, are usually redefined by the patriarchal system as feeble characteristics. Not only does this ideological framing marginalize women, but it also serves as a source of their trauma of taking normal emotional abilities and turning them into stigmatized vulnerabilities. As the character of Tulsi portrayed by Meera can demonstrate, this dynamic is also

evidenced by a single cultural system that assumes femininity to be a manifestation of fragility: it is not only personal betrayal but also a touch of feminine nature that causes the trauma that Meera experiences.

The intersection of trauma studies and feminist theory is based on their focus on the realities of women who experience both visible and invisible violence- physical attack, emotional domination, sexual coercion, and the biopolitical regulation of female bodies. These types of violence are in the form of psychic scars that are being carried over generations. In literature, therefore, trauma is both a means of resistance and remembrance and it portrays the means through which the female subject returns voice in the narration of her injuries.

The Poison of Love: A Psychoanalytic Feminist Reading

In *The Poison of love* the wishes and decisions of the heroine, Tulsi, become the designers of her future, as she is made to suffer mental torture that surpasses the boundaries and capabilities of the human mind. After meeting Madhav, Tulsi becomes emotionally attached to him, and she falls in love and becomes more and more dependent. During this, she becomes emotionally unstable, her life starts going out of her control, and she is controlled by an overwhelming and destabilizing desire to the point of being willing to sacrifice her own life to that of her beloved.

Giving up her professional dreams is one of the biggest sacrifices that Tulsi has to face. Being a graduate of the engineering degree at the renowned Indian Institute of Technology, she passed her exams brilliantly and proved to have a superior intellectual potential. Her teachers proclaimed her as the most promising student and she was the person who would make India proud even a Nobel Prize winner. In her personal memory, Tulsi tells: “at that time I was an IIT student. Madhav was a correspondent to an English magazine in Chennai. He had arrived at the campus to give a report about the psychological pressure that the students of the IIT were getting. I passed my engineering examinations and took my degree” (Meera 15)

The move by Tulsi to abandon her family and elope with Madhav is the start of a path that is influenced by grief and the regrets. This inner break is caused by the illness of her mother who had advanced uterine cancer that was in her third stage. She wanted to have her three daughters get married before her death. Tulsi remembers the stress of such a situation with ice-cold clarity: “Marriage was inevitable, after all. My mother’s uterine cancer had progressed to the third stage.

She was hurrying to offer her three daughters” (Meera 15) This alienation highlights the clash between her duty as a family member and her own wishes.

Tulsi feels Madhav has an almost insurmountable power, an entity that keeps her lured to him even when she knows of his betrayals. She cannot resist his influence; each kiss, each moment they spend together intimate is able to leave her enthralled. Meera expresses the level of this emotional and physical attachment: *“I was yearning to see him. I wanted to talk to him when I was alone. My heart brimmed over whenever I met him and felt drained when he went away”* (Meera 18). The devotion of Tulsi is rather obsession with his experience because she enjoys it to a certain spell enchantment: *“His touch was magical, spellbinding. It was as if I was in a trance. Like a gopika enchanted with Krishna’s divine flute music, I lost awareness of the world around me. My body was under some sort of black magic. I was thrown off balance”* (Meera 22).

Tulsi falls in love with Madhav and is in a lot of emotional pain. Her affection towards him is mingled with hate and jealousy – especially towards his past relations that added to her sufferings and drove her towards psychological instability. Some several months after they got married, one of the old girlfriends of Madhav appeared at their flat. The woman kissed and hugged Madhav in front of Tulsi, and this left Tulsi inconsolable. Madhav also talks a lot about his twenty-seven former girlfriends in an intimate way and describes love as a female weakness. By expressing his love with such a degree of openness, he only increases the feelings of attachment and the feelings of enmity that Tulsi feels towards him. Tulsi in her first-person narration says “Madhav wrote openly and uninhibitedly about the twenty-seven lovers who had been part of his life. I was left totally shocked” (Meera 14). The oscillating moods of love, hatred, and jealousy of Madhav by Tulsi demonstrate the depressed stance of Klein when guilt and inner conflict can be experienced due to the understanding of the presence of aggressive impulses along with attachment (Klein 145-150).

Tulsi is obsessively involved in an affair with Madhav as well as the collective trauma of other women who are played around by the man. This mirrors the idea of Lacan of being in the desire of the Other, that the subject lacks and are influenced by the symbolic power of a superior being (Lacan 64-66). Madhav defends himself by saying, “I never went seeking anyone. All of them came to me” (Meera 14), and makes his emotional state of mind even more difficult: “Tulsi, I shall never refuse a woman’s love. It would devastate her. If my love can make a woman happy,

why would I want to deny her?” (Meera 17). The story exposes that Tulsi is not the only woman who has been the victim of the manipulative nature of Madhav, other women too get utilized and exploited, and this is a common experience between them and they bond together. The manipulation of Madhav is a good example of patriarchal objectification since women are viewed as objects of male desire, which supports structural gendered power dynamics and is reflective of collective trauma (Fredrickson and Roberts 175-178).

Madhav’s betrayal is slowly revealed under the guise of love. “As I was cleaning, I discovered a black brassiere underneath the cot in the second bedroom. When I asked him about it, he hugged me close and kissed me, feigning hurt. ‘You are the mother of my child... yet you doubt me...’” (Meera 70). Madhav plays on the emotional weakness of Tulsi and the concept of motherhood that she is tied to in a patriarchally stimulated society. Through appealing to her maternal identity, he is attempting to demote her agency, playing with her guilt and love to impose on her that the role of a mother is also one that requires trust and blind obedience. However, the fact that Madhav wanted to hide the fact of his betrayal is not an expression of guilt, but the need to save his social reputation and not to disrupt his relationship at home. Tulsi notes, “He always stopped my questions with kisses. He trounced me with sweetened words” (Meera 71).

People are constantly neglected, and an emotional discontinuity happens in Tulsi’s marriage. Meera depicts the marriage to be a source of constant disengagement and emotional disconnection where Madhav’s indifference becomes an everyday wound. “I remembered the time when I had been pregnant with Kanna. Madhav had stopped coming to the flat. Money was running low” (Meera 82). He returned to work in the evening, and got out in the morning. She waited and he disregarded her completely. Gradually, their intimacy is also performative, a gesture that disables only affection rather than tends to nourish it. Their marriage is further shaken by the encroachment of Madhav’s unresolved past attachments, showing how the emotional reciprocity of the relationship is weak because of the patriarchal structure. Madhav’s narcissism is hidden in his confident belief that the women around him rely on him. He informs Tulsi with unnerving casualty, “I am in trouble ‘tell me’ Bhama wants me to marry her”(Meera 88) which reveals that he needs to be desired and he has a habit of justifying infidelity by proclaiming it to be a necessity of emotion.

Tulsi remembers with bitterness “I signed the joint petition for divorce with vengeance” (Meera 92). The fact that Madhav slowly turns into a stranger to Tulsi is one of her greatest emotional traumas. His words are a pretence of intimacy and dependency “He said, ‘I have no life without you or my children. You are my strength’” (Meera 84). However, his actions reflect the opposite, and he performs a scheme of neglect and abandonment. The discrepancy between words and actions exacerbates the feeling of betrayal in Tulsi and underlines the emotional abuse that was a part of the marriage.

The saddest part of Tulsi’s married life happens when Lily, Madhav’s ex-lover, visits him. The incident takes place while Tulsi is present and proves to be a scene of betrayal and emotional abuse compelling Tulsi to deal with the frailty of her own marriage and her displacement in it. Meera makes the incidence too horrible to fathom: “*Lily pushed me aside, and rushed in, her eyes anguished. Madhav stood like a statue... Lily pounced on him. She embraced him tightly and burst into tears... ‘How could you, how could you?’ she muttered hysterically. I will not give you up, Madhav! I will never ever give you up to anyone!*” (Meera 48). Although the visit of Lily was incidental, it turns out to be an eye opener moment of truth. Tulsi remembers “When I met Lily again... she sympathized with me... She told me Madhav had made love to her, then called me from her phone. ‘I threw him out of my life that day’” (Meera 51). This fight is what makes Tulsi realize that Madhav is two-faced and this is where the irreversible break in their relationship happens as she is betrayed and her agency is highlighted. All these add to Tulsi’s fear of loss and being jilted.

The self-harming behavior of Tulsi serves as an outburst of her interior world. Faced with the perceived failure of her love life and personal ambitions, she transfers responsibility of her emotional pain and suffers it physically as an actual expression of psychic pain. Meera depicts this suicidal drive very well: “*I fought with monkeys for the fruits thrown by visitors. Hitting them and throwing stones at them, I made those monkeys my foes. The wounds I sustained during these scuffles became badly infected and hurt grievously. The pain delighted me*” (Meera 5). Tulsi’s compulsion becomes even more intense because she willingly wants to be hurt, trying to highlight how much she needs to relieve herself of inner pain: “I needed wounds. To hurt myself more grievously, I needed more wounds” (Meera 77). These lines indicate that her self-harm is not only

physical damage but a complicated system of coping with the excessive emotional and relational crisis.

Such self-punishment is symptomatic of her despairing nature and demonstrates the psychological impact of her relationship with Madhav. According to Freud, the urge to reenact pain, particularly during a romantic relationship, is a neurotic bid to conquer loss (Beyond the pleasure principle 23). The novel shows that she carries her trauma with her, and she thinks that inflicting harm upon herself is one way of forgiving herself over what she considers as failures. The fact that Tulsi is a self-destroyer indicates that she is not an associate of the people in her world. The sense of alienation and emotional emptiness of Tulsi not only by her family but also by Madhav also leads her to self-harm as a symbolic scream of help. When she realizes that she is in a state of desperation, she writes to her father, “Your daughter Tulsi seeks forgiveness, falling at your feet” (Meera 83). This shows that she has internalized guilt and she wishes to receive acceptance.

This action not only highlights her emotional suffering but also stresses the absence of tools and resources that women with mental health problems have in a patriarchal world. This wretched state of mind makes Tulsi find solace in Vrindavan where the woman spends the rest of her life devoted to Krishna as a widow to Krishna- a devotion that she undertakes till she dies. Her choice indicates her profound emotional and spiritual confusion, the need to find a remedy in the religious surrender in order to deal with trauma. Such change is explainable in terms of reaction formation, a type of defense mechanism, whereby bypassed or unacceptable urges are substituted with their counterparts (Freud 122-123). The repressed erotic desire and disappointment in Tulsi is thereby transferred to the extreme piety and self-sacrifice to enable her to transfer the emotional pain into the spiritual worship. Her flight to Vrindavan is also regressive which is also one of the defense mechanisms as explained by Freud where the ego reverts to some earlier phase in the psychological growth in a bid to avoid the intolerable conflict (Freud 128-130).

The fact that Tulsi also has a problem with identity contributes to her desperation. She is more lost as she struggles with her desires, expectations of the society and her relationship that ended. Her self-destroying acts characterize this identity crisis and they act as a physical expression of her inner turmoil. The actions of Tulsi are an extension of the larger theme of how social pressures can cause people to resort to dysfunctional coping strategies when they are trapped and

helpless. The story explores the psychological reasons as to why Tulsi has been self-harming and this creates complexities to her emotional needs. It brings up significant issues concerning mental health and the stigma that surrounds this issue and the failure of the society to deal with them, especially in women. The story of Tulsi is a heart-rending experience of how empathy and understanding are needed by persons who grapple with mental problems.

The novel shows that Tulsi fights against a patriarchal society that tries to suppress her wishes and wants. The trauma and oppression are developed by being raised in such a repressive world. This constant stress due to the imposed cultural norms and moral policing has a strong toll on her mental stability. Tulsi lives in a patriarchal society with a tendency to emphasize the dominance of men and discredit the desires of females. This social setting deprives her of chances and suffocates her aspirations, driving her into the fixed roles. This is manifested in the fact that she is bound to an arranged marriage to Vinay which she cannot help but say no to due to her passionate but toxic relations with Madhav. The novel presents the way women are controlled by societal norms, thus making them to do sacrifices in the name of love that in the end hurts them.

The action of the story reaches its climax when Tulsi does the tragic act of the story, in desperation and in a state of despair, Tulsi decides to poison her two children to kill them. This gesture marks the completion of her interior obliteration and a tragedy of denial of the older female role. It also underscores her understanding of love as something that is destructive and corrosive which can be associated with her own experiences of betrayal and abandonment. The infanticide deprives the subject of desiring; she turns even motherhood into abjection. Her poisoning of her children is a violent rejection of the maternal image that is sacred and is reminiscent of what Kristeva said – that maternity is an ordeal where the body undergoes its own limitations and fragmentation (Kristeva 178). The act may be considered as the final way of showing her emotional suffering when she is convinced that, in any case, if she cannot be happy, her children should not be happy either. The actions of Tulsi are more self-destructive after the poisoning of their children. Her readiness to undergo physical suffering like letting monkeys bite her is an indication of the fact that she sought a way out of her misery. This is an internal struggle of wanting to join Madhav even in death, a symbol of her dying that she loves him more than she loves her life.

Conclusion

The novel presents Tulsi, a woman born in the patriarchal paradigm of the Indian culture, who is conditioned since birth to internalise its meaning structures. The fact that she is called a girl introduces her into the symbolic order and a process of psychological programming begins in her life which continues all her life where she unknowingly carries the gendered meanings and expectations in which she was told to be. Every social responsibility and duty of Tulsi in a society dominated by men is internalized as a part of her own being, engrained within her own unconsciousness through generations of cultural indoctrination and her own mentalistic brainwash, which reinforces patriarchal values. The sacrifices that Tulsi makes and how much she longs after Madhav create a strong feeling of guilt which in turn leads her to a state of self-punishment.

Although Tulsi knows that Madhav has had many lovers, and she does not like his personality, particularly his past involving many women, she slowly gets attracted to his physical and behavioural qualities. This attraction is an expression of how Meera views the force of emotions taking over rational intellect as Tulsi is beset by feelings towards Madhav. This also portrays the idea of the Other as the source of desire by Lacan, who states that desire is constructed by the Other; Tulsi wants to be recognized and validated by the symbolic structure of authority that Madhav holds over her emotional life (Lacan 164-66). This scenario brings out the fact that the women who are usually depicted as in search of love and being validated by others are considered as vulnerable or weak. It highlights how society will view emotional needs of a woman as a sign of weakness, making her powerless and dependent. As the story unfolds later we get to know that love is actually a curse to Tulsi. Thus, she is stuck in emotional torture and does not bring her happiness as she wanted to begin with at the beginning.

Women have been bound long within social structures which hail motherhood and ignore the psychological burden of motherhood. The figure of the self-sacrificing mother tends to cover over the internal crisis that comes along with it such as postpartum depression. Finally, Tulsi tries to overcome her long-term suffering and mental unrest by trying to find a new identity, an attempt to forget herself as a person that she identifies with abjection. This urge to destruction becomes so overwhelming that even the thought of destroying her own children comes to her as a way of cutting off all the links to her old life. The gesture of cruelty in Tulsi is turned into a desperate protest against the unbearable life. Her logic of her children being better off out of their tribulations puts death into a paradoxical cave and inversion of the survival instinct that defines human and

animal life. Storey (2004) explores how Tulsi's love is a place of passion and persecution as this devotion is now transformed into a sort of internalized violence. In *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, Julia Kristeva defines melancholy as a breakdown of meaning, which leaves the subject with the dead body of the abandoned object in him/her (Kristeva 13-15).

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Media Literacy in an AI-Driven World: An Ethical Lens

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Abstract: This paper explores the transformative role and impact of AI in media. In the present era, individuals, especially students, rely on AI technology. This is clear with regards to Chat GPT as it makes obtaining and creating information easier and more convenient. This reliance becomes a challenge for accessing genuine information, questioning the core values of credibility and accuracy. With the rapid usage of this technology in media, concerns like deep fakes, misinformation, and bias are on focus during academic discussions, making ethics and media literacy the need of the hour today. The study is explorative in nature. It reviewed literature from various academic journals accessed on google scholar, research gate and sage publications, seeking to explore the role of media literacy in an AI era. With a descriptive qualitative approach based on the secondary data, the paper finds how ethical reflection becomes central to media literacy. The study proposes an ethics-centered media literacy approach in preparing students to use technology with integrity.

Keywords: Technology, Chat GPT, Credibility, Ethics, Media literacy

1. Introduction:

AI Tools like Chat GPT help to create information easier, faster and more conveniently today than ever before. At the same time, this convenience comes with concerns that endanger credibility. In today's world, it is challenging to detect AI-generated content that looks the same as human work and verify its reliability. As a result, the value of the content cannot be taken for granted at a single glance. This situation makes it more important to talk about the need for media literacy. It is not just a cognitive and technical competency but an ethical necessity requiring the ability to discern what is right and what is wrong to do. Individuals, particularly students who engage to a large extent with Chat GPT, need to learn to question and verify AI-generated content. This study argues that media literacy must integrate critical awareness with ethical conscience to better prepare learners to engage responsibly with AI-generated content. In a world where truth

itself can be manufactured, fostering ethics-centered media literacy is necessary for informed participation in the techno-centric era.

2. Review of Literature

Cristian Vaccari and Andrew Chadwick (2020) argued that deep fakes work as tools of online political disinformation, causing significant uncertainty about the truthfulness of the content. It was established, by analyzing two case studies namely one that was a fake kidnapping video on Whats App in India that triggered mob violence and the other was a manipulated video of former U.S. President Obama, that the technology has the potential to deceive individuals, making it difficult to detect the truth and thereby influencing public trust.

Examining different ethical frameworks that address the influence of AI technologies, Dr. Thilo Hagedorff (2020) identified several issues, which are recurring, such as privacy, accountability and fairness. He argued that these guidelines focused more on technical rather than moral solutions, proposing a virtue-oriented approach that enhances individual responsibility and ethical awareness. Joelle Swart (2021), acknowledging that young people are aware about how algorithms structure the news on social media, opined that consistent and constant exposure can limit their awareness about the hidden work of algorithms. The study put forward a suggestion to develop algorithm literacy within media literacy. Tierman et al. (2023) explained how AI has conditioned individuals' ability to access, evaluate and produce information. Their review recommended a more collaborative strategy to strengthen information and media literacy. Malik Sallam (2023) examined the role of Chat GPT in healthcare education and research. His findings revealed both potential benefits and major concerns like bias, inaccuracy, plagiarism and lack of transparency. He concluded that developing a code of ethics is essential to ensure responsible use.

Elaborating on the influence of AI and ChatGPT in terms of learning and evaluation in the education sector, Simone Grassini (2023) brought to light the important concerns like accuracy, plagiarism, data privacy and bias. He emphasised that the integration of AI in education calls for an individual's ethical reflection and moral responsibility. Frau-Meis (2024) amplified the need for understanding the algorithmic processes, especially its influence on information consumption, creation and dissemination. She proposed a conceptual framework and use of algo-literacy pre bunking kit which can support both educators and learners to have a critical engagement with AI-driven content. Edda Lundberg and Peter Mozelius (2024), examining the socio-psychological effects of deep fakes across news media, entertainment and education, found that deep fakes, besides being creative, have the potential to endanger public trust. Drawing insights from educators in Hong Kong, Stephanie Jean Tsang (2025) proposed the integration of AI literacy into media literacy for junior high school students. The study stressed that teaching should focus on ethical reasoning rather than technical proficiency of AI tools. The study commented that empowering students to navigate the digital technology and evaluate generative information. Opeyemi Dorcas Alawode (2025) analysed how the personalised content curation on social media affected public opinion. The research revealed that hidden algorithms through emotional content reinforce existing beliefs. The study cautioned that algorithms thrive on engagement metrics over accuracy leading to increased polarization and weakening informed citizenship.

3. Objectives:

1. To explore the role of media literacy in the AI era
2. To propose an ethics-centered media literacy

4. Methodology

The study systematically reviewed appropriate literature relevant to media literacy. With a descriptive research approach, the secondary data were drawn from peer reviewed journals accessed through databases such as Google Scholar, Research gate and Sage publications. The review involved a critical examination of concepts that address the need for media literacy.

5. Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded on the theories from media and communication studies.

5.1 Technological Determinism : It is a reductionist theory that questions the influence of technology on individuals, social structures and culture. Advanced by Marshal McLuhan in 1964, the theory states that media and technology shape individual's thinking, perception and interaction with the world. It is fitting to note his quote that says, "We shape our tools and they in turn shape us" to fit in the discourse. The relevance of this theory is significant as individuals, particularly students, adopt technology such as Generative AI tools for learning, creativity and production.

5.2 Uses and Gratification Theory : developed by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumer and Michael Gurevitch (1973), the Uses and Gratification theory (UGT) focuses on the active role of media users. It assumes that the audience are goal-driven and deliberately choose media to fulfill "specific needs such as information, personal identity, integration, social interaction and entertainment". In the context of an AI-driven environment, the theory is highly applicable in understanding how users engage with Generative AI tools and recommendation systems to satisfy their needs. As students actively choose platforms like Chat GPT, AI systems can simultaneously anticipate and shape their choices through personalized responses and adaptive learning patterns.

5.3 Postmodern Media Theory : Advocated by Jean Baudrillard in 1981, the theory posits that how media in the postmodern era blurs the boundaries between reality and representation. In his study, Baudrillard defines Simulacra as the copies that no longer refer to any original truth and this leads to the state of hyper reality. In the AI-driven era, Deep fakes, AI-generated voices and fabricated news are simulacra in the words of Baudrillard, represented as reality. They create convincing narratives about the events or the persons. Content of this nature makes one believe that truth can be manufactured and trust can be programmed.

6. Discussion

6.1 Artificial Intelligence is present everywhere

It is no more a distant technology. It has changed our life and learning. Voice Assistants (Siri, Google Assistant and Alexa) help us in our regular activities like setting alarms, navigating traffic. Netflix, Spotify and YouTube use AI to curate content based on our content preferences for watching and listening. E-commerce platforms such as Amazon and Flipkart recommend products based on past purchasing behavior. Writing, studying and generating ideas is becoming easier with AI writing tools like Chat GPT and Gemini. AI is also integrated into healthcare, finance and transportation.

6.2 Algorithm Driven Media Content

India has over 886 million internet users (ICUBE, 2024), making it the world's second-largest digital population (Petrosyan, A.2025). In this context, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is shaping how people consume news and entertainment through algorithms on social media and streaming platforms. Engagement becomes the key metric for platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) that use algorithms to promote content, often reinforcing the existing beliefs. Joelle Swart (2025) finds that journalism students and young audiences mainly get their news from social media feeds driven by these algorithms, which present highly personalized content. Kreiss & McGregor (2021) also indicate that users often do not realize how much their feeds are filtered or how algorithms can amplify certain viewpoints while limiting others.

6.3 AI Hallucinations

Artificial intelligence (AI) increases the fake news phenomenon (Frau-Meigs, 2024). AI enables online tools to imitate and even extend human intelligence, making it easier to spread and harder to control the proliferation of misinformation (Ghallab, 2019). Students, if not aware of these potential issues, can be susceptible to fraud or even harm. For example, Chat GPT has the “potential to generate incorrect or even fabricated information”, as often reported by both users and the scientific literature (Sallam, 2023). Such issues can be problematic for students who rely on Chat GPT in the process of learning. This tendency of AI models is often referred to as “AI Hallucinations” (Alkaissi, H., & McFarlane, S. I.2023).

6.4 Information Integrity

India experienced a significant surge in AI-generated misinformation and deep fakes during the 2024 general elections, with altered videos and audio targeting both political figures and celebrities. The American global computer security software company, McAfee reports that More than 75 per cent of Indians have encountered deep fake content in the past year and a significant number of people were unable to spot real and AI-generated content (Nishtha Badgamia, 2024). The report also highlights that one in four Indians believed “political deep fakes were real.” In these instances, it is important to note that differentiating fact from fabrication has become difficult, posing a profound threat to information integrity.

6.5 Academic Integrity

With the use of Chat GPT, plagiarism and lack of proper citation have become major concerns for academia. These practices obstruct the true objective of learning, complicating the assessment of the students' conceptual learning. It is important to note here that among AI tools, ChatGPT is the most widely used Automated text tool among students, particularly in academic settings (Divya & Ravi Kumar, 2024), but its accuracy and reliability remain uncertain (Sallam,2023). Providing meaningful feedback to students, who rely on such tools consistently, is demanding for educators. It may even impede their learning process.

7. Challenges

7.1 Ignorance is invisible

Ignorance is often unnoticed as users rarely realise how little they understand about how algorithmic models work and what data they process. For many students, this lack of awareness is a great concern. Overreliance on such models can cover up gaps in genuine understanding as the automation tools perform the thinking instead of students. Evidently, there is a lack of knowledge about how these models work, both students and educators may overlook biases built into them. This lack of understanding can also lead to what Symons & Alvarado (2024) call “epistemic injustice”, wherein people affected by such systems cannot challenge them due to insufficient knowledge.

7.2 The Dunning–Kruger effect

The “*Dunning-Kruger effect*” states that people with limited knowledge are disposed to overrate their competence because they cannot assess their own understanding accurately (Kruger & Dunning, 1999). While students are engaged with ChatGPT, they often assume that its answers are correct and believe that they fully understand the topic, causing them to overlook their learning gaps. As a result, these tools can mask weaknesses in comprehension. Research also points out that limited awareness of how these systems work can increase overconfidence in both personal ability and trust in the tools' output.

8. Recommendation

Use of AI technology looks unavoidable among students. Gaining deeper insights into what goes behind the data sets used by the AI tools to generate information is a must-know for students. For example, engaging students in hands-on activities like comparing and contrasting information generated by ChatGPT with verified sources and reflecting on their accuracy, can strengthen their ethical awareness and critical thinking. In this way, ethics-centered media literacy becomes effective in molding students into responsible informed citizens. Educational institutions should include ethics into curriculum and have AI policy for detecting AI content for all academic related purposes, not just the research helping to uphold academic integrity.

9. Conclusion

AI technologies, like ChatGPT, come with a lot of opportunities for learning and also raise concerns about credibility. The study realises that students' heavy reliance on these tools is likely to result in unnoticed learning gaps, overconfidence and a decline in critical thinking. It is

important to stress on the role of educators and institutions in preparing students to use technology with integrity by equipping them with Ethics-Centered Media Literacy (ECML) skills.

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Indianisation of English as a Language: From Post-Independence to the Present

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Abstract:

Since gaining independence in 1947, India has maintained English as a de facto national language alongside Hindi. This paper examines how English in India has evolved into a distinct variety often called Indian English. It surveys policy history (the Constitution's provisions for official languages), changes in education and media, and the linguistic "indigenization" of English in vocabulary, grammar, and sound. Early postcolonial leaders chose Hindi as the official language but retained English for government and court. Over time, English spread widely through schools, urbanization, and globalisation. As **Costa** notes, English "has acted as a lingua franca between speakers of different local languages" and facilitated unity in India's multilingual society. Contemporary studies report that Indian English has acquired unique lexical, grammatical, and phonological features (through Kachru's "indigenization") that distinguish it from British or American English. English-medium education has surged (e.g. roughly doubling from 2009 to 2014) and use of code-mixed "Hinglish" is now ubiquitous. Survey data show English remains more common among the educated elite: only about 6–10% of Indians report any proficiency, concentrated in cities and among upper castes. By contrast, English has become widely embraced as a crucial skill rather than a colonial imposition: recent fieldwork finds that English has largely "shed its colonial associations" and is seen as a key credential of modern life. This study synthesizes scholarly sources to provide a comprehensive, post-1947 overview of Indian English's development, illustrating both its distinctive linguistic traits and its social significance.

Keywords: Indian English, Indigenization, Postcolonial Identity, Code-Switching, Language Policy, Education, Social Stratification, Globalization

Introduction

After 1947, India's leaders faced a multilingual nation and needed a common medium. The Constitution (1950) designated Hindi (in Devanagari script) as the Union's official language, while permitting continued use of English for all governmental and judicial purposes[1][2]. Thus English remained co-official alongside Hindi at the federal level. In practice, English quickly became entrenched in administration, education, and technology. English is used "in tourism, government administration, education, the armed forces, business and the media"[3] and even dominated Bollywood film subtitles and news until the 1990s. Although only a tiny minority speak English natively, it serves as a **lingua franca** unifying India's linguistic diversity[3][7]. As Costa (2017) observes, English provides "stable linguistic threads for unity" in a nation of hundreds of languages[12]. In this context, a new variety – Indian English – emerged. This paper traces its emergence from Independence to the present, covering language policy, sociolinguistic factors, and the distinct linguistic features that mark Indian English.

Language Policy and Education (Post-1947)

At independence, the question of the national language was hotly debated. The 1950 Constitution adopted a bilingual policy: **Hindi** would be the official language (Article 343), but **English** "shall be used for all the official purposes of the Union"[1], including legislation and courts. This compromise was extended indefinitely via amendments (the "Official Languages Act" of 1963 and 1967), reflecting English's practical necessity. English remained the medium of higher education and civil service exams, and it connected India with the global Anglophone world.

Educationally, English-medium instruction expanded rapidly. Parents increasingly favor English schooling for its perceived social and economic advantages. For example, government data indicate that **enrollment in English-medium schools surged from roughly 15 million students in 2008-09 to 29 million by 2013-14** (nearly doubling in five years)[13]. Today private and public schools alike teach in English from early grades. English literacy and test preparation (TOEFL, IELTS) are widespread among youth. In contrast, rural and less affluent regions still rely more on regional languages; even in 2011 only about 10.6% of Indians reported English proficiency[14][7].

Key point: English is taught as a second language in virtually all states. Studies show 72% of Indian men and 83% of women report no English skills[15]. Those who do speak English are heavily concentrated in urban and elite segments. According to a 2019 Mint/CMIE survey, **only about 6% of Indians** claimed any English ability, down from roughly 10% in the 2011 census[8]. Meanwhile, proficiency strongly correlates with class and religion: about **41% of the wealthy** can speak English versus only 2% of the poor[16]; **15% of Christians** vs. 6% of Hindus and 4% of Muslims[9]; urban adults (12%) far outnumber rural (3%). English knowledge also skews young and educated – roughly one-third of Indian university graduates report speaking English[17]. These patterns underscore that English in India functions as a **prestige language and status symbol**.

Despite uneven spread, English has become indispensable in Indian society. It enables interstate communication and global integration. Grishechko (2021) notes that for many Indians, English now “pervades their routine life”[2]. In cities, even taxi drivers and service workers regularly use Hinglish (Hindi-English) to communicate. English high-stakes exams determine college admissions and jobs, and urban Indians often default to English when interacting with speakers of different mother tongues[3]. The internet and media further fuel Anglophone culture: major newspapers, TV channels, and movies (including Bollywood subtitles) use English. In sum, **language policy and education** have ensured that English is deeply embedded in India’s institutional and cultural fabric.

Linguistic Indigenization of English

As English rooted itself in India, it naturally absorbed local influences. Scholars describe Indian English as a “**transplanted language**” shaped by centuries of contact (Kachru 1976, cited by Costa)[18]. This process is often called *indigenization*: the infusion of Indian phonology, grammar, and vocabulary into English. For instance, Costa (2017) emphasizes that Indian English has developed “unique lexical, grammatical, phonological and discourse features” acquired through indigenization[4][19]. These features give Indian English its distinctive character. We illustrate several major areas of influence below.

- **Lexical Innovations:** Indian English has coined many words to express local concepts. Common examples include *prepone* (“to reschedule earlier”), *co-brother* (husband of

one's sister-in-law), and *out of station* (away from home)[4]. Many ordinary words take on new senses: e.g. *cousin-brother* for close cousin, or *revert* meaning “reply to an email.” English has also borrowed (and sometimes re-borrowed) terms from Hindi, Urdu, Sanskrit, and other Indian languages. Sengupta et al. (2024) note that global vocabulary has become bilingual: for example, *khaki* (from Hindi *khākī* for “dust-colored”) and *mantra* entered English from Sanskrit roots, while Hindi has adopted *botal* and *tamatar* from English (for “bottle” and “tomato” respectively)[20]. Even basic courtesies differ: Indians say *Hello*, *Bye-bye*, and *achha* (“okay”) colloquially, reflecting local speech rhythms[21]. These lexical hybrids fill semantic gaps and carry Indian cultural resonance. According to Griffiths (2010), this rising “hybrid” vocabulary is so widespread that Hinglish (Hindi mixed with English) is now a dominant mode of casual communication online and offline[6].

- **Phonological Patterns:** Indian English exhibits several phonetic traits from native tongues. One salient pattern is the lack of distinction between [v] and [w]; many speakers use a single labio-dental [v/w] sound for both letters[22]. Similarly, **retroflex consonants** (sounds made by curling the tongue back) from Dravidian and Indo-Aryan languages often replace English alveolar stops. In practice, /t/ and /d/ may be pronounced as retroflex [ʈ] and [ɖ] respectively[23]. Indian English is also largely **non-rhotic**: word-final *r* is often silent, though Indian speakers may produce a tapped or trilled [ɾ] before a vowel[24][23]. Consonant clusters are simplified (e.g. *film* is [fɪləm]), and vowels can differ (short /æ/ may sound like [ɛ]). These phonetic shifts make Indian English accent noticeably distinct, yet usually intelligible to other English speakers.
- **Grammatical Features:** While largely conforming to English grammar, some syntactic patterns in Indian English reflect local influences. For example, present continuous tense is used more broadly (“*I am understanding*” instead of “I understand”). Habitual aspect is sometimes marked with *be* or by contextual particles. Article usage can vary (some speakers omit “the” or “a” in places a native speaker would use them). Question tags often use “no” (e.g. “*You are coming, no?*”). Redundant pronouns or reflexives may appear (“*She herself went*”). Many Indians also use double negatives (“*He didn't do nothing*”) or the informal “passive” (“*The car is got cleaned*”). While not “errors” within

Indian English, such constructions can sound unusual in Standard British or American varieties. Sharma (2009) terms these borrowings and shifts as “substrate influence,” reflecting transfer from the speaker’s L1 structure[25].

Costa (2017) frames these changes positively, arguing that Indian English is not a degenerate form but “a language in its own right”[26]. Indeed, Kachru’s pioneering work recognized Indian English’s normative status by the 1980s. The phrase “*Indian English*” itself gained academic currency with Kachru’s 1983 book **The Indianization of English**. Scholars now speak of a “New Englishes” model, situating India in the “Outer Circle” of English-speaking nations where English has official and nativized use. In this view, Indian English’s idioms are neither errors nor inferior deviations, but legitimate variations rooted in local culture and need[4][19].

Sociocultural Impact and Identity

The indigenization of English has deep sociocultural repercussions. English proficiency often functions as a marker of modern education and upward mobility. Because of colonial history, it was historically associated with the elite. Even today, data confirm that English speakers in India tend to be richer, urban, and from higher castes[16]. Surveys show pronounced stratification: only 2% of the poorest report any English ability versus 41% of the wealthiest[16], and upper-caste Indians are over three times more likely to speak English than Dalits or tribals[9]. Consequently, English can both unify and divide. On one hand, it allows pan-Indian communication across regional languages; on the other, it exacerbates inequalities by privileging those who access English-medium schools and higher education.

Culturally, English has become a key part of many Indians’ identity. It features prominently in literature, media, and government. In postcolonial Indian English literature (novels, poems, plays) writers often weave English with Indian words and syntax to reflect local flavour. Nobel laureates V.S. Naipaul and Rudyard Kipling used Indianized English to portray colonial India (e.g. Kipling’s “*the Englishman’s cottage*” tone). Contemporary authors like Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, and Aravind Adiga frequently include Hinglish phrases and rhythms in their fiction, signaling a new confidence in Indian English as a creative medium. Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* famously gives characters audible Hindi accents and Slang, haunting standard English with “*Indian*

consonances”[27]. These literary examples illustrate that Indian English is not just spoken dialect but a literary instrument conveying Indian culture to global audiences.

In popular media, English (and Hinglish) pervade advertising, cinema, and social media. Bollywood films routinely mix English dialogue with Hindi songs. Indian TV channels air many shows in English. Internet use further solidifies English’s role: many websites, social networks, and memes use hybrid language. The rise of Bollywood rap and tech startups has created a youth culture steeped in trendy English slang combined with Indian idioms. The “*English only*” movement has largely receded; people view India’s variety of English as homegrown. In fact, Kachru (1990) and others have argued that India has arrived at a point of “*ownership*” of English, where the language feels natural to its users rather than alien[26].

Recent sociolinguistic research confirms this shift in attitude. A 2024 study of language attitudes in Delhi, Lucknow, and Indore found that **English is no longer widely seen as a colonial relic**, but as an integral part of modern Indian life[10][28]. Respondents emphasized that proficiency in English is a form of cultural and economic capital, vital for education and jobs[11]. Hindi, meanwhile, has gained prestige as a marker of national identity, leading many to champion mother tongues alongside English. The same study notes that Hinglish is often regarded as an *antidote* to linguistic hegemony – a way for speakers to assert local identity within English use. In this sense, Indian English today embodies a **postcolonial hybridity**: it is at once global and distinctly Indian, shedding some colonial baggage while retaining a unifying international lexicon.

Contemporary Challenges and Trends

Looking ahead, English in India faces both opportunities and tensions. Globalization and technology ensure its continued relevance. English fluency opens doors in IT, science, and international business. India’s young population is increasingly bilingual, and many see English as essential to compete globally. Educational reforms (such as policies encouraging early English instruction) and digital English media further entrench its use. According to language surveys, India now ranks among the top English-proficiency countries in Asia[29].

However, the uneven spread of English raises policy questions. Some critics argue that overemphasis on English can undermine regional languages and widen social gaps. Conversely, others point out that indigenously adapted English forms a bridge language that does not replace

vernaculars but coexists with them. Indeed, Indian English can be seen as another “scheduled language” in practice – one that roughly 83 million people reported as a second language in 2011[7]. Its role in education also evolves: while English-medium private schools proliferate, efforts continue to strengthen local-language schooling and bilingual education.

Finally, the digital era is spurring new evolutions in Indian English. Social media platforms are a laboratory for language change, accelerating code-mixing and colloquial innovations. The 2024 study by Sengupta et al. shows that **Hinglish usage on Twitter grew by ~2% annually from 2014 to 2022**[6]. Young Indians coin new terms constantly (e.g. “*timepass*”, “*tiffin*”, “*auto*”). Emoji and transliteration also influence written English. These trends suggest Indian English will keep changing rapidly, but its core status as a living variety will endure.

Conclusion

Since Independence, English in India has undergone remarkable transformation. Retained as an official language, it has grown from a colonial import into a genuinely Indian lingua franca. This process involved **indigenization** – adopting local sounds, structures, and meanings – creating a unique Indian English. Government policy and education expanded its reach, while society reshaped its prestige. Today only a minority speak native English, yet millions use it as a second language in daily life[7][8]. As Khan and Jayaraj (2024) conclude, English in India is largely disentangled from colonialism and embraced as “a necessity of the modern age”[11]. The diversity of Indian English – from bureaucratic English to vibrant Hinglish – reflects India’s evolving identity. In sum, the Indianisation of English has made it into a living, hybrid language: firmly global, but deeply Indian in character.

Table 1: English-Speaking Population in India, 2011 Census (Citing Mint, 2019)[7]

Category	Number of Speakers (2011)	% of Total Population
English as mother tongue	256,000	0.02%
English as second language	83,000,000	6.8%
English as third language	46,000,000	3.8%

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Phonological Awareness Skills of a Hindi Speaking Children with Mild Intellectual Disability

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Abstract

Phonological awareness (PA) is a key precursor to literacy development, yet children with mild intellectual disability (ID) often demonstrate delays or atypical patterns in PA acquisition. This case study examines the phonological awareness skills of a 6-year-old Hindi-speaking child with mild ID using the Phonological Awareness Test for Hindi-Speaking Kindergarten Children (PATH-KG). The child was assessed across rhyme-, syllable-, and word-level tasks corresponding to developmental expectations for 3- to 5-year-olds. Results showed strong foundational PA abilities, including full scores in rhyme generation, syllable blending, syllable segmentation, and word counting. Moderate difficulty was noted in rhyme discrimination and rhyme oddity tasks. Marked weaknesses emerged in advanced word-level manipulation tasks such as word deletion, substitution, and sentence-level switching. The findings reveal an uneven PA profile, with intact basic skills but impaired higher-order processing. Targeted intervention focusing on complex phonological and syntactic skills is recommended to support literacy development.

Key Words: Phonological Awareness; Mild Intellectual Disability; Hindi-speaking Children; Rhyme Awareness; Syllable Segmentation; Word Manipulation;

Phonological awareness (PA) refers to an individual's ability of recognizing, discriminating, and manipulating the sounds in his/ her language, regardless of the size of the focused unit (Anthony

& Francis, 2005). It refers to children's knowledge of the sound structure of a language as well as the ability to manipulate this sound structure (Burt et al., 1999). Phonological awareness develops at four levels, viz: word level, syllable level, onset- rime level and phonemic level (Lane, Pullen, Eisele, & Jordan, 2002). Among these, word level is the easiest, while phonemic level is the most difficult (Adams, 1990). Development of phonological awareness will allow the child to tell you when two words end with the same sound (Eleanor, 2009). A child who has phonological awareness can tell you when two words rhyme and when two words start with the same sound.

Intellectual disability is a state of interrupted and incomplete mental development that is particularly characterized by the impairment of those abilities that occur during the development period and that affect the general level of intelligence, such as: cognitive, speech, motor and social abilities (WHO, 1992). The causes of intellectual disability are divided into: prenatal (viral infections, bacterial infections, spirochete infections, parasitic diseases, exposure to toxins, consumption of certain drugs, excessive smoking, ionizing radiation, anorexia in the mother, malnutrition in the mother, endocrine disorders, others), perinatal (fetal asphyxia, intracranial hemorrhage, hyaline lung membrane in the newborn, mechanical pressures on the fetus, prematurity, others) and postnatal (infections, exposure to toxins, malnutrition, endocrine disorders, head injuries, vascular disorders, immune reaction, others).

Intellectual disability is a condition that not only affects the individual's quality of life but also poses challenges for their family, educators, and society as a whole. Disruptions appear in behavior, social adjustment, communication, motor skills, emotions, feelings, perception, imagination, attention, thoughts, memory, time-space context, willpower, and temperament. Intellectual disability is categorized based on the level of impairment into: mild intellectual disability, moderate intellectual disability, severe intellectual disability, profound intellectual disability, and other unspecified forms of intellectual disability. The structure of internal dialogue, or the arrangement of verbal reasoning, is essential for an individual to comprehend sense, reflect, and communicate effectively.

Dessemontet and Chambrier (2015) in their study "The role of phonological awareness and letter-sound knowledge in reading development of children with intellectual disabilities" involved 129 children aged 6 to 8 with mild or moderate intellectual disabilities who took an academic achievement test. Results showed that at ages 6-8, phonological awareness and letter-sound knowledge forecasted improvements in reading both words and non-words after one school year and two school years, while accounting for IQ, age, expressive vocabulary, spoken language, and type of placement. Phonological awareness and letter-sound recognition at ages 6-8 also forecasted improvement in reading comprehension after one and two years of school. These results indicate that developing phonological awareness skills alongside direct phonics instruction is crucial for promoting reading advancements in children with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities of unknown origin.

The study “Exploring Phonological Awareness Skills in Children with Intellectual Disability” (Dessemontent, Chambrier, Martinet & Moser, 2017) compared the phonological awareness abilities of 7 to 8-year-old children with intellectual disabilities to those of 4 to 5-year-old typically developing children matched for early reading skills, vocabulary, and gender. Kids with intellectual disabilities showed a significant deficit in phonological awareness. Syllable blending, syllable segmentation, and initial phoneme detection seemed to be retained. In comparison, children with intellectual disabilities exhibited a significant deficiency in detecting rhymes and a minor deficiency in blending phonemes. Two academic years later, these deficits had disappeared. The results from this study indicate that children with intellectual disabilities exhibit an unusual pattern in phonological awareness that evolves over time.

Studies investigating the phonological awareness skills of children with Intellectual disability (ID) with an unspecified or mixed etiology are scarce. Channell, Loveall, and Conners (2013) compared the reading-related skills of 12- to 19-year-old youths with ID with mixed etiology to those of younger typically developing children who were matched for verbal mental age. Phonological awareness and phonological memory were found to be weaknesses in youths with ID. Van Tilborg, Segers, von Balkom, and Verhoeven (2014) also found that 6- to 8-year old children with ID with mixed etiology under performed younger typically developing children who were at the same phase of literacy acquisition.

The National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage (NCF) (2022) and the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) have strongly advised promoting the development of Phonological Awareness skills for Indian children aged 3–8 years. Different competencies related to curricular objectives for developing Phonological Awareness skills have been specified for children aged 3 to 6 years.

India is a multilingual and multicultural country with a population which had wide variations in the socioeconomic status as well as pre literacy practices. The development of phonological awareness varies across all these factors. Hence there is a **need** to study phonological awareness across languages and cultures; and study the typically developing populations across different languages and culture. This will help to understand the development of phonological awareness in the Indian children. Hence, this study **aim**sto assess the phonological awareness skills in three linguistic levels, rhyme, syllable and word level in a child with mild intellectual disability who attend Hindi medium school.

Method

The aim of this study was to investigate the phonological awareness skills of a Hindi speaking child with mild intellectual disability. The Phonological Awareness Test for Hindi Speaking Kindergarten Children (PATH-KG) (Rawat & Kiran, 2024) was used as assessment tool for assessment of phonological awareness skills of a child with mild intellectual disability.

The PATH-KG test measures phonological awareness skills among 3 to 6 years old native Hindi speaking children. The test consists of tasks at different linguistic levels. These linguistic levels are rhyme, syllable and word level. There are different tasks at each linguistic levels which include Rhyme Generation in the Unfamiliar Poem (RG-UP), Rhyme Discrimination (RD), Rhyme Oddity (RO), Rhyme Word Generation (RWG), Syllable Blending (SB), Syllable Segmentation (SS), Word Counting (WC) (No. of Words in a Sentence), Word Deletion (WD), Word Substitution (WSub), Word Switching in a Sentence (WSw).

Administration & Scoring:

Administration: The test is designed to assess native Hindi speaking kindergarten children in the three age groups namely 3 years 0 months to 3 years 11 months, 4 years 0 months to 4 years 11 months and 5 years 0 month to 5 years 11 months. There are different tasks and respective test items for each age group. Each age group has separate test sheet and score sheet. The score sheet has details of the test items, obtained score for each test item and obtained total scores.

Scoring: The test item has been given score of 1 for correct answer and 0 for incorrect answer. The scores are to be recorded on the score sheet.

Case Report:

The patient is a 6-year-old male child from arural background, currently studying in the 1st standard at a Hindi-medium school. He has been diagnosed with Mild Intellectual Disability. As reported by mother of the child, behavioral problems have been present since the age of 2 to 3 years. The child has shown multiple behavioral difficulties and struggles in interacting with peers of his age group. His mother reported that his temper issues began early and gradually worsened over time; he would become angry over trivial matters.

These behavioral problems extend to his interactions with other family members, including his father and sister. When asked to do tasks he dislikes, he often reacts by throwing objects at family members or using inappropriate language. At school, he frequently refuses to follow teachers' instructions and avoids participation in class activities. His noncompliance often escalates into aggressive outbursts, which have led to repeated complaints from teachers. He is also unable to perform academic work at a pace comparable to other children of his age.

A developmental interview with his mother revealed delays in achieving early developmental milestones. He began walking at around 18 months of age. Delays in speech and language development were also reported—his first words were spoken at approximately 17 to 18 months of age.

Procedure: child was made comfortable by having a general conversation with the child before beginning the test. A detailed case history which included the child's demographic details, family

history, education history, developmental history, history of psychological evaluation was noted. Any others information provided by parents was also noted.

Test environment: The test was administered in a quiet room in the school. The tool was administered and responses were recorded in a score sheet of the test.

Results and Discussion:

The aim of this study was to investigate the phonological awareness skills of a Hindi speaking child with mild intellectual disability. This study evaluated the performance of a child with mild intellectual disability across three different age groups tasks: 3 years 0 months to 3 years 11 months, 4 years 0 months to 4 years 11 months, and 5 years 0 months to 5 years 11 months. The child was assessed on a range of phonological and linguistic tasks, including rhyme generation, syllable segmentation, word manipulation, and sentence formulation. The performance in each task was scored, and the results from each age group provide insight into the child's developmental progress in relation to these language-related skills.

Table 1: Performance of child with mild intellectual disability under the 3 years 0 months to 3 years 11 months age group tasks.

SL. No.	Tasks	Maximum Score	Obtained Score
1.	Rhyme Generation in Unfamiliar Poem (RG-UP)	2	2
	Total Scores	2	2

Table 2: Performance of child with mild intellectual disability under the 4 years 0 months to 4 years 11 months age group tasks.

SL. No.	Tasks	Maximum Score	Obtained Score
1.	Rhyme Discrimination (RD)	5	3
2.	Rhyme Oddity (RO)	3	2
3.	Rhyme Generation in Unfamiliar Poem (RG-UP)	2	2
4.	Rhyme Word Generation (RWG)	5	4
5.	Syllable Blending (SB)	5	5
6.	Syllable Segmentation (SS)	5	4
	Total Scores	25	20

Table 3: Performance of child with mild intellectual disability under the 5 years 0 months to 5 years 11 months age group tasks.

SL. No.	Tasks	Maximum Score	Obtained Score
1.	Rhyme Discrimination (RD)	5	3
2.	Rhyme Oddity (RO)	3	2
3.	Rhyme Word Generation (RWG)	5	4
4.	Syllable Blending (SB)	5	5
5.	Syllable Segmentation (SS)	5	4
6.	Word Counting (WC) (No. of Words in a Sentence)	5	5
7.	Word Deletion (WD)	2	1
8.	Word Substitution (WSub)	2	1
9.	Word Switching in a Sentence (WSw)	2	1
	Total Scores	34	26

Results:

Table 1: Performance in the 3 years 0 months to 3 years 11 months age group tasks, In the 3 years to 3 years 11 months age group, the child was assessed using a single task, Rhyme Generation in Unfamiliar Poem (RG-UP). The child scored 2/2 on this task, indicating full mastery of rhyme generation in an unfamiliar context. This performance suggests that the child demonstrated the ability to recognize and generate rhymes, a foundational skill in early phonological awareness (Bishop, 2006).

Table 2: Performance in the 4 years 0 months to 4 years 11 months age group tasks, At 4 years to 4 years 11 months, the child completed a more comprehensive set of tasks, including Rhyme Discrimination (RD), Rhyme Oddity (RO), Rhyme Generation in Unfamiliar Poem (RG-UP), Rhyme Word Generation (RWG), Syllable Blending (SB), and Syllable Segmentation (SS). The total score in this group was 20/25, with the child performing well in Syllable Blending (SB) and Syllable Segmentation (SS), scoring 5/5 in both tasks. However, performance was weaker in tasks such as Rhyme Discrimination (RD) and Rhyme Oddity (RO), where the child scored 3/5 and 2/3, respectively. These lower scores suggest that, while the child could generate rhymes, they struggled with tasks requiring the discrimination between rhyming and non-rhyming words (Snow, 2010). The development of phonological awareness is critical at this stage, as it is linked to later reading skills (Lonigan, 2006).

Table 3: Performance in the 5 years 0 months to 5 years 11 months age group tasks, In the 5 years to 5 years 11 months age group, the child completed a set of tasks that involved more advanced language skills: Word Counting (WC), Word Deletion (WD), Word Substitution (WSub), and Word Switching in a Sentence (WSw). The total score was 26/34, with the child achieving perfect scores in Word Counting (WC) (5/5) and Syllable Blending (SB) (5/5). However, the child's performance on tasks like Word Deletion (WD), Word Substitution (WSub), and Word Switching

in a Sentence (WSw) was lower (1/2 on each). These tasks require a deeper understanding of sentence structure and word manipulation, areas where the child showed room for improvement.

Discussion

The results suggest that the child demonstrates a steady progression in phonological and linguistic abilities, although there are notable areas for further development. In the early years (3 years to 3 years 11 months), the child excelled in tasks related to rhyme generation, which is consistent with findings that rhyme recognition and generation are key milestones in early language development (Bishop, 2006). However, as the tasks became more complex, especially in the 4 years to 4 years 11 months and 5 years to 5 years 11 months age groups, the child encountered difficulties, particularly in tasks requiring flexibility with language (e.g., word substitution and switching).

The child's strong performance in syllable segmentation and blending (5/5 in both tasks across age groups) is noteworthy, as these are critical components of phonological awareness, which has been shown to be a predictor of later reading success (Lonigan, 2006). The child's ability to blend and segment syllables efficiently aligns with research that highlights the importance of these skills in early literacy development (Snow, 2010).

However, the lower scores in tasks like Word Deletion, Word Substitution, and Word Switching in a Sentence suggest challenges in higher-order language processing. These tasks require not only a basic understanding of word sounds but also an ability to manipulate words within sentences, a skill that develops later and may need targeted intervention (Gathercole & Baddeley, 1990). The lower performance on these tasks indicates that the child may benefit from additional support in these areas, particularly as they relate to understanding more complex sentence structures and syntax.

The child's total scores across age groups suggest that with appropriate interventions focusing on language manipulation and syntactic flexibility, the child could continue to make progress in these areas. Language intervention programs, especially those emphasizing word manipulation, sentence construction, and phonological awareness, could help the child build on their strengths and address the areas of difficulty identified in this assessment (Catts, 2009).

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the results of this study highlight both strengths and challenges in the language development of a child with mild intellectual disability. While foundational phonological skills such as rhyme generation and syllable manipulation are progressing well, more advanced tasks involving word manipulation and sentence structure may require additional focus to ensure the child's continued linguistic development.

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Innovating Pronunciation Pedagogy in the Gulf: Teacher Cognitions and Practice-Based Challenges in English Language Classrooms

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Abstract

This study investigates English language teachers' beliefs, practices, and challenges related to pronunciation instruction in two Gulf countries—Oman and Qatar—where Arabic-monolingual classrooms dominate English language teaching. Grounded in Flege's Revised Speech Learning Model (SLM-r), a mixed-methods design was employed, incorporating surveys (n = 60), classroom observations (n = 10), and interviews (n = 12). While teachers valued pronunciation for communicative competence, they reported limited training, inadequate curricular focus, and institutional barriers that constrain effective instruction. Segmental features were more frequently taught, whereas suprasegmentals such as stress and intonation were often overlooked. Findings highlight a gap between teacher cognition and classroom practice, shaped by systemic limitations in pedagogical preparation and policy. The study offers theoretical insights into pronunciation input delivery and pedagogical recommendations for professional development and curriculum reform in the Gulf region.

Keywords

pronunciation instruction, teacher cognition, Gulf EFL contexts, speech learning model, segmentals, suprasegmentals, Oman, Qatar, monolingual classrooms, second language pedagogy.

1. Introduction

Pronunciation instruction has gained renewed attention in the field of second language acquisition (SLA), particularly in contexts where English serves as both an academic requirement and a marker of social capital (Couper, 2021; Derwing & Munro, 2015). Despite a growing body of research emphasizing the role of intelligible pronunciation in communicative competence, empirical studies exploring how pronunciation is actually taught and perceived by teachers in the Gulf region remain scarce. This study focuses specifically on Oman and Qatar—two Gulf nations that share linguistic, educational, and sociocultural similarities but diverge in their institutional approaches to English language education. By investigating teacher beliefs, pedagogical practices, and classroom challenges in these two contexts, the study contributes to a more localized and comparative understanding of pronunciation pedagogy in Arabic-monolingual English classrooms.

Unlike many Western or urban cosmopolitan contexts where multilingualism is common, English language classrooms in Oman and Qatar are overwhelmingly monolingual, with Arabic as the shared first language (L1) among learners. This linguistic homogeneity presents both pedagogical opportunities and limitations. On the one hand, it allows educators to draw on shared phonological features when designing instructional interventions; on the other hand, it increases the risk of L1 transfer effects becoming fossilized—especially when pronunciation is not systematically addressed in the curriculum (Alamer & Alrabai, 2023; Dorsey, 2018). Compounding this challenge is the fact that many English language teachers in both countries have

limited formal training in phonetics or pronunciation pedagogy, and they often operate under curricular frameworks that emphasize grammar and vocabulary over phonological accuracy (Algethami, & Al Kamli, 2025; Elkouz & Munoz, 2023).

The urgency of enhancing pronunciation instruction is further heightened by national policy shifts in both Oman and Qatar toward English Medium Instruction (EMI) in higher education and certain public school streams. These policies, while intended to improve global competitiveness, have inadvertently magnified existing gaps in learners' oral proficiency—particularly in prosodic features such as stress, intonation, and rhythm, which are rarely taught explicitly (Gitsaki & Zoghbor, 2023). In both nations, pronunciation is frequently marginalized in teacher education programs and omitted from high-stakes assessments, thereby weakening its perceived instructional value and reducing the likelihood of its consistent classroom implementation.

To date, most pronunciation-related research in the Gulf has been confined to descriptive phonological analyses of learner errors or contrastive studies of Arabic and English segmental features (Al-Khresheh, 2024). While such studies provide valuable insights into learners' difficulties, they overlook the equally critical dimension of **teacher cognition**—the beliefs, knowledge, and assumptions that inform instructional choices (Borg, 2003, 2015). Understanding what teachers in Oman and Qatar believe about pronunciation instruction, how they implement it (if at all), and what constraints they face can offer practical and theoretical insights into both local and broader SLA pedagogical debates.

This study adopts Flege's Revised Speech Learning Model (SLM-r) as its theoretical lens. SLM-r offers a psycholinguistic framework to understand how L2 phonological categories are formed in adulthood, especially when L1 phonological boundaries interfere with accurate L2

sound perception and production (Flege & Bohn, 2021). This model is particularly suited to Arabic-speaking learners of English, whose L1 phonology presents well-documented challenges in acquiring certain English consonants, vowels, and suprasegmental patterns. Within this framework, teacher input is not merely a delivery mechanism but a critical component influencing whether learners can successfully form new phonetic categories.

The present study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are English language teachers' beliefs in Oman and Qatar regarding the role and importance of pronunciation instruction in L2 learning?
2. What instructional strategies are employed to teach pronunciation, and how do these vary between the two national contexts?
3. What institutional and pedagogical challenges do teachers report in integrating pronunciation into their classroom practice?

By narrowing its geographical focus to Oman and Qatar, this study offers a comparative and contextually rich exploration of pronunciation instruction in Arabic-monolingual classrooms. Its findings aim to inform regional teacher education programs, support policy reform in EMI-driven systems, and contribute to applied phonological theory by connecting teacher cognition with learner outcomes in under-researched educational contexts.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Pronunciation in Second Language Acquisition

Pronunciation remains a fundamental component of L2 oral proficiency, shaping learners' intelligibility, comprehensibility, and listener perceptions of competence (Derwing & Munro,

2015; Levis & Echelberger, 2022). Yet, despite its communicative centrality, pronunciation instruction is often neglected in L2 curricula, especially in Arabic-speaking contexts. This marginalization has been attributed to misconceptions that pronunciation either develops naturally through exposure or is too complex to teach systematically (Couper, 2021; Madzo, 2019).

Recent meta-analyses, however, confirm that explicit instruction—targeting both segmental and suprasegmental features—can produce significant gains in learners’ speech accuracy, fluency, and comprehensibility (Alghazo, Jarrah, & Al-Salem, 2023; Sakai & Moorman, 2018; Yağız, Kaya, & Ötügen, 2024). In particular, high-variability phonetic training and form-focused pronunciation instruction (FFI) have been shown to facilitate L2 phonological category formation and speech intelligibility (Thomson & Derwing, 2015). These developments underscore the critical need for pronunciation to be treated as a pedagogically tractable and essential skill within L2 instruction.

2.2 Teacher Cognition and Pronunciation Pedagogy

Teacher cognition—the beliefs, knowledge, and perceptions teachers hold—has a powerful influence on classroom practice, particularly in areas where formal training is limited (Borg, 2003, 2015). Pronunciation instruction exemplifies this relationship. In many educational contexts, teachers must make independent decisions about whether, how, and to what extent pronunciation is taught, often in the absence of institutional guidance or curricular emphasis.

Research in Gulf contexts suggests a persistent gap between teachers’ favorable attitudes toward pronunciation instruction and their limited classroom implementation. For example, Algethami and Al Kamli (2025) found that Saudi teachers supported pronunciation pedagogy in principle, yet cited lack of training, materials, and curriculum time as major constraints. Similar trends were identified in Jordan, where Elkouz and Munoz (2023) reported that even when teachers

recognized the importance of pronunciation, they felt unprepared to deliver effective instruction. This disconnect highlights the importance of studying teacher cognition as both a mediating and limiting factor in L2 pronunciation outcomes.

2.3 Pronunciation in Arabic-Monolingual Classrooms

Arabic-speaking learners of English face well-documented challenges in segmental production, including difficulties with phonemes absent in Arabic (/p/, /v/, /ŋ/), interdental fricatives (/θ/, /ð/), and final consonant clusters (Al-Khresheh, 2024; Al-Salman, 2021; Jahara & Abdelrady, 2021). Yet, most literature focuses narrowly on learner errors, often overlooking the pedagogical practices or teacher strategies that might address such difficulties.

Unlike many Western L2 classrooms, Gulf classrooms are typically monolingual and homogenous in learners' L1 background, making L1 transfer effects highly predictable (Alamer & Alrabai, 2023). However, this predictability may also lead to the normalization of fossilized pronunciation patterns—especially when teachers share learners' L1 and are unaware of critical L2 phonological contrasts. Consequently, teacher input and metalinguistic feedback become key variables in shaping learners' phonological development.

2.4 Policy and Practice in Oman and Qatar

Both Oman and Qatar have implemented broad educational reforms that emphasize English Medium Instruction (EMI), particularly in higher education and STEM disciplines (Gitsaki & Zoghbor, 2023). Despite these macro-level policy shifts, English language instruction remains heavily weighted toward grammar, reading, and writing, with pronunciation receiving minimal attention in curricula, assessment, and teacher training programs (Dorsey, 2018; Thakur, 2020).

In Qatar, differences between private and public education systems further exacerbate disparities in pronunciation instruction. While some private schools incorporate pronunciation

components within communicative curricula, public institutions often follow centralized syllabi that marginalize spoken fluency and phonological accuracy (Allouh, 2021; Naz & MacLeod, 2016). These systemic limitations create a disconnect between the linguistic demands of EMI and the instructional realities of English language classrooms.

2.5 Theoretical Framework: The Revised Speech Learning Model (SLM-r)

This study is theoretically grounded in the **Revised Speech Learning Model (SLM-r)**, developed by Flege and Bohn (2021), which offers a comprehensive psycholinguistic explanation of how L2 phonetic categories are acquired, retained, or inhibited by L1 phonological systems. Unlike earlier models (e.g., the original SLM-r or Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis), SLM-r posits that L2 category learning is possible across the lifespan, provided learners receive sufficient rich input, particularly in the auditory-perceptual domain.

SLM-r also emphasizes the bidirectional relationship between L1 and L2 phonetic systems—suggesting that L1 may adapt in response to sustained L2 exposure (Flege & Bohn, 2021). Recent empirical studies validate these predictions. Desmeules-Trudel and Zamuner (2021) found that children exposed to early L2 input developed more native-like perception of phonetic contrasts; similarly, meta-analyses by Sakai and Moorman (2018) show that perceptual training can yield moderate-to-strong effects in L2 production, thus confirming the perception-production link central to SLM-r. (see also Dong, Clayards, Brown, & Wonnacott, 2019; Saito, 2021; Uchiyara, Karas, & Thomson, 2025, on input variability and talker heterogeneity).

These findings are particularly relevant to Arabic-speaking learners, whose shared phonological systems present common perceptual difficulties. However, the classroom environment becomes a decisive factor in determining whether learners receive the quality input necessary to reshape L2 categories. Teachers' instructional choices, feedback types, and

phonological awareness all influence the input conditions described in SLM-r. Despite its relevance, very few studies have explored pronunciation instruction or teacher cognition through the lens of SLM-r in Arabic-monolingual contexts—marking a significant theoretical and empirical gap that this study aims to fill.

2.6 Summary and Research Gap

This review has identified three primary gaps in the literature:

1. **Limited application of SLM-r to teacher cognition and pronunciation instruction**, especially in monolingual Arabic-speaking contexts;
2. **Under-researched classroom practices in the Gulf**, despite their relevance to global EMI developments;
3. **Mismatch between teachers' favorable beliefs and limited implementation**, underscoring the need for theory-informed inquiry into pronunciation pedagogy.

By exploring how English language teachers in Oman and Qatar conceptualize, prioritize, and enact pronunciation instruction—within the cognitive framework provided by SLM-r—this study contributes to both regional applied linguistics research and broader discussions on teacher agency in L2 phonological development.

3. Methodology

This section adopts a **mixed-methods approach** to balance the depth of qualitative inquiry with the generalizability of quantitative data.

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a **convergent parallel mixed-methods design**, integrating quantitative and qualitative data to investigate English language teachers' beliefs, practices, and

challenges related to pronunciation instruction in Oman and Qatar. This design was selected to ensure a comprehensive understanding of both measurable trends and context-specific narratives, allowing for triangulation of findings and increased validity (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Fetter & Molina-Azorin, 2020; Lee, 2019). The study is framed within the **Revised Speech Learning Model (SLM-r)** (Flege & Bohn, 2021), which necessitates examining both the quality of input (teacher practices) and the contextual factors that shape that input (teacher beliefs, institutional conditions) and emphasizes the importance of phonetic input quality and variability in shaping L2 category formation (Uchihara, Karas, & Thomson, 2025).

3.2. Research Context

The study was conducted in state and private secondary schools, language institutes, and foundation programs in higher education institutions across urban and semi-urban areas of **Muscat (Oman)** and **Doha (Qatar)**. Both countries have adopted English Medium Instruction (EMI) at various academic levels and share similar sociolinguistic characteristics, such as Arabic-monolingual classrooms and national educational policies that prioritize English for academic and professional advancement (Dorsey, 2018; Gitsaki & Zoghbor, 2023; Naz & MacLeod, 2016).

3.3. Participants

A total of 60 English language teachers participated in the study—30 from Oman and 30 from Qatar. Participants were selected through **purposive sampling** to ensure representation across institutional types, teaching experience levels, and nationalities (native and non-native English-speaking teachers). All participants held at least a bachelor's degree in English language or a related field, and 85% reported prior exposure to pronunciation instruction either as learners or teachers. This sampling strategy aligns with prior teacher cognition studies seeking theoretically

relevant representation (Borg, 2003, 2015; Couper, 2021). **Table 1** presents participant demographics and data collection summary.

Table 1

Participant Demographics and Data Collection Summary

Variable	Oman (n = 30)	Qatar (n = 30)	Total (N = 60)
Gender	14M / 16F	13M / 17F	27M / 33F
Years of Experience	1–5: 10	1–5: 8	1–5: 18
	6–10: 12	6–10: 14	6–10: 26
	11+: 8	11+: 8	11+: 16
Institutional Affiliation	Schools: 16	Schools: 14	Schools: 30
	HE/Colleges: 14	HE/Colleges: 16	HE/Colleges: 30
Formal Pronunciation Training	Yes: 9	Yes: 11	Yes: 20
	No: 21	No: 19	No: 40

3.4. Instruments

The study used three primary instruments:

1. Teacher Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire was developed based on validated instruments used in previous teacher cognition research (Borg, 2003, 2015; Couper, 2021). It comprised **five sections**: (1) demographic data, (2) beliefs about pronunciation instruction, (3) reported teaching practices, (4) perceived challenges, and (5) institutional and curricular support. Items were a mix of Likert-scale (5-point), multiple choice, and open-ended formats.

2. Semi-Structured Interviews

Twenty participants (10 per country) were interviewed to explore instructional rationales, pedagogical beliefs, and professional development experiences related to pronunciation. Interviews were conducted in English, lasted 30–45 minutes, and followed a semi-structured guide informed by prior cognition studies (Alghazo, Jarrah, & Al-Salem, 2023; Tsunemoto, Trofimovich, & Kennedy, 2023). Interviews were conducted via Zoom or in person, depending on logistics.

3. Classroom Observations

A subset of 10 participants (5 from each country) allowed non-intrusive observation of 1–2 pronunciation-focused lessons. A standardized observation checklist was used to track frequency and types of pronunciation instruction (segmental vs. suprasegmental), use of phonetic symbols, corrective feedback, and learner engagement.

3.5. Data Collection Procedure

Data collection occurred over a three-month period from **January to March 2025**. After obtaining institutional permissions and informed consent from all participants, questionnaires were distributed electronically via Qualtrics. Interviews and observations were scheduled flexibly to accommodate participants' teaching commitments. All interviews were recorded with permission and transcribed verbatim for thematic analysis. Observations were conducted in person or via video-recorded lessons, depending on institutional policy.

3.6. Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using **SPSS (Version 29)**. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies) were calculated for all closed-ended items. Comparative analyses (e.g., independent samples t-tests, chi-square tests) were

conducted to detect statistically significant differences between Oman and Qatar in teacher beliefs and practices.

Qualitative data (interview transcripts and observation notes) were analyzed thematically using **NVivo 14**. An initial coding scheme was developed based on the research questions and the SLM-r framework. Two independent coders analyzed the data, and inter-rater reliability was calculated using **Cohen's Kappa ($\kappa = 0.82$)**, indicating strong agreement (McHugh, 2012). Themes were refined through iterative analysis and member checking with a subset of participants to enhance credibility.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from both participating institutions and adhered to the principles of informed consent, voluntary participation, and data confidentiality. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants to protect anonymity. Data were stored on password-protected drives accessible only to the researcher.

3.8. Summary

The methodology section outlines a rigorously designed and ethically grounded research process that integrates teacher-reported data with observational and interview-based evidence. By adopting a mixed-methods approach and embedding the study in a strong theoretical framework (SLM-r), the research provides a multifaceted view of pronunciation instruction in two under-examined Gulf contexts: Oman and Qatar.

4. Results

This section presents the results of the study in two parts: (1) quantitative findings from the teacher questionnaire and (2) qualitative themes derived from interviews and classroom

observations. Each subsection addresses the research questions related to teachers' beliefs, instructional practices, and pedagogical challenges in pronunciation instruction.

4.1. Teacher Beliefs About Pronunciation Instruction

Quantitative analysis revealed that a significant majority of teachers in both Oman and Qatar perceive pronunciation as essential to communicative competence. As shown in **Table 1**, 91.7% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that pronunciation should be integrated into all levels of English instruction. However, only 40% reported feeling “very confident” in teaching it effectively, indicating a notable belief-practice gap.

Table 1

Teachers' Beliefs About Pronunciation Instruction (N = 60)

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Pronunciation is essential for communication in English.	0	1	4	27	28
I feel confident teaching English pronunciation.	3	9	24	17	7
Pronunciation should be explicitly taught in all levels of English classes.	1	2	2	26	29
My training has adequately prepared me to teach pronunciation.	7	16	18	13	6

These beliefs were consistent across the two national contexts, with no statistically significant differences ($p > .05$). However, qualitative responses revealed that teachers in Qatar were more likely to describe pronunciation as a “priority skill” in EMI contexts, whereas Omani teachers described it as “important but often sidelined.” Interview data reinforced these findings. Teachers repeatedly emphasized the communicative value of pronunciation, especially in oral

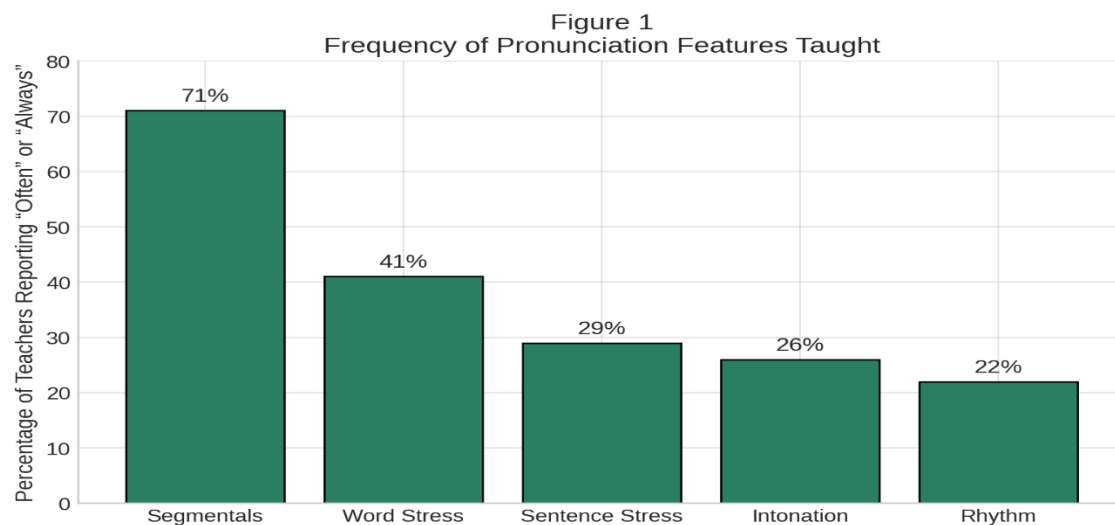
assessments and speaking interviews. For instance, a Qatari instructor stated, *“If students mispronounce academic terms, it affects their credibility—even when their grammar is correct.”*

4.2. Reported Instructional Practices

In terms of classroom practice, segmental features (e.g., individual consonants and vowels) received more attention than suprasegmental elements (e.g., stress, intonation, rhythm). As illustrated in **Figure 1**, over 70% of respondents reported frequently correcting segmental errors, whereas fewer than 30% reported consistently teaching suprasegmentals.

Figure 1

Frequency of Pronunciation Features Taught



Moreover, while 58% of teachers reported occasionally using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), only 17% used it consistently. Several teachers reported relying on “repetition drills” and “listening-and-repeating” strategies without articulatory explanations. Notably, the majority of participants (67%) said they lacked access to pronunciation-specific teaching materials.

Classroom observations supported these self-reports. As shown in **Table 2**, segmental correction was the most frequently observed activity, while guided intonation practice was absent in all ten classrooms.

Table 2

Observed Pronunciation Instruction Strategies in 10 Classrooms

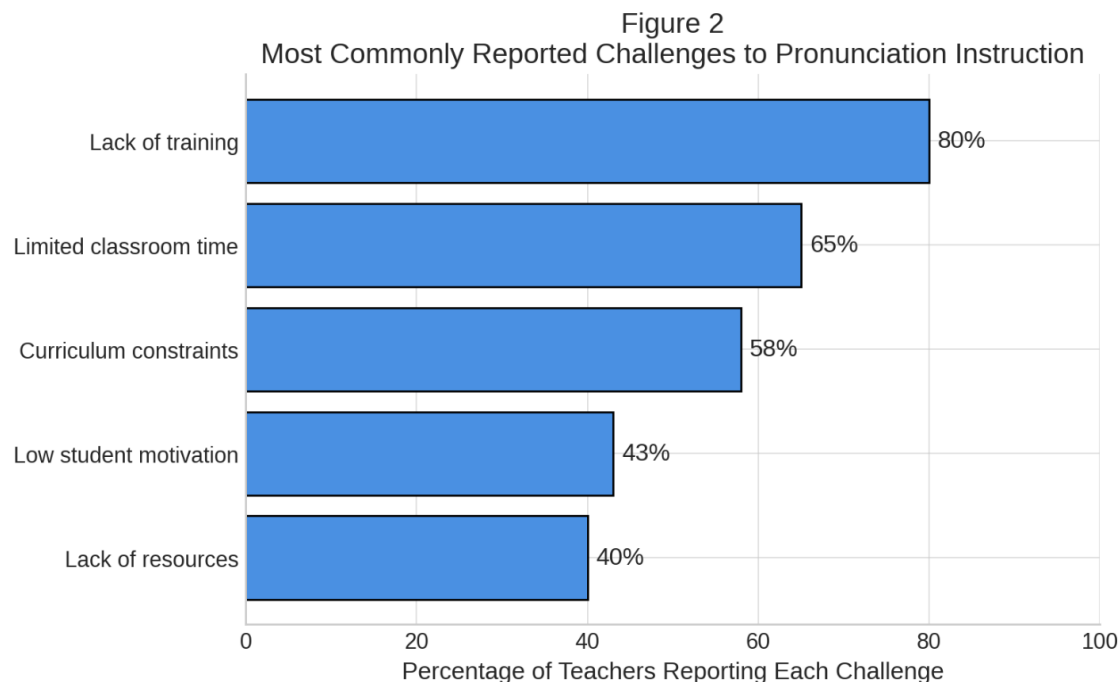
Strategy Observed	Frequency (out of 10 classrooms)
Segmental correction (e.g., /p/ vs /b/)	9
Teacher modeling with repetition	8
Minimal pair activities	5
Use of IPA on the board or slides	3
Stress or intonation activities	2
Guided intonation drills	0

4.3. Institutional and Pedagogical Challenges

Both quantitative and qualitative data highlighted systemic and pedagogical challenges that limit effective pronunciation instruction. According to the questionnaire, the most frequently reported barriers were lack of training (80%), insufficient classroom time (65%), and lack of curriculum integration (58%). These barriers are summarized in **Figure 2**, which depicts the top five reported challenges.

Figure 2

Most Commonly Reported Challenges to Pronunciation Instruction



Interview narratives provided nuanced insight into these obstacles. One teacher in Oman noted, “*Pronunciation is seen as ‘extra’—if there’s time, we cover it. If not, it’s skipped.*” Another teacher in Qatar commented, “*We are expected to prepare students for exams, but pronunciation isn’t on the test, so it gets ignored.*” Notably, many teachers expressed a desire for professional development in this area. As one Omani participant explained, “*We need workshops focused on practical techniques—not just theory.*”

4.4. Comparative Trends Between Oman and Qatar

While general patterns were similar across both contexts, a few differences emerged. Teachers in Qatar were more likely to report institutional support for pronunciation (e.g., inclusion in syllabi, access to materials), whereas Omani teachers described more rigid curriculum frameworks and heavier emphasis on grammar. These trends are visualized in **Table 3**, which compares reported perceptions of institutional support.

Table 3

Perceived Institutional Support for Pronunciation Instruction

Indicator of Support	Oman (n = 30)	Qatar (n = 30)
Curriculum includes pronunciation goals	9	18
School provides teaching materials	6	16
Pronunciation included in oral tests	7	12
CPD offered for pronunciation teaching	4	9

Although these differences were not statistically significant ($p = .06$), they suggest Qatar may offer a slightly more supportive environment for pronunciation pedagogy. Nevertheless, in both countries, the lack of systemic prioritization continues to hinder consistent instructional implementation.

4.5. Summary

The results indicate strong teacher belief in the importance of pronunciation instruction, yet limited practice due to structural and pedagogical constraints. Segmentals receive more instructional attention than suprasegmentals, and institutional support varies across contexts. These findings validate the need for targeted professional development, curricular reform, and further theoretical inquiry—particularly in Arabic-monolingual EMI environments such as Oman and Qatar.

5. Discussion

The present study investigated the beliefs, practices, and institutional challenges related to pronunciation instruction among English language teachers in Oman and Qatar. Grounded in **Flege’s Revised Speech Learning Model (SLM-r)**, which emphasizes the importance of input quality and L1–L2 phonetic category differentiation (Flege & Bohn, 2021), the study’s findings reveal critical insights into how teachers mediate L2 phonological development in Arabic-monolingual classrooms. This discussion integrates the quantitative and qualitative findings with broader SLA theory and pedagogical research to address the study’s three research questions.

5.1. Teacher Beliefs: High Value, Limited Confidence

The data revealed that teachers in both Oman and Qatar overwhelmingly recognize pronunciation as central to communicative competence. This belief aligns with recent literature asserting the importance of intelligible pronunciation in spoken interaction, particularly in EMI environments where oral fluency is closely tied to academic and professional success (Derwing & Munro, 2015; Yağız, Kaya, & Ötügen, 2024). However, the low levels of instructional confidence reported—particularly in Oman—mirror findings from other Gulf contexts where teachers are often inadequately prepared to teach pronunciation (Algethami, & Al Kamli, 2025; Elkouz & Munoz, 2023).

According to SLM-r, effective pronunciation learning depends heavily on the quality and consistency of L2 input, especially when learners' L1 phonological systems exert strong influence over their perception and production of L2 sounds (Flege & Bohn, 2021). Teachers who lack confidence may provide inconsistent or insufficient input, limiting learners’ exposure to target-like phonetic models and decreasing the likelihood of category reformation. The observed belief–practice gap therefore has direct theoretical implications, as it suggests that learners are receiving suboptimal input conditions for robust phonological development.

5.2. Instructional Practices: Emphasis on Segmentals, Neglect of Suprasegmentals

Consistent with prior research (Couper, 2021; Madzo, 2019), this study found that segmental features (e.g., /p/ vs. /b/) receive far more instructional attention than suprasegmentals (e.g., stress, intonation, rhythm). Teachers were more likely to correct mispronounced consonants than to guide students through sentence-level prosody—a pattern observed in both self-reports and classroom observations.

From the perspective of **SLM-r**, this emphasis is both understandable and problematic. While segmentals are often more salient and easier to correct explicitly, suprasegmental features contribute significantly to intelligibility and comprehensibility, especially in L2 speech involving global or academic audiences (Derwing, Munro, & Thomson, 2008; Derwing, Waugh, & Munro, 2021). Moreover, suprasegmental instruction supports learners in developing more native-like rhythm and stress patterns, which SLM-r suggests are difficult to acquire without explicit and repeated input that challenges L1 timing schemas.

The limited use of tools such as the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), as well as the reliance on repetition drills without articulatory explanation, further limits learners' opportunities to map new L2 categories. Teachers are providing some phonological input, but not at the frequency, depth, or metalinguistic richness required for optimal L2 category formation as defined by SLM-r.

5.3. Institutional Constraints and Pedagogical Challenges

A recurring theme across both contexts was the structural marginalization of pronunciation in curricula, assessments, and teacher training programs. Teachers reported that pronunciation instruction was deprioritized due to exam-focused syllabi, limited classroom time, and insufficient access to materials—findings echoed in studies across other Arab nations (Alamer & Alrabai,

2023; Dorsey, 2018). This mirrors global concerns that pronunciation, despite its communicative significance, remains the “neglected orphan” of language teaching (Derwing & Munro, 2015).

SLM-r posits that input quality and frequency are paramount for phonological restructuring. If institutional systems do not encourage, assess, or resource pronunciation instruction, learners are unlikely to receive the dense, varied, and corrective input required for robust L2 category development. These findings also speak to the ecological dimension of SLM-r—while the model focuses on learner cognition, the surrounding pedagogical environment directly mediates input and learning outcomes.

5.4. Comparative Trends Between Oman and Qatar

While Oman and Qatar share many structural similarities, notable contextual differences emerged. Qatari teachers reported greater access to pronunciation materials, more institutional encouragement, and better integration of pronunciation into oral assessments. This may be attributed to Qatar’s broader investment in international curricula and its larger number of EMI institutions, which necessitate more comprehensive oral communication training.

These disparities have implications for the generalizability of findings and also support the SLM-r model’s emphasis on variability across learner environments. Learners in more input-rich contexts (e.g., Qatar) may experience more phonological development not because of cognitive differences but because their teachers are better resourced and institutionally supported in delivering consistent and high-quality phonetic input.

5.5. Implications for Teacher Training and Policy

The findings of this study underscore the need for regionally grounded professional development that equips English language teachers with both theoretical knowledge and practical tools to teach pronunciation effectively. Training should include instruction in articulatory

phonetics, IPA use, classroom-based correction techniques, and suprasegmental modeling. Moreover, curriculum designers in Oman and Qatar should embed pronunciation goals explicitly into English syllabi and align them with assessment practices to raise the instructional status of pronunciation.

At the policy level, Ministries of Education and Higher Education in both nations should consider integrating pronunciation outcomes into national proficiency benchmarks, particularly in EMI-stream institutions. Aligning these reforms with theoretical models such as SLM-r ensures that pedagogical decisions are grounded in well-established principles of phonological learning and SLA.

5.6. Summary

Viewed through the lens of **SLM-r**, the study's findings highlight a mismatch between the phonological input learners need and the input they are currently receiving in Arabic-monolingual classrooms in Oman and Qatar. Teachers value pronunciation instruction but face structural and pedagogical limitations that constrain their ability to deliver input of sufficient quality and quantity. Addressing this gap requires systemic reform, professional development, and a re-evaluation of pronunciation's place within L2 curricula and pedagogy.

6. Conclusion

This study explored English language teachers' beliefs, practices, and instructional challenges surrounding pronunciation pedagogy in Arabic-monolingual classrooms in Oman and Qatar. Grounded in **Flege's Revised Speech Learning Model (SLM-r)**, the research offers a theoretically and empirically informed account of how pronunciation instruction is conceptualized and implemented in two underrepresented Gulf contexts.

The findings revealed a strong belief among teachers in the communicative importance of pronunciation, yet a widespread lack of confidence and formal preparation in delivering effective pronunciation instruction. While segmental features were commonly addressed in classrooms, suprasegmental elements—critical for intelligibility and prosodic naturalness—were consistently underemphasized. Institutional and curricular constraints further limited the scope and frequency of pronunciation-focused pedagogy. Differences between the two national contexts also emerged, with teachers in Qatar reporting marginally greater institutional support compared to their counterparts in Oman.

The findings also carry important implications for teacher training programs and EMI policy in the Gulf. By integrating pronunciation-focused modules in both pre-service and in-service training, and by aligning institutional language policies with communicative goals, educators in the region can be better prepared to address learners' pronunciation challenges in a more systematic and pedagogically sound manner.

Interpreted through the lens of SLM-r, these findings underscore the mismatch between learners' phonological input needs and the instructional input currently available in many Gulf classrooms. The absence of consistent, high-quality input—particularly in suprasegmentals—reduces the likelihood of L2 phonological category formation and long-term intelligibility gains. As such, pronunciation instruction remains an unmet need in L2 English education in the region.

This study makes several key contributions. Theoretically, it extends the application of SLM-r to a new sociolinguistic context, demonstrating its relevance not only to learner cognition but also to teacher agency and institutional ecology. Pedagogically, the findings advocate for the integration of pronunciation into national curricula, teacher education, and classroom assessment

practices. They also highlight the need for practical, classroom-oriented training that bridges theoretical phonology and day-to-day instruction.

Nonetheless, the study is not without limitations. The sample size, while adequate for a mixed-methods investigation, limits broad generalization across the wider Gulf region. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data may have introduced bias, though this was mitigated by triangulation with interviews and observations.

Future research should expand this line of inquiry by including more diverse educational settings across the Gulf, longitudinally tracking the effects of pronunciation-focused teacher training, and incorporating learner outcome data to directly measure phonological gains. Studies could also examine the role of digital tools and AI-assisted pronunciation software in enhancing classroom input quality, especially in resource-constrained environments.

In conclusion, addressing the persistent marginalization of pronunciation instruction in Oman and Qatar requires systemic, pedagogical, and policy-level reform. Teachers are willing, but underprepared; learners are motivated, but underserved. With informed investment and theoretically grounded change, pronunciation pedagogy in the Gulf can evolve from peripheral concern to core communicative competency.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Teacher Survey on Pronunciation Instruction

Section 1: Background Information

1. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female
2. Years of English Teaching Experience: ☐ 1–5 ☐ 6–10 ☐ 11+
3. Country of Teaching: ☐ Oman ☐ Qatar
4. Institutional Type: ☐ School ☐ Higher Education
5. Have you received formal training in pronunciation instruction? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Section 2: Beliefs about Pronunciation Instruction

(Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements using a 5-point Likert scale:

1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
Pronunciation is essential for communication in English.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel confident teaching English pronunciation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Pronunciation should be explicitly taught at all proficiency levels.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My training has adequately prepared me to teach pronunciation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section 3: Instructional Practices

(How often do you include the following in your teaching? 1 = Never, 5 = Always)

Feature / Activity	1	2	3	4	5
Teaching segmental sounds (e.g., /p/ vs /b/)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teaching word stress	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teaching intonation or sentence rhythm	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Using IPA in teaching	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Correcting pronunciation in real-time speech	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section 4: Challenges and Support

(Please check all that apply.)

- ☐ Lack of training in pronunciation
- ☐ Lack of classroom time
- ☐ Curriculum does not emphasize pronunciation
- ☐ Lack of teaching resources
- ☐ Low student motivation
- ☐ Pronunciation not assessed in tests
- ☐ Other: _____

Appendix B

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. How important do you think pronunciation is in your students' overall English proficiency?
2. Can you describe how you typically teach pronunciation in your classes?
3. What challenges do you face when teaching pronunciation?
4. Do you feel that your training has prepared you to teach pronunciation effectively?
5. Are there any institutional supports or resources available to help you teach pronunciation?
6. How do you decide which pronunciation features to focus on (e.g., segmentals vs suprasegmentals)?
7. What improvements would you suggest for teaching pronunciation more effectively in your context?

The NETIZENS' concern in the time of deteriorating AQI: A case study of firecracker ban in India

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Abstract

Indian cities are experiencing severe deterioration in air quality, which worsens during the pollution season due to stubble burning and firecracker use. Although the government implements measures to control pollution, the effectiveness of such policies depends on public compliance, which in turn is shaped by people's primary concerns. Understanding these concerns is therefore essential. Therefore, to understand the concerns of netizens, the study examines their reactions to the firecracker ban on social media. The netizens' concerns are reflected in the elements of arguments. Therefore, the study addresses the question: What standpoints and material starting points are expressed in these posts? Using the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation, the study identifies and interprets these argumentative elements. Data were collected from X (formerly Twitter) over a 45-day period from October 1 to November 15, 2024, consisting exclusively of Hindi-language posts. The findings show that anti-ban netizens focus largely on issues of economy, employment, culture, tradition, and the intentions of those advocating the ban, rather than on deteriorating air quality. In contrast, pro-ban netizens express concerns aligned with environmental conditions and emphasise separating religious traditions from the practice of burning firecrackers. The study contributes to research on online argumentation and digital environmental humanities, offering insights that may help policymakers enhance public compliance.

Keywords: Firecracker ban, pragma-dialectical, netizen, social-media, argumentation

1. Introduction

The deteriorating air quality in India's urban landscape has created an air quality crisis that has emerged as one of the most pressing environmental challenges of the 21st century. The Air Quality Index (AQI) of Indian metropolitan cities, such as Delhi, Chennai, Kolkata, and Mumbai, is consistently deteriorating and ranks among the world's most hazardous levels. The AQI values in these cities exceed 300-500 during peak pollution seasons (Central Pollution Control Board, 2023). The listing of 22 Indian cities among the 30 world's most polluted cities highlights the severity of the nation's air pollution predicament (World Health Organisation, 2023). The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has reported that 40% of India's population lives in areas where air quality fails to meet national standards. The deteriorating air quality has escalated the environmental concern to a public health emergency (Balakrishnan et al., 2019). Over 1.67 million premature deaths annually in India are linked to air pollution, which highlights the devastating situation that makes air pollution a leading environmental factor for mortality in the country (Ghude et al., 2016). Moreover, air pollution also has significant economic implications, resulting in an annual economic loss of \$95 billion, equivalent to approximately 3% of India's GDP (Maji et al., 2018).

The deterioration of air quality in Indian cities has been caused by both anthropogenic and natural factors. Industrial emissions are among the primary contributors to air pollution. The rapid industrialisation and inadequate pollution control measures result in the emission of particulate matter (PM 2.5 and PM 10), including sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, and other volatile organic compounds, into the atmosphere (Guttikunda & Calori, 2013). The exponential growth with over 295 million registered vehicles as of 2023, contributes approximately 27% of total air pollution due to vehicular emissions in the urban areas (Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, 2023). Agricultural activity, particularly post-harvesting stubble burning in large quantities in Punjab and Haryana, exacerbates air quality issues. It alone contributes to 15-20% of Delhi PM2.5 pollution during the October-November months (Cusworth et al., 2018). Moreover, construction activities and road dust account for nearly 38% of PM10 pollution in major cities (Apte et al., 2015). The use of solid fuels for cooking in urban areas also contributes to the deterioration of air pollution levels.

Seasonal factors, including meteorological conditions and festival seasons, also contribute to air pollution. The meteorological conditions, such as temperature inversions, low wind speeds, and humidity variations, trap air pollutants in the lower atmosphere, creating a 'pollution bowl' during the winter months (Sharma et al., 2016). During the festival seasons, marked by the widespread use of firecrackers during Diwali and other celebrations, an acute pollution spike causes a 30-40% increase in PM2.5 levels within 24-48 hours (Singh et al., 2019).

In the deteriorating air quality of Indian cities, it is essential to understand the public's concern over it. Public concern and awareness regarding air pollution are fundamental drivers of

environmental policy and behavioural change in contemporary India (Bhat, 2021). The social dimensions of public concern regarding the environment play crucial roles in shaping collective action and policy advocacy. Studies indicate that perceived health risks associated with air pollution significantly influence individual and community-level responses, including support for stringent environmental regulations and lifestyle modifications (Doherty, 2017). Public concern serves as a critical feedback mechanism for policymakers, influencing them to develop policies and allocate resources for pollution control measures. The growing environmental consciousness has led to increased public interest litigation challenging government inaction and demanding accountability from regulatory authorities (Narain & Sall, 2016). This civic engagement has led to judicial interventions, including the Supreme Court's directives on vehicular emissions, industrial pollution controls, and seasonal firecracker regulations. Therefore, it is essential to understand the public's concerns about air quality deterioration.

While substantial research exists on the physical and health impacts of air pollution, a significant gap remains in understanding public concern regarding specific environmental interventions, such as bans on firecrackers. The primary objective of the study is to understand public concern regarding air quality deterioration in the context of firecracker bans in India by examining online discourse that reflects the public's attitudes and perceptions towards environmental issues. The firecracker ban issue serves as a particularly relevant case study because it represents the convergence of environmental policy, cultural traditions, economic interests, and public health concerns. To achieve the objective, the study aims to address the following two questions.

- 1.1. What is the standpoint of argumentation?
- 1.2. What is the material starting point of argumentation?

The research contributes to multiple areas of study, including digital environmental humanities and online argumentation, and will also provide policymakers and environmental advocates with practical insights to address India's air quality crisis through evidence-based interventions and effective public engagement strategies.

2. Literature Review: The study on people's concerns over air pollution in India

This literature review examines the existing body of research on policy interventions, their effectiveness and limitations, and public concern in the Indian context, with the aim of understanding netizens' concern over deteriorating air quality through online argumentation analysis.

2.1 Policy interventions

The policy response to air pollution due to firecrackers on Diwali has evolved significantly over the past decade, with judicial interventions playing a particularly prominent role. The Supreme Court of India issued directives restricting the manufacture, sale, and use of certain categories of

firecrackers in the National Capital Region, representing a landmark judicial intervention in environmental regulation (Yadav et al., 2022).

Yadav et al. (2022) assessed the effect of judicial prohibition on firecracker celebration at the Diwali festival on air quality in Delhi. Their findings indicated measurable declines in PM metrics associated with regulation periods, suggesting that the bans, when enforced, can produce tangible benefits for air quality. Similarly, Yadav and Saxena (2020) have examined the impact of the Supreme Court's ban on crackers on air pollution in Delhi. They have found significant reductions in pollution indicators during the ban period.

The COVID-19 pandemic provided an unintended natural experiment for evaluating the effectiveness of firecracker bans. During 2020, several Indian states imposed strict prohibitions on the use of firecrackers as part of broader pandemic-related restrictions. Nagda et al. (2022) conducted a multi-city comparison of air quality across eight metropolitan cities during Diwali 2020 versus 2019. The study found a reduction in concentrations of PM_{2.5}, PM₁₀, NO_x, and SO₂ on Diwali day in 2020, consistent with the reduced firecracker activity during the imposed ban. Singh et al. (2020) examined the impact of the COVID-19-implemented ban on Diwali fireworks in Rajasthan specifically, and they found pollution reductions during the 2020 festival compared to previous years.

2.2 Effectiveness and limitations of policy interventions

While the evidence suggests that bans and restrictions can reduce pollutant concentrations during festival periods, the study also highlights important limitations and contextual factors that affect the effectiveness of these policies. Many studies have noted that observed benefits depend heavily on the strength of enforcement and public compliance, which vary substantially across jurisdictions and years (Yadav et al., 2022; Nagda et al., 2022). However, enforcement details are rarely quantified in the monitoring studies, making it difficult to establish clear relationships between enforcement intensity and pollution outcomes. Chen et al. (2019) have found that while targeted short-term restrictions, such as bans on firecrackers, reduce pollution, comprehensive strategies addressing multiple sectors yield larger health gains at scale. The integrated policy perspective is supported by source apportionment studies, which show that residential biomass burning, vehicular emissions, industrial sources, and regional agricultural burning collectively account for the majority of annual pollution burdens in most Indian cities (Mukherjee et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2019).

2.3 Public concern and attitudes toward environmental policies

In contrast to the extensive technical literature on the impacts of air quality and policy effectiveness, research on public attitudes toward firecracker bans remains remarkably limited. Saha et al. (2024) conducted a primary survey of 741 young residents in Delhi to examine youth responses to the firecracker ban, investigating the socio-economic and normative drivers of firecracker use and the

role of policy instruments. The study found that social norms and faith-based considerations played important roles in shaping attitudes toward firecracker use, with respondents who reported stronger social pressure against firecracker use and those exposed to institutional messaging more likely to report reduced or discontinued firecracker bursting. While this study provides valuable insights into the factors influencing youth compliance with firecracker bans, its limitations are substantial, particularly in addressing the primary public concern regarding the intersection of culture, tradition, celebration, health, and pollution, such as the use of firecrackers on Diwali.

2.4 Online discourse analysis: A critical gap

Numerous studies have examined the air quality and health impacts of Diwali firecrackers, as well as the growing effectiveness of policy interventions, including judicial bans and COVID-19-related restrictions. The studies have consistently demonstrated that the use of firecrackers produces measurable pollution spikes with associated health risks, and that bans can reduce these impacts when effectively enforced. However, the literature review has revealed striking gaps in understanding netizen attitudes, perceptions, and concerns regarding firecracker bans, despite noting the growing importance of digital and social media in shaping environmental debates in India (Aarya, 2024; Prabhakar, 2020). None of the studies have presented analyses of social media argumentation to understand netizens' concerns about the ban on firecrackers. The single major survey (Saha et al., 2024) examining youth in Delhi employed a cross-sectional design, which leaves significant gaps in understanding the attitudes of netizens.

Given the central role of digital and social media in contemporary public discourse in India, understanding public concern about firecracker bans requires analysing the online venues where much of this discourse now occurs. The proposed research aims to understand netizens' concerns and attitudes towards one of the environmental issues by analysing online discourse from an argumentative perspective. The study addresses a critical gap and attempts to generate insights with both theoretical and practical significance for environmental policy implementation in India and beyond.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design: This study employs a qualitative argumentative analysis approach to examine public discourse surrounding the ban on firecrackers in Delhi NCR. The methodology integrates systematic data collection from social media with pragma-dialectical argument reconstruction to extract the argumentative elements and analyse them to know their concern on pollution control policy.

3.2 Data Collection

3.2.1 Data Source

Data were collected from the social media platform X (formerly Twitter) over a 45-day period from October 1 to November 15, 2024, which is only written in Hindi. This timeframe was strategically selected to capture public discourse surrounding two significant policy interventions related to firecracker regulation in the Delhi NCR region. (1) First Policy Intervention (September 10, 2024): The Delhi government imposed a comprehensive ban on all types of firecrackers, effective until January 1, 2025, as a measure to combat winter air pollution. (2) Second Policy Intervention (October 14, 2024): Fifteen days prior to Diwali (October 31, 2024), the Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) issued a formal order reinforcing the ban, explicitly covering the production, storage, sale (including online platforms), and bursting of firecrackers within the National Capital Territory of Delhi.

3.2.2 Sampling Criteria and Data Selection:

The study focused exclusively on posts authored by individual citizens to capture authentic public discourse. To ensure data quality and relevance, the following exclusion criteria were applied: Posts from news channels and media organisations, Posts from authoritative figures and public officials, Posts from government handles and institutional accounts, Posts from commercial entities and corporate accounts. After applying these filters, **70 posts** discussing the firecracker ban issue were identified and selected for analysis during the specified period.

3.3 Data Filtration

A content-based filtration process was implemented to filter out non-argumentative posts. The non-argumentative and off-topic posts were systematically excluded. The study has also classified posts as non-argumentative if an individual presents the opinion of someone else, as it is typically expressed in the form of “he said...” Only posts containing identifiable argumentative structures were retained for analysis.

3.4 Analytical Framework

3.4.1 Pragma-Dialectical Approach

The study employs the pragma-dialectical framework (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2010) for the reconstruction and analysis of arguments. This framework conceptualises argumentation as a goal-directed critical discussion aimed at resolving differences of opinion on merit through four argumentative stages: Confrontation stage: Identification of the difference of opinion, Opening stage: Establishment of procedural and material starting points, Argumentation stage: Presentation and examination of arguments, Concluding stage: Determination of the outcome of the discussion

3.4.2 Argument Reconstruction Process

Argument reconstruction was conducted through four systematic analytic operations:

Deletion: Removal of irrelevant content, redundancies, and non-argumentative elements that do not contribute to the argumentative structure.

Addition: Identification and explicit formulation of implicit premises, unexpressed conclusions, and contextual assumptions necessary for complete argument comprehension.

Substitution: Replacement of unclear, ambiguous, or colloquial language with precise analytical terminology to enhance interpretability.

Permutation: Reorganisation of argumentative elements to align with the four stages of a critical discussion:

3.4.3 Analytical Categories

Following argument reconstruction, the study has analysed the post according to two primary dimensions:

1. Standpoint identification: Identification of the arguer's position (pro-ban, anti-ban, or conditional) and concern regarding the firecracker ban policy.
2. Material starting points: Examination of the shared premises, common ground, and assumptions upon which arguments are constructed.

4. The analysis of netizens' reaction to the firecracker ban: the results and findings

4.1 Standpoint: In the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation, the standpoint is the position or claim that a speaker puts forward and defends through argumentation in a discussion. It is the propositional content expressing what the arguer wants the audience to accept as true, reasonable, or acceptable. A participant in argumentation shows their attitude towards the topic of discussion through externalisation of their opinion or position (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 2010). Therefore, in this section, the study aims to understand the primary concerns of people through their standpoint on the ban on firecrackers on Diwali. During Diwali, netizens have reacted to the issue of a ban on firecrackers. The study first classifies the posts into two types: Anti-ban and pro-ban, based on the nature of the comments. Then analyse the standpoint, aiming to find their concern.

Netizens have posted their anti-ban views both directly and indirectly. They criticise the ban by directly labelling it as a wrong decision and indirectly by describing other facts related to Diwali and firecrackers. The study has decoded the posts into six broader categories. As given below.

1. Pollution denial, 2. Justification, 3. Personal attack, 4. Ban rejection, 5. Employment, and 6. Communal

4.1.1 Pollution denial:

The study reveals that a significant portion of netizens tend to reject the notion that the burning of firecrackers during Diwali substantially contributes to air quality deterioration. Their discourse primarily centres on emphasising alternative sources of air pollution, arguing that even if firecrackers have an impact, it remains negligible in comparison to other major contributors. The denial of the role of firecrackers in air pollution is constructed around three principal arguments.

First, netizens underscore that the predominant sources of air pollution are industrial emissions, vehicular exhaust, domestic fuel use, and everyday human activities rather than festive practices such as bursting firecrackers. For instance, one respondent asserts, “हमारे प्रतिदिन के व्यवहार से हवा खराब होती है, न कि दिवाली में पटाखे फोड़ने से।” (“It is our everyday behavior that pollutes the air, not the bursting of firecrackers during Diwali.”).

Second, the denial is reinforced through references to ambiguous or inconsistent reports. Participants frequently cite contradictory statements made by political leaders and public authorities to demonstrate the lack of a clear consensus regarding the extent to which firecrackers contribute to air pollution.

Third, a comparative standpoint is presented, wherein individuals juxtapose the use of firecrackers in India with that in various developed nations, implying that India’s practices are negligible in comparison to developed nations. Therefore, the allegation of pollution is exaggerated. For instance “भारत में पटाखों के कारण प्रदूषण या पर्यावरण को गंभीर नुकसान पहुँचाने का आरोप ग़लत और अतिशयोक्तिपूर्ण है। (The allegation that firecrackers cause severe pollution or environmental damage in India is incorrect and exaggerated.)”

Collectively, these arguments illustrate an attempt to minimise or deflect responsibility for the degradation of air quality away from cultural practices associated with Diwali, situating the blame instead within broader structural and everyday sources of pollution.

4.1.2 Justification: Traditional, Celebration, Positive evaluation

Netizens have sought to rationalise the practice of burning firecrackers during Diwali by invoking cultural, celebratory, and positive evaluative justifications. Within the traditional justification, users emphasise that the act of bursting firecrackers is not a modern phenomenon but rather an integral part of an enduring cultural heritage. They support this stance by presenting evidence that situates the custom within historical continuity. For example, one user asserts, “दीवाली में पटाखे चलाना कोई आधुनिक परंपरा नहीं, बल्कि प्राचीन समय से प्रचलित है।” (“The bursting of firecrackers during Diwali is not a modern practice but one that has been prevalent since ancient times.”).

A second line of justification is rooted in the celebratory dimension of Diwali. Netizens claim that firecrackers symbolise joy, festivity, and communal participation, thereby rendering their use both appropriate and enjoyable during moments of celebration. This standpoint is reflected in statements such as “जब खुशी का अवसर हो, तब पटाखे चलाना उचित और आनंददायक होता है।” (“It is appropriate and enjoyable to burst firecrackers on occasions of happiness.”).

The third form of justification pertains to the positive evaluation of firecracker use, wherein some individuals go so far as to claim potential health benefits associated with the practice. This

perspective is encapsulated in post like “दीवाली पर पटाखे चलाना अच्छा और लाभदायक है।” (“Bursting firecrackers during Diwali is good and beneficial.”).

Collectively, these justifications reveal an attempt by netizens to construct a discourse that frames the burning of firecrackers not as an environmentally harmful act but as a culturally rooted and socially meaningful tradition imbued with symbolic, emotional, and even perceived health-related value.

4.1.3 Personal attack: Moral inconsistency, Hypocrisy accusation, Political conspiracy

The study reveals that netizens have adopted a confrontational stance toward critics of firecracker use during Diwali, employing *ad hominem* arguments rather than engaging directly with the substance of the criticism. Instead of refuting the claims made by critics, netizens have sought to undermine their credibility through personal attacks grounded in morality, hypocrisy, and political conspiracy. Their argumentative strategy in standpoint is constructed upon the notion that the critic’s (antagonist’s) own actions contradict the moral or ethical standards they attempt to uphold.

One prominent form of this moral critique involves highlighting the perceived inconsistency between critics’ personal practices and their condemnation of firecracker use. For instance, a standpoint states: “जो व्यक्ति जानवरों को मारकर मांस खाता है, वह पटाखों से जानवरों को होने वाले दर्द का हवाला देकर पटाखा-विरोध नहीं कर सकता; यह नैतिक रूप से असंगत है।” (“A person who kills animals for meat cannot oppose firecrackers on the grounds of animal suffering; this is morally inconsistent.”). This argument portrays critics as lacking moral authority, framing their opposition to firecrackers as ethically flawed.

A second category of *ad hominem* reasoning targets what netizens describe as the “elite narrative.” In this discourse, individuals from the entertainment industry and other influential circles who advocate against the use of firecrackers are accused of hypocrisy and pretension. As exemplified by the statement, “दीपावली पर पटाखे चलाना सही है और बॉलीवुड का पटाखा-विरोध ढोंगपूर्ण और असंगत है।” (“Bursting firecrackers on Diwali is justified, and Bollywood’s opposition to it is hypocritical and inconsistent.”), Netizens depict such critiques as elitist, detached from cultural sentiment, and fundamentally disingenuous.

The third dimension of the *ad hominem* attack involves political conspiracy. Here, critics are portrayed as politically motivated actors seeking to divide the Hindu community. This strategy reframes the debate over environmental and ethical concerns into one of religious and political identity. For instance, one user claims, “वे हिंदुओं को विभाजित करने का षड्यंत्र कर रहे हैं।” (“He is conspiring to divide Hindus.”). Such assertions reveal an attempt to shift the focus from environmental discourse to issues of communal integrity and political loyalty.

Collectively, these *ad hominem* standpoints illustrate how netizens' defence of firecracker use transcends environmental reasoning, transforming into a broader socio-political and moral discourse aimed at discrediting opponents rather than engaging with their arguments on empirical or ethical grounds.

4.1.4 Employment:

One of the most frequently articulated standpoints against the ban on firecrackers pertains to the issue of employment. The study reveals that protagonist netizens foreground the economic dimension of firecracker production, emphasising its role as a significant source of livelihood for a wide range of individuals. Their argument highlights that the firecracker industry provides employment opportunities across various social and economic strata, regardless of caste, class, or religion.

Through this lens, netizens construct a narrative in which the use of firecrackers during Diwali is not merely a matter of cultural expression but also one of socio-economic importance. The act of supporting firecracker production and sale is thereby framed as an act of supporting workers' welfare and community livelihoods. For instance, one standpoint asserts: "पटाखे बनाने के काम से लगभग हर वर्ग के लोगों को रोजगार प्राप्त है।" ("The work of manufacturing firecrackers provides employment to people of almost every social group.").

In this argument, the primary concern expressed by proponents is the preservation of employment for those dependent on the firecracker industry. Consequently, the justification for permitting the use of firecrackers extends beyond cultural tradition to encompass broader socio-economic implications, positioning the practice as integral to sustaining livelihood and economic stability among diverse communities.

4.1.5 Communal and ban rejection:

The study indicates that protagonist netizens have also adopted a communal standpoint in their opposition to the ban on firecrackers during Diwali. Within this discourse, netizens assert that the restriction on firecrackers is being influenced or obstructed by members of the Muslim community. Such arguments frame the ban not as an environmental or regulatory issue but as an act perceived to threaten Hindu religious freedom. This sentiment is exemplified in the statement: "भारत में हिन्दू त्योहार मनाने की स्वतंत्रता पर मुस्लिम समुदाय द्वारा खतरा पैदा किया जा रहा है।" ("In India, the Muslim community is creating a threat to the freedom of celebrating Hindu festivals."). Through this standpoint, the protagonists directly attribute the perceived curtailment of Hindu cultural expression to the actions of another religious group, thereby transforming the debate into one centred on religious identity and communal relations.

Additionally, another prevalent standpoint among netizens centres on public defiance and mass rejection of the ban. In this discourse, users emphasise that despite official restrictions, people across various regions continued to burst firecrackers, interpreting this widespread participation as a collective repudiation of the ban's legitimacy. For instance, one example reads: “पटाखों पर लगाया गया बैन लोगों ने नकार दिया।” (“The people have rejected the ban on firecrackers.”). This argument posits that the act of bursting firecrackers constitutes a form of popular resistance, implying that if the ban had been justified or acceptable, the public would have complied with it.

Together, these two standpoints reflect the dual emphasis of netizens' concerns on religious identity as a perceived threat and on mass acceptance as a measure of policy legitimacy. By invoking communal sentiment and public behaviour, netizens seek to challenge the authority and relevance of the ban, reframing it as both socially unacceptable and religiously discriminatory.

In pro-ban standpoints, netizens have expressed the thought regarding the firecracker ban employing three types of propositions: Distinctive, Normative, and Descriptive propositions.

4.1.6 Distinctive proposition:

The concept of distinctive propositions refers to statements in which the speaker seeks to establish a clear differentiation between two concepts or phenomena. In the context of this study, such propositions are employed to identify standpoints that deliberately distinguish the environmental implications of firecracker use from those of religious and cultural practices.

The findings suggest that netizens often employ this form of reasoning to argue that the use of firecrackers during Diwali and their potential impact on air quality deterioration should not be conflated with matters of faith, culture, or tradition. Through these arguments, netizens aim to clarify that environmental criticism directed at firecracker use does not equate to an attack on Hindu religious or cultural identity.

For example, one standpoint explicitly states: “दीपावली पर पटाखे फोड़ने की परंपरा हिन्दू परंपरा नहीं है और उसका विरोध हिन्दू धर्म का विरोध नहीं है।” (“The tradition of bursting firecrackers on Diwali is not a part of Hindu tradition, and opposing it is not equivalent to opposing the Hindu religion.”). This statement encapsulates the essence of the distinctive standpoint, wherein the speaker attempts to separate the environmental dimension of the debate from its religious and cultural associations.

Overall, this form of argumentation highlights an important effort among netizens to distinguish between ritual identity and environmental accountability, thereby reframing the discourse on firecrackers as one of rational distinction rather than cultural defensiveness.

4.1.7 Normative proposition:

A normative proposition refers to a statement that conveys a value judgment or prescriptive stance, indicating how things ought to be or what actions individuals should undertake. Within this framework, the study identifies that netizens employ a normative standpoint in their discourse on the use of firecrackers during Diwali, articulating judgments, suggestions, and behavioural guidelines that reflect ethical and social evaluations.

In these judgmental standpoints, netizens collectively assert three key positions: first, that burning firecrackers during Diwali is environmentally wrong; second, that implementing a ban on firecrackers is necessary; and third, that labelling those who support such a ban as “anti-national” or “Pakistani” is inappropriate.

An illustrative example of this reasoning appears in the statement: “पटाखों के शोर से दिक्कत बताने वालों को देशद्रोही कहना या पाकिस्तान भेजने की बात करना अनुचित है।” (“It is wrong to call those who express discomfort with the noise of firecrackers traitors or to suggest that they should be sent to Pakistan.”).

This normative standpoint highlights a segment of netizens who demonstrate moral and environmental awareness, acknowledging the adverse effects of firecracker use on public health and urban air quality. Their standpoints emphasise responsible citizenship, rational deliberation, and ethical restraint in framing disagreements.

4.1.8 Descriptive proposition:

Descriptive propositions refer to statements that convey observations or descriptions of existing facts, phenomena, or social trends. In the context of this study, netizens have utilised descriptive standpoints to articulate and reflect upon the evolving public attitudes toward the use of firecrackers during Diwali. These standpoints often provide a commentary on societal behaviour, illustrating perceived shifts in collective practices and values.

The study identifies that such propositions are employed to describe a gradual change in people’s attitudes, particularly a movement away from the practice of bursting firecrackers. This is exemplified in the statement: “लोग अब पटाखों से दूर हो रहे हैं, और यह एक सही व स्वाभाविक बदलाव है।” (“People are now moving away from firecrackers, and this is a right and natural change.”).

This example not only describes an observable trend but also carries evaluative undertones, implicitly endorsing the change as positive and desirable.

Thus, while descriptive in nature, these standpoints simultaneously exhibit normative characteristics, as they assess and interpret social transformation in a value-laden manner. The underlying concern reflected in this discourse aligns with support for the ban on firecrackers,

framing the behavioural shift as an indication of increasing public awareness and environmental responsibility.

4.2 Material starting point:

The material starting point refers to the shared knowledge, belief, assumption, and facts that both the protagonist and antagonist accept as common ground to begin the critical discussion on merit. It is an accepted set of premises (explicit and implicit) that do not need to be defended, serving as the ground of argumentation (van Eemeren, 2010). The study analyses the material starting point of pro-ban and anti-ban posts to understand the concerns of netizens through their argumentative ground.

Netizens have challenged the policy of the firecracker ban implemented during Diwali in India by advancing arguments grounded in seven principal lines of reasoning: 1. Comparison, 2. Economy and Employment, 3. Culture, society and tradition, 4. Hypocrisy 5. Ad populum and effectiveness 6. Identity 7. Divisive conspiracy

4.2.1 Comparison

The study identifies two principal forms of comparative argumentation employed by netizens to contest the ban on firecrackers: (1) comparisons based on the quantity of production and use of firecrackers, and (2) comparisons between air pollution caused by firecrackers and other major sources of pollution. Through these comparative frameworks, netizens seek to minimise the perceived environmental impact of firecracker use and to question the legitimacy of policy measures targeting them.

In the first type of comparison, netizens emphasise the relatively small scale of firecracker production and consumption in India. They argue that since India's contribution to global firecracker usage is minimal, its role in overall air pollution is correspondingly insignificant. The reasoning underlying this argument follows the logic that "a comparatively negligible quantity of pollutants can be disregarded." This standpoint is exemplified in statements such as: "यदि अन्य देश भारत से कहीं अधिक पटाखे फोड़ते हैं और उन्हें दोषी नहीं ठहराया जाता, तो भारत को भी दोषी नहीं ठहराना चाहिए।" ("If other countries burst far more firecrackers than India and are not blamed for it, then India should not be blamed either."), and "अगर भारत केवल 2% पटाखे बनाता है, तो वह वैश्विक प्रदूषण में बड़ा योगदानकर्ता नहीं हो सकता।" ("If India produces only 2% of firecrackers, it cannot be a major contributor to global pollution."). These propositions collectively express an appeal to proportional reasoning, suggesting that actions producing a relatively minor environmental effect should not attract disproportionate condemnation or restriction.

In the second form of comparative argumentation, netizens shift focus toward alternative sources of pollution, particularly industrial emissions and vehicular exhaust, which they argue make far more substantial contributions to air quality deterioration. Within this framework, the pollution caused by firecrackers is framed as negligible in comparison. This standpoint is articulated in statements such as: “अन्य स्रोत अधिक प्रदूषण करते हैं तो केवल पटाखों को दोष देना अनुचित है।” (“If other sources cause more pollution, then it is unfair to blame only firecrackers.”). Here, the speaker attempts to relativise the pollution caused by firecrackers, thereby displacing responsibility from cultural practices to structural and industrial causes.

Taken together, these comparative standpoints reveal that the primary concern of netizens is not a consideration of pollution but rather an attempt to contextualise and relativise the role of firecrackers within the broader spectrum of pollution sources. By doing so, they seek to portray India as a marginal actor both in terms of firecracker production and its environmental consequences, thus framing the ban as an exaggerated and misplaced policy response.

4.2.2 Economy and employment

The economic and employment-based grounds of argumentation are founded on the assumption that any activity contributing to national economic growth and providing livelihoods to citizens is inherently positive and socially beneficial. Within this framework, netizens justify the use and production of firecrackers by emphasising their role in stimulating the economy and generating employment across different social groups.

The material starting point of this reasoning is exemplified in the statement: “आर्थिक और सामाजिक योगदान करने वाला उद्योग गलत नहीं होता है।” (“An industry that contributes economically and socially cannot be considered wrong.”). This assertion encapsulates the belief that the firecracker industry, due to its economic and social contributions, holds legitimate value within society.

In this line of argumentation, netizens highlight the economic significance of the firecracker sector, portraying it as a source of income for workers and a contributor to local and national markets. The discussion frames the industry as an integral component of economic sustainability and livelihood security.

However, this economic rationale has overshadowed considerations of air quality by prioritising employment and financial benefit. Consequently, the netizens’ primary concern from this standpoint is oriented toward economic and social welfare, while issues of pollution and ecological impact remain largely marginalised or unaddressed.

4.2.3 Culture, tradition, and its antiquity

The argumentation that invokes culture, tradition, and historical antiquity to justify the use of firecrackers during Diwali and to oppose the ban on firecrackers is grounded in the assumption that any act rooted in a longstanding cultural or religious tradition is inherently legitimate. Netizens develop their reasoning based on this material starting point and proceed to argue that imposing restrictions on cultural or religious festivities through policies or bans is inappropriate.

This line of reasoning is illustrated in the example: “धार्मिक या सांस्कृतिक उत्सवों को सीमित करना संस्कृति-विरोधी है।” (“Restricting religious or cultural celebrations is anti-cultural.”). Here, the appeal is explicitly rooted in the protection of cultural and religious expression.

In another instance, netizens attempt to validate the use of firecrackers by emphasising their historical antiquity. For example: “9वीं शताब्दी की पेंटिंग्स में पटाखों का चित्रण किया गया है।” (“Firecrackers have been depicted in paintings from the 9th century.”). This evidence is used to argue that the use of firecrackers is not a modern practice and, therefore, should not be prohibited solely on the basis of contemporary environmental concerns.

Across this line of argumentation, netizens seek to refute the ban on firecrackers by foregrounding cultural continuity and historical legitimacy. However, the underlying material starting point reveals that their primary concern is the preservation of culture, tradition, and antiquity, rather than addressing the issue of deteriorating air quality.

4.2.4 Hypocrisy

The study reveals that netizens frequently target individuals who advocate for a ban on firecrackers by drawing attention to their environmentally harmful behaviours. According to this line of reasoning, individuals who themselves engage in anti-environmental activities lack the moral authority to advise others about environmental protection. Consequently, netizens reject the guidance or criticism offered by those they perceive as hypocritical.

This form of argumentation is grounded in the assumption that moral arguments are legitimate only when there is consistency between one's conduct and one's statements. The example: “कुछ लोग बकरी का मांस खाते हैं। वही लोग कहते हैं कि बकरी पटाखों से डरती है, इसलिए पटाखे नहीं फोड़ने चाहिए।” (“Some people eat goat meat, yet the same people say that goats fear firecrackers, so they should not be burst.”) illustrates the perceived contradiction between behaviour and moral claims.

By emphasising this inconsistency, netizens employ a hypocrisy-based rebuttal to dismiss the legitimacy of criticism related to firecrackers. In this line of argumentation, their primary concern is not evaluating the environmental impact of firecrackers but rather questioning the credibility of the individuals who support the ban.

4.2.5 Ad populum and effectiveness

The study has found that netizens employ ad populum reasoning to challenge the practicality and legitimacy of the ban on firecrackers. In this form of argumentation, they evaluate the policy based on its reception and acceptance by the general public rather than on environmental or regulatory grounds. Netizens argue that despite the official ban, a large number of people continued to burn firecrackers, indicating that the policy lacks societal acceptance. The example, “बैन के बावजूद लोगों ने पटाखे जलाए” (“People burst firecrackers despite the ban”), is used to demonstrate widespread public disregard for the restriction.

By highlighting such instances, netizens attempt to establish that the ban is ineffective and therefore unjustified. Their argument relies on the assumption that mass rejection reflects policy inadequacy, implying that if a significant portion of the population refuses to comply, the policy itself must be flawed rather than the behaviour of the public.

Furthermore, netizens link effectiveness directly with public compliance, asserting that the ban failed not because of insufficient enforcement but because people continued to use firecrackers. This reasoning is grounded in the assumption that a policy’s failure stems from its own inherent weaknesses rather than from resistance or non-compliance.

In both strands of argumentation, the primary concern of netizens aligns with public sentiment rather than environmental considerations, framing the issue in terms of societal acceptance rather than pollution control.

4.2.6 Identity

The study finds that the identity of pro-ban speakers is targeted in netizens’ argumentation. Rather than engaging with the substance of the arguments presented, netizens dismiss the suggestions or opinions of such individuals on the basis of their professional or religious identity. By undermining the speaker’s credibility, they create a justification for disregarding the argument itself.

This type of reasoning operates on the underlying assumption that valid and sound arguments can only originate from individuals who possess a higher or socially respected professional identity. The example, “ऐसे नचनिया पदनिया की औकात ही क्या है जो वो हमको ज्ञान दे।” (“What status does such a dancer/performer have to give us knowledge?”), illustrates this appeal. Here, the argument shifts attention away from the issue of firecracker use and focuses instead on belittling the speaker’s profession.

Such material starting points rely on appeal to authority or, conversely, appeal to lack of authority, wherein the perceived social or professional standing of the speaker is treated as more important than the logical coherence or empirical validity of their reasoning. This suggests that the primary

concern of netizens employing this argumentation is the identity of the speaker, rather than the content of the argument or the environmental implications associated with the use of firecrackers.

4.2.7 Divisive conspiracy

The argumentation related to divisive conspiracy is grounded in judgments about the speaker's or policy advocate's intentions. Netizens question the motives of those who support the ban on firecrackers, alleging that their intentions are divisive. They argue that since individuals from all social groups are involved in the production and consumption of firecrackers, imposing a ban would disrupt existing social cohesion.

The example, “हिंदू मुर्गा छाप पटाखे गर्व से खरीदते हैं जबकि यह दलित समुदाय की कंपनी है।” (“Hindus proudly purchase ‘Murga brand’ firecrackers even though it is a Dalit community company”), exemplifies the claim. Here, the emphasis is on the interconnected networks of production and consumption that link people across caste lines. Based on this reasoning, netizens contend that banning firecrackers would undermine social harmony by weakening these integrative economic and cultural exchanges.

The underlying assumption of this argument is that policies perceived as divisive are inherently inappropriate for the country. This material starting point places strong emphasis on social integration, indicating that the primary concern of netizens employing this line of argumentation is the preservation of intergroup harmony rather than environmental considerations.

The material starting points of pro-ban posts of netizens are based on six issues: 1. Environment and health, 2. Separation, 3. Change, 4. Normative proposition 5. Descriptive

4.2.8 Environment and health:

The study indicates that netizens who support the firecracker ban ground their argumentation in environmental and health-centric material starting points. This line of reasoning rests on the assumption that any activity or practice that harms the environment or public health is inherently undesirable. Netizens employ these assumptions to advance pro-ban arguments.

For example, the statement “पटाखे चलाने से प्रदूषण और स्वास्थ्य समस्याएँ बढ़ती हैं। (Bursting firecrackers increase pollution and health issues)” reflects the position that the use of firecrackers exacerbates pollution and contributes to health-related issues. In such arguments, the primary concern of netizens is to halt practices that negatively affect environmental quality and human well-being.

4.2.9 Separation:

In the pro-ban separation argument, netizens attempt to distinguish the practice of bursting firecrackers on Diwali from Indian religious, cultural and traditional practices. They contend that

the use of firecrackers is not historically or intrinsically linked to Indian religious or cultural practices. This form of argumentation is grounded in the assumption that any practice that does not originate within Indian cultural or religious traditions can be legitimately discontinued.

The example, “यदि कोई प्रथा विदेशी मूल की है, तो वह भारतीय धार्मिक परंपरा का हिस्सा नहीं मानी जा सकती। (If a practice is of foreign origin, it cannot be considered part of Indian religious tradition.),” illustrates this reasoning by asserting that practices of foreign origin cannot be considered part of Indian religious tradition. Within this framework, the act of bursting firecrackers on Diwali is positioned as non-essential and therefore abandonable. Overall, the concern of netizens employing this standpoint is oriented toward legitimising the cessation of firecracker use by separating it from traditional religious and cultural identity.

4.2.10 Normative and Descriptive

The analysis shows that several netizens’ posts incorporate both normative and descriptive elements. Within the normative propositions, users prescribe specific measures for reducing pollution and outline how a ban on firecrackers should be implemented effectively. In the descriptive propositions, netizens describe emerging shifts in public attitudes, suggesting that a gradual reduction in firecracker use is beneficial for society.

Both forms of argumentation are grounded in the shared material starting point that air pollution is harmful to human health and therefore must be mitigated. This underlying assumption suggests that netizens expressing these views are primarily motivated by concerns for environmental quality and public health.

4.2.11 Justification

Netizens have also advanced pro-ban argumentation by employing justification strategies to legitimise the prohibition of firecrackers during Diwali. These justificatory statements clarify the rationale behind implementing the ban. For example, the standpoint “पटाखे हवा खराब करते हैं इसलिए बैन लगाया गया था ताकि प्रदूषण कम हो। (Firecrackers pollute the air, which is why the ban was imposed so that pollution could be reduced.)” explicitly states that the ban was imposed because firecrackers degrade air quality, and therefore the restriction serves the purpose of reducing pollution. This line of reasoning highlights that the primary concern of these netizens is the improvement of air quality and the protection of public health.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore public concerns surrounding the ban on firecrackers and examined the argumentation related to this issue against the backdrop of severe environmental conditions in Indian cities. Prior research indicates that AQI levels in many Indian cities exceed the WHO-

recommended limits, with conditions worsening during the winter and festive seasons, when the use of firecrackers increases.

Drawing exclusively on Hindi-language data from X during Diwali 2024, the study analysed the primary concerns of netizens regarding the firecracker ban. Using the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation, the research identified arguments and their constituent elements. It examined the standpoints and material starting points present in both anti-ban and pro-ban posts. Anti-ban standpoints emphasised justifications for firecracker use on Diwali, personal attacks on pro-ban speakers, employment concerns, claims of public rejection of the ban, and communal interpretations. These arguments indicate that anti-ban discourse largely diverges from environmental concerns. Although pollution is occasionally discussed, anti-ban users often claim that firecrackers neither cause pollution nor contribute to deteriorating air quality. In contrast, pro-ban standpoints focus on refuting anti-ban claims and clarifying that the environmental impact of firecrackers is distinct from the cultural and traditional practices associated with them. Pro-ban arguments also appear in normative and descriptive propositions that centre on social harmony and the environmental effects of firecrackers.

The study finds that the material starting points of anti-ban posts draw on comparative argumentation, economic and employment considerations, cultural and traditional appeals, charges of hypocrisy, ad populum reasoning, identity-based attacks, questions of policy effectiveness, and allegations of divisive intent. Through these lines of reasoning, anti-ban netizens foreground issues of economy, tradition, identity, and mass sentiment rather than environmental conditions. Conversely, pro-ban posts rely on material starting points grounded in environmental and health implications. Normative propositions outline methods for effective implementation of the firecracker ban, reflecting concern for air quality, while descriptive propositions highlight shifting public behaviour and offer justification for regulation. Only one type of material starting point attempts to separate firecracker usage from religious and cultural practices.

Overall, the study concludes that anti-ban posts place minimal emphasis on environmental degradation and the declining air quality in urban centres, prioritising instead economic, cultural, and traditional concerns. In contrast, pro-ban posts demonstrate heightened environmental sensitivity, with netizens expressing clear concern for air quality and pollution.

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Semantic Idiosyncrasies and Classification of Selected Multi-Word Expressions in Namboothiri Dialect

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Abstract

Multi-word expressions (henceforth MWEs) are an interesting feature of languages. They are expressions containing more than one word with a meaning, different from the meaning of their constituent elements. The meaning carried by these MWEs is specific. They are usually mastered and used extensively by native speakers. However, there are a few hurdles in understanding or decoding for non-native speakers. It becomes a bit more difficult when it comes to dealing with MWEs in a dialect of a language. The current study focuses on delving into the semantic idiosyncrasies and classification of MWEs in the Namboothiri dialect of Malayalam. This dialect is a caste dialect that carries its idiosyncrasies. Namboothiris are a subcategory of the Brahmins of Kerala. They are believed to have settled in the state as a result of the Aryan migration. They have influenced the development of Malayalam with their Sanskrit tradition that led to the *maṇipRavāḷa* tradition. The study is the first of its kind, as there are few or no studies about MWEs of a dialect of a language. MWE-based studies are very less even in the Malayalam language. Hence, the current study adds significantly to the existing knowledge of the MWEs of the Malayalam language.

Keywords: Multi-word expressions (MWEs), Malayalam, dialect, semantic idiosyncrasies, classification

Introduction

Multiword Expressions (MWE) can be described as "idiosyncratic interpretations that cross word boundaries (or spaces)" (Sag, Ivan A. et.al, 2002). They are lexical items that exhibit semantic idiosyncrasies. They can be classified into various types. Identification of these MWEs in a language is carried out based on certain properties and features. These properties are the basis of the semantic idiosyncrasies of MWEs. The research paper provides comprehensive information on the properties, types, and classification of MWEs.

The paper specifically focuses on analysing the semantic idiosyncrasies of MWEs in one of the caste dialects of the Malayalam language. The dialect is known as the Namboothiri dialect. Namboothiris, also known as Kerala brahmins or Malayala brahmins, are a community following the ancient Vedic tradition. According to Kesavan Veluthattu brahmin settlements of Kerala began around the end of the Sangam period in history. They brought in with them their tradition which is heavily influenced by Vedic tradition. The contribution of this community to the development of the Malayalam language is non-negligible because they influenced Malayalam language development with the Sanskrit tradition. The life and culture of this community is deeply entangled with the Sanskrit language. Hence, one can find a lot of idiosyncrasies in their dialect. Therefore, MWEs of this caste dialect is interesting with their uniqueness. Thus, in this paper the semantic idiosyncrasies and the classification of these MWEs are attempted.

Literature Review

The literature review carried out in relation to this study revealed that studies on Multi-Word Expressions (MWEs) in Malayalam are a less explored area. There are hardly any studies focusing on the MWEs in the dialects of Malayalam. The research paper by Treesa Anjaly Cyriac, Sobha Lalitha Devi (2022) is a work focusing on MWEs in Malayalam. In their paper, they are trying to explore multiwords in Malayalam and to classify them as per the three idiosyncrasies: semantic idiosyncrasy, syntactic idiosyncrasy, and statistic idiosyncrasy. The classification and features are given and are studied using Malayalam MWEs. Through this study, they identified how the linguistic features of Malayalam, such as agglutination, influenced its multiword expressions in terms of pronunciation and spelling. Malayalam has a set of code-mixed multiword expressions, which is also addressed in this study. Another research work carried out in this area is the combined

research paper by Jayan Vasudevan, V.K. Bhadrar, and Arathi Raghunathan, 2016. This paper strives to establish the relevance of exploring the domain of Multi-Word Expressions in English and Malayalam. Next, the study carried out by Dhirendra Singh, Sudha Bhingardive, Pushpak Bhattacharyya creates MWEs annotation in Indian languages viz., Hindi and Marathi. Annotation is done for two types of MWEs: compound nouns and light verb constructions. The result of this study was that it created a resource which is made available publicly and can be used as a gold standard for Hindi and Marathi MWEs systems. Last but not the least, Mathieu Constant ATILF, Université de Lorraine & CNRS Gül, sen Eryiğit Istanbul Technical University Johanna Monti “L’Orientale” University of Naples Lonneke van der Plas University of Malta Carlos Ramisch Aix Marseille University, CNRS Michael Rosner University of Malta Amalia Todirascu LiLPa, Strasbourg University (2017) together worked with the aim not only to provide a focused review of MWE processing, but also to clarify the nature of interactions between MWE processing and downstream applications. They proposed a conceptual framework within which challenges and research contributions can be positioned. The work offers a shared understanding of what is meant by “MWE processing,” distinguishing the subtasks of MWE discovery and identification.

Research questions

The current study poses the following research questions: -

1. Are there dialect-specific MWEs?
2. How can the semantic idiosyncrasies of these MWEs be analysed?
3. How can the MWEs be classified?

Aim

The current study aims to identify the semantic idiosyncrasies of selected MWEs from the Namboothiri dialect and to classify them into various categories.

Objectives

1. To compile the semantic idiosyncrasies MWEs from Namboothiri dialect.
2. To analyse the semantic idiosyncrasies of MWEs from Namboothiri dialect.
3. To classify them into various categories of MWEs.

Research Methodology

The current study, which undertakes an indirect approach, employs qualitative research design techniques in the data collection and analysis process.

Data Collection

The data required for the current study were collected using a random sampling method from primary as well as secondary sources.

Multiword Expressions (MWEs)

A multiword expression (MWE) consists of two or more words that function together as a single unit of meaning. Notably, the characteristics of an MWE cannot be anticipated from the individual properties of its component words, and its overall meaning is often distinct from the meanings of those components when considered separately

Definitions of MWEs

According to Seretan (2011) there are a lot of definitions for MWEs. Some of the important ones are the following: -

“a multiword unit or a collocation of words that co-occur together statistically more than chance” (Carpuat and Diab 2010)

“a sequence of words that acts as a single unit at some level of linguistic analysis” (Calzolari et al. 2002)

“Lexical items that: (a) can be decomposed into multiple lexemes; and (b) display lexical, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic and/or statistical idiomaticity” (Baldwin and Kim 2010)

Properties of MWEs

1. Non-compositionality and non-literal translatability

Non-compositionality is a striking feature of MWEs. This feature highlights that the meaning of the expression as a whole, the MWE, cannot be inferred from its individual components. It has its own semantic idiosyncrasy. Hence, translation of MWEs on a word-by-word basis leads to unnatural, ungrammatical, and nonsensical results. In fact, the non-compositionality feature complements the non-literal translatability feature. Multiword expressions are idiomatic by

definition. But this feature is not observed throughout all kinds of multiwords. Multiword expressions can have compositional or non-compositional semantics.

2. Ambiguity

MWEs are ambiguous when its compositional words can co-occur without forming an expression. These expressions can act as an MWE or can take the literal meaning of the sequence. This selection is contextual

3. Discontinuity

Parts of certain MWEs may get separated from each other by some external element/s. Depending on the context the intervening word may change. This makes it difficult to identify multiword expressions from a sentence.

4. Non-substitutability

Non-substitutability is a property that is relevant for most MWEs. According to this property, it is not possible to replace a part of an expression with a synonym or similar word. It often causes lexical rigidity.

5. Frequency and collocation

One of the typical properties of MWEs is that the constituent words tend to occur (together) more than expected. When compared to the chances of using a possible alternative, the frequency of co-occurrence of the component words of an MWE is larger. Since the language speakers tend to use MWEs instead of explaining the concept, multiwords happen to occur frequently. Multiword expressions are stored in the mental lexicon of language speakers. They become habitual through frequent usage. Frequency can be considered as a reliable criterion for lexicalization, but it should not be a necessary one.

Single lexical unit:

Multiword expressions consist of a minimum of two words that cut across word boundaries and are complex than the individual units. Generally, MWEs do not cross the sentence boundaries and are treated as single lexical units. The component words do not act individually. Instead, they work together as a group and contribute meaning to the expression as a whole. They are stored as a single unit or a particular concept in the mental lexicon of the speaker.

Syntactic fixedness:

MWEs are considered syntactically fixed expressions. However, in the opinion of many linguists, MWEs exhibit a continuum of syntactic fixedness.

Spelling:

MWEs are widely seen as words with spaces. Defining multiword expressions as words with spaces is theoretically unsatisfactory. The speakers are not accurate all the time and spelling are not always consistent.

Classification of MWEs

MWEs are classified into lexicalized phrases and institutional phrases. Lexicalized phrases “have at least in part idiosyncratic syntax or pragmatics”. Lexicalized phrases are again classified as fixed, semi-fixed and syntactically flexible expressions. (Sag et al., 2002)

Fixed Expressions

Fixed expressions are frozen expressions that do not undergo any morphosyntactic variations or internal modifications. They can be considered as words-with spaces. Generally, they are transparent in meaning.

Semi-Fixed Expressions

In the case of semi-fixed expressions, word order and composition are strictly invariable. However, some lexical variations are possible. Semi-fixed expressions can be further classified into three subcategories:

Non-decomposable idioms: We cannot analyze or understand non-decomposable idioms from the words they are composed of. They are semantically opaque and do not undergo syntactic variability. But they can take inflections and reflexive form variations.

Compound Nominals: Compound nominals do not undergo syntactic variations. But they do inflect for number.

Proper Names/Named entities: Proper names are syntactically highly idiosyncratic in nature.

Syntactically Flexible Expressions

Unlike semi-fixed expressions or fixed expressions, syntactically flexible expressions allow a range of syntactic variations. Syntactically flexible expressions include:

Verb-Particle Constructions: These are the expressions that consist of a verb and one or more particles and they can be compositional or semantically idiosyncratic.

Decomposable Idioms: Decomposable idioms are syntactically flexible to some extent. It is very difficult to predict the syntactic variations they undergo.

Light Verbs: Light-verb constructions are highly idiosyncratic. They undergo full syntactic variability.

Institutionalized Phrases

Institutionalized phrases are syntactically and semantically compositional, but statistically idiosyncratic. They occur with high frequency and undergo full syntactic variability.

Malayalam and its various dialects

Malayalam, the native language of Kerala in southern India, is spoken by over 35 million people and is recognized as one of the classical and official languages of India. Malayalis, the people who speak Malayalam, derive their name and collective identity from the language itself. As a member of the South-Dravidian branch of the Dravidian language family, Malayalam is considered relatively young among its linguistic relatives.

The language exhibits numerous dialects, reflecting variations in pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and phonology based on region, community, occupation, social status, and communicative context. These dialects are broadly categorized as regional and social. Clear distinctions exist among Southern, Central, and Northern regional dialects. Social stratification is less obvious, except for the distinct speech patterns of the Muslim community. Christian and Hindu dialects are more similar to each other than to the Muslim dialects, and caste-based dialect differences can be observed in kinship terms as well.

Research from a Kerala village (Subramoniam, 1977) reveals that:

- The Brahmin dialect is closest to the standard version of Malayalam.

- Nair dialect aligns with Brahmin speech, while the Ezhava-Tiyya dialect is closer to the Harijan dialect.
- Harijan dialects retain archaic features like pronominal endings.
- Nair and Ezhava dialects are more similar to each other than to the Muslim dialect.
- Higher-caste groups often maintain non-native phonology, whereas lower castes tend to adapt loanwords to native phonology.

Namboothiri Dialect

Namboothiris have a distinct dialect that is so much a part of their culture. As in any other speech form, culture has its overwhelming influence over the Namboothiri dialect too. They also have a peculiar intonation, diction, and style of delivery in ordinary conversation. (Nambudripad, K.D.2008) The Namboothiri dialect is a distinctive sociolect of Malayalam. It stands out for its unique blend of Sanskrit influences and Dravidian linguistic features, making it quite different from other Malayalam dialects spoken in the region (Calicut, n.d.).

Historical and Cultural Roots

The insular and priestly nature of the Namboothiri community shaped the dialect over centuries, intertwining language use with rituals, social hierarchy, and identity. This dialect evolved with heavy borrowings from Sanskrit due to the community's role in Vedic traditions and ritual recitation. Simultaneously, local Dravidian phonology contributed to the dialect's unique sound system.

Phonological Features

The Namboothiri dialect is noted for:

- Aspirated consonants (like /ph/ in /phalam/ and /dh/ in /dhanam/), which are pronounced distinctly by older speakers—this is rare in casual speech among other Malayalam speakers.
- A slightly expanded inventory of consonant clusters and nasal sounds compared to standard Malayalam.

Lexical and Syntactic Characteristics

- There are marked differences in how speakers address equals and those of different castes; for example, verbs and responses have unique endings or forms. (Calicut, n.d.-a)

Scope of the study

- The study can be further extended to all aspects of idiosyncrasies namely statistical, syntactic, phonological etc. of MWEs. It can be used in NLP based projects and studies. The study can be modelled to conduct similar studies in the dialects of other languages.
- One promising direction is the statistical analysis of MWEs, which involves examining the frequency, distribution, and co-occurrence patterns of MWEs within natural language corpora. Understanding these statistical properties can help reveal which expressions are more entrenched or culturally salient among speakers, providing deeper insights into language use and variation.
- Syntactic analysis is another vital area to extend research. This involves investigating how MWEs behave within sentence structures, including their syntactic flexibility or fixedness, the way they integrate with surrounding words, and any unique grammatical patterns they exhibit. Syntactic study can uncover rules governing the position and form of these expressions in discourse, clarifying the interplay between structure and meaning.
- Phonological aspects are equally important, particularly in a dialect marked by distinctive pronunciation and intonation patterns like Namboothiri Malayalam. Research can focus on the sound patterns within MWEs, such as phoneme realization, stress, nasalization, or aspirated consonants, which may differ from standard Malayalam or other regional dialects. These phonetic features often carry social and identity markers, making their study crucial for a holistic understanding.
- Besides theoretical linguistics, these expanded studies hold great potential for applications in Natural Language Processing (NLP). Incorporating dialect-specific MWEs into NLP models can improve machine translation accuracy, speech recognition systems, sentiment analysis, and text mining for Malayalam, especially for dialectal variants. It can enable more culturally sensitive and precise computational tools that respect linguistic diversity.

- Finally, the methodologies and findings from the Namboothiri dialect study can serve as a valuable blueprint for investigating MWEs in other dialects and languages.

Comparative dialectology can benefit from such frameworks, facilitating cross-linguistic studies that enhance understanding of language contact, change, and cultural identity across linguistic communities.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data excerpts, MWEs from the Namboothiri dialect is as follows: -. The MWE *akalōm nīlōm kollikuka* carrying the whole meaning ‘make things difficult’ when broken down into its constituent meanings reflect as *akalōm* means ‘distance’, *nīlōm* means ‘length’ and *kollikuka* means ‘to contain’ which starkly highlight its non-compositionality. This expression falls into the category of non-decomposable idiom as it cannot be analysed or understood from the words they are composed of. They are semantically opaque and do not undergo syntactic variability. Similarly, the MWEs *aḍukkaḷa māruka* with whole meaning ‘to get married’ and constituent meanings-*aḍukkaḷa* means ‘kitchen’ and *māruka* means ‘change’, *ambalakkāḷa* with the whole meaning ‘one who leads life in a dareless manner’ and constituent meanings-*ambalam* means ‘temple’ and *kāḷa* means ‘bull’, *ambalam viḷuṇuka* with whole meaning ‘to loot completely’ and constituent meanings- *ambalam* means ‘temple’ and *viḷuṇuka* means ‘to swallow’, *ōtikkōn parayunṇatellām ṍttalla* with the whole meaning ‘it is not necessary that everything said by an expert or master is always right’ and constituent meanings- *ōtikkōn parayunṇatellām* means ‘all that is said by the expert or master’ *ōttalla* means ‘it is not the Veda’, *ōlanmaṭṭa* with the whole meaning ‘without any decorations’, in other words, ‘in a simple and carefree way’ and constituent meanings- *ōlan* is ‘a vegetarian dish that is spice less’ and *maṭṭa* means ‘nature of a thing’, *kāppukeṭṭuka* with the whole meaning ‘to get married’ and constituent meanings- *Kāppu* means ‘sacred thread tied around the wrist of the bridegroom for safety’ *keṭṭuka* means ‘to tie’, *kumiḷ pole* with the whole meaning ‘a matter or something that lacks depth’ and constituent meanings- *kumiḷ* means ‘the gamhar tree’ *pole* means ‘like’, *kuḷi bandham* with the whole meaning ‘not even the slightest trace of any relationship’ and constituent meanings- *kuḷi* means ‘bath’ and *bandham* means ‘relationship’, *koṭṭakuḍayukaa* with the whole meaning ‘destruction of everything that is in possession’ and constituent meanings- *koṭṭa* means ‘basket’ *kuḍayukaa* means ‘to empty it’ and *gōpiyākkuka* with the whole meaning ‘to defeat’ and constituent meanings- *gōpi* is a term carrying

different connotations depending on the context such as ‘a proper name’, ‘female counterpart of a person who looks after cattle’ etc. *ākkuka* means ‘to make’, all fall into the category of non-decomposable idioms due to their non compositionality feature.

Another category of MWE found out from the analysis of the data is the code-mixed expressions. MWEs like *uruḷakkupastarikuka* with the whole meaning ‘spend on things separately’ and constituent meanings- *uruḷa* means something that is made into a round or sphere shape, e.g, rice balls *upastarikuka* means ‘to serve ghee’ , *kaṇḍḍhasūtram parikuka* with the whole meaning ‘a Namboothiri woman becoming a widow’ and constituent meanings- *kaṇḍḍhasūtram* means ‘the marriage knote around the bride’s neck’ *parikuka* means ‘to pluck’, *kōritarppikuka* with the whole meaning ‘to serve without any limit or to spend without any limit’ and constituent meanings- *kōri* means to ‘take handfull’ and *tarppikuka* means ‘to carry out the ritual for pleasing god, departed souls etc.’ and *gaṇapati kurikuka* with the whole meaning ‘to mark the beginning of something’ and constituent meanings- *gaṇapati* ‘a Hindu god’ *kurikuka* means ‘to scribble’ belong to this category.

Discussion and Findings

The study conducted on selected Multi-Word Expressions (MWEs) from the Namboothiri dialect of Malayalam highlights the prominent feature of non-compositionality. In almost all the MWEs analyzed, the meanings of the individual constituents did not contribute directly to the whole expression. For example, in *ambalam viḷuṇuka*, which means "to loot completely," the separate meanings—*ambalam*, "temple," and *viḷuṇuka*, "to swallow"—do not combine to reveal the actual idiomatic meaning. This characteristic of non-compositionality also leads to non-translatability; accurately translating these MWEs into another language is challenging, as direct translation would often fail to carry over their exact sense and cultural resonance.

Another significant feature observed is the property of non-substitutability. The constituents of these MWEs generally cannot be replaced with other lexical items without altering or destroying their established meaning, making them lexically rigid. For instance, with the expression *kuḷi bandham*, which means "not even the slightest trace of any relationship," the parts cannot be switched out for synonyms without losing the idiomatic meaning entirely.

Collocations were also frequently noticed among these MWEs. For example, in *ōtikkōn parayunṇatellām ōttalla*, meaning "it is not necessary that everything said by an expert or master is always right," the elements *ōtikkōn*, "expert/master" and *ōtt*, "Veda" form a habitual collocation.

The MWEs examined in this study were found to fall into two categories: non-decomposable idioms, and code-mixed MWEs. By illuminating these features, the analysis enhances our understanding of how MWEs in the Namboothiri dialect encapsulate cultural knowledge, reinforce lexical rigidity, and embody unique semantic identities.

Conclusion

MWEs in the Namboothiri dialect of Malayalam language exhibits semantic idiosyncrasies that contributes to their uniqueness. This property of these MWEs thus forms the basis of their classification into various categories. Unlike ordinary phrases, these MWEs cannot be understood simply by analyzing the literal meanings of their individual components. Instead, their meanings emerge from culturally and socially grounded interpretations that are specific to the Namboothiri community. This idiosyncrasy plays a crucial role in classifying MWEs into various categories, such as institutionalised phrases, non-decomposable idioms, and code-mixed expressions. These classifications help linguists and researchers organize the complex variety of expressions, clarifying how language operates as a marker of social identity and cultural heritage within the community.

This classification is not merely linguistic but also deeply anthropological. It reflects how the Namboothiri dialect encodes traditional values, rituals, and social hierarchies through language. For example, certain phrases are embedded in ritual practices and social norms that define group membership and interpersonal relations. By studying these MWEs, one gains insight into how language functions not only as communication but also as a living repository of collective history and social practices. This underscores the essential role of dialectal variation in preserving cultural identity and highlights the dynamic interaction between language and society.

Thus, the study's emphasis on semantic idiosyncrasy enriches the understanding of the Namboothiri dialect's complexity, showing how linguistic forms carry intertwined cultural meanings. This knowledge supports both theoretical linguistics and practical applications,

enabling a deeper appreciation of the dialect's role in shaping and reflecting the identity of its speakers.

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Homogenisation of Dualistic Pairs in Five Manipuri Folktales

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Abstract

Settling on the periphery of dualism, the area of interest of this paper centres on exertion of Val Plumwood's "homogenisation or stereotyping" theory on the folktales "Sandrembi and Cheishra", "Uchek Langmeidong" in Dr. Haobam Bilashini Devi's *Folktales of Manipur* and "Lai Khutshangbi" "Hingchabigi Wari" and "Haoshi Namoinu" from Huiem Behari Singh's *A Study of Manipuri Meitei Folklore*. The acquirement of dualistic pairs from the folktales, which is maintained in the study, facilitates a course of action for the application of "homogenisation or stereotyping" theory. The framework of this paper is to secure an interpretation of the acquired dualistic pairs in terms of the "homogenisation" theory. The interpretation is intended to assess relationships between females of different capacity, found in the narratives.

Keywords: homogenisation, dualism, folktale, Manipur.

Defining the Theory of Homogenisation

The aspects of classical negation exclusively engender hierarchical dualisms, which is the dichotomies prioritising dominant category while oppressing the underprivileged. (Ferguson,

2023). Plumwood appertains to promote her critique of classical negation as weapons to defend oppression. (Eckert, Donahue, 2020)

“Homogenisation” theory in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, refers to the western theory of dualism. Capitalising the theoretical use of “homogenisation”, Val Plumwood undertakes critical deconstruction of dualistic relationships maintained according to the theory of dualism. The construct of the theory of “homogenisation” is rendered, to assess the hierarchal set up in dualisms, in the interest of the inferiorised underside in dualistic pairs (Plumwood, 2003).

As maintained in the theory of dualism, the narratives are polarised in a binary fashion, constitutive of two terms of which the first term is superior to the second term. The configured hierarchy in dualism that categorically maintains the class of dominant or superiority over the other term generates a conflict between the two. Contriving theories like “homogenisation”, “backgrounding”, “radical exclusion”, Plumwood attempts to address the conflict in her *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (Plumwood, 2003).

“Homogenisation” theory is conceptualised with the understanding that the inferiorised in dualistic pairs are categorically classified as one; the difference among them in terms of diversity of culture and society is disregarded and “dismissed as ‘aliens’, ‘wogots’, or ‘reffos’ (refugees)” (Plumwood, 2003). The identity of the undersides, second terms is of little interest to the upperside first terms. Hence, the undersides are homogenised as one; the undersides are denied of identity on account of its serving as background to the uppersides first terms. In view of the prospect that the undersides are rendered diversely available in surplus to the uppersides, the undersides are denied recognition for its uniqueness. The dualistic pair “master/slave” fits the framework of dualism (Plumwood 2003, p. 53). Regardless of the fact that the upperside master lives entirely on the service of his

slave, the slave in the second term is denied of being depended on and the narratives of the slave is backgrounded.

“To the master, all the rest are just that: ‘the rest’, the Others, the background of his achievements and the resources for his needs” (Plumwood 2003, p. 54). Given the approach of the “homogenisation” theory, it suggests that the “homogenisation is a feature of the master’s perspective.” The perspective of master occupies the central space, with no concern for the identity of the underside and difference among the inferiorised, rendering the “master” a space of superiority. Moreover, Plumwood extends the “homogenisation” theory to “gender stereotyping.”

Dualistic pairs in the five Manipuri folktales

The narrative “Sandrembi and cheishra” highlights unhealthy relationships maintained between step-mother/step-daughter, step-sister (Cheishra)/ step-sister (Sandrembi). The underlying cause of the conflict between the characters is deemed to be the husband who is the father to his two daughters from different mothers; with regards to the fact that he takes a woman in marriage while he is still married to his wife. As the second wife kills the first wife at the very outset of the narrative, Sandrembi is deprived of a mother. Consequently, she is abused, tortured physically and emotionally by her step-mother and her step-sister and further murdered by them so as to steal her identity and live the life of her step-sister. Though, Sandrembi effectively pursues revenge after getting reincarnated, the enduring tortures, abuse and murder occupy the central space of the narrative. It is imperative to note that Sandrembi has a biological brother which is not abused by their step-mother. (Bilashini, 2009)

The step-mother/Sandrembi and Cheishra/Sandembi are the dualistic pairs serving the plot structure of the narrative. Taking note of the nature of the characters in the first terms, with regards

to the fact that Sandrembi in the second terms, who is a step-daughter and a step-sister, is ill-used, tortured and murdered by the step-mother and Cheishra in the first terms, the use of the power over Sandrembi by the step-mother and Cheishra render the placements of two terms.

In close proximity to the plot structure of “Sandrembi and Cheishra”, the folktale “Uchek langmeidong” is engaged with a toxic relationship between a step-mother and a step-daughter. As one would reasonably expect, a man marries twice after the demise of his wife. He has a daughter out of his first marriage and a son from the second marriage. The man who is a father to the daughter, leaves home for work. In his absence, the daughter is ill-used for house chores, to look after her step-brother, and physical and psychologically tortured at the same time by the step-mother. However, she transforms into Uchek Langmeidong (hornbill bird) and escapes from her tragic reality.

A parallel account may be drawn concerning the folktale, Hari Nongnang (Haoshi Namoinu); the narrative undertakes a corresponding course with regards to the theme which involves a step-mother of a malicious nature and an innocent and naive step-daughter. The step-daughter is abused and tortured by her step-mother mentally and physically. Haoshi Namoinu, the step-daughter is over-exploited concerning the house chores like fetching paddy, husking the paddy. She is expected to husk the paddy with no rest in between after having fetched the paddy. Over a trivial complain by the step-daughter of the situation imposed, the step-mother verbally slanders her step-daughter and beats her “on the crown of her head with the bamboo ladle.” Devastated with the torture, she makes a break free from her disastrous life by transforming into Hari Nongnang (cicada). (Singh, 1985)

Unexceptional to the typical relationship of a malicious step-mother and a step-daughter, “Hingchabigi Wari (The Story of Demoness)” unfolds a catastrophic relationship between the two.

The theme of the narrative materialises a detrimental relationship between a step-mother and a step-daughter; engaged with characters- a step-mother (Wasareima), her mother demoness (Hingchabi), a step-daughter and a father figure to the daughter and a husband to the step-mother. Having fixed on the idea of killing her step-daughter without getting her hands dirty, she sends her step-daughter to her demoness mother maintaining the pretext that she sends her hand-written letter to her demoness mother through her step-daughter. The content of the letter in fact refers to her sinister intent of permanent annihilation of her step-daughter. However, while she sleeps on the way, the content of the letter is altered contradictorily by a stranger: requesting her demoness mother to “treat her with warm affection and love” and not “to eat her up” as she does to other children. The narrative progresses to a paradoxical end in view of the situation that unfolds: the demoness gets killed by the step-daughter, making use of the magical instruments of the demoness, having learned about the instruments from the introduction initiated by the demoness beforehand, and thereafter, the father kills Wasareima, the step-mother, bearing the fact that the situation is revealed to the father by the step-daughter (Singh, 1985).

In spite of the fact that the theme involved in “Lai Khutsangbi” from Dr. Haobam Bilashini Devi’s *Folktales of Manipur* centralises the torture and abuse of weaker women by the long-armed witch which is portrayed a stronger figure; it marks a departure from the afore-mentioned narratives in terms of the characters structured. The long-armed witch occupies the central space of the folktale; she lives on the flesh of human, vulnerable children and women without their male counterparts are her targets. The women characters like Chaobi and Tombi are characterised as preys of the witch; with regards to the fact that Tombi is a widow, who lives alone and Chaobi is a married woman who is sometimes unaccompanied by her husband as he leaves his wife at home, on a business trip. The target on Tombi is obtained; she is consumed by the witch. However, the

attempts on Chaobi occasion a destructive outcome to the witch with regards to the fact that the long-arm of the witch is chopped off by the husband of Chaobi; Chaobi tricked the witch in making her believe that she is unattended by her husband at home at the moment when she is asked to open the door, being aware of the fact that the witch is in guise of the dead “Tombi”, the witch is asked to insert her hand through the hole of the wall to open it and when she does, her hand is chopped by the husband of Chaobi.

Taking the narratives into account, the dualistic expressions may be drawn- (Step-mother/Sandrembi) and (Cheishra/Sandrembi) from “Sandrembi and Cheishra” and with regards to the folktale “ Uchek Langmeidong”, it is - (step-mother/step-daughter). In “Hingchabigi Wari,” the chief dualistic relationship is occupied by (Wasareima/step-daughter), in “Haoshi Namoinu” it is – (step-mother/step-daughter) and in “Lai Khutsangbi”, it is (witch/Chaobi) and (witch/Tombi). Laying a common ground on the dualistic expression drawn, the first terms in the expressed dualisms of the five narratives align each other and the same is encountered in the second terms, as to the fact that the first term figures refer to the dominant, oppressor and the privileged over their second term figures in the narratives. Making approach to the dualistic expression- (Step-mother/Sandrembi), here, the step-mother occupies the first term, owing to the fact that the step-mother stands privileged and she holds the power over her step-daughter, which is proven by her extensive use of her step-daughter, Sandrembi at her own disposal in the narrative. Under the stated circumstances, the dualistic relationship maintained in- step-mother/Sandrembi, corresponds to the dualistic relationships in the rest of the four narratives. It is encountered that the step-mother in “Sandrembi and Cheishra”, the step-mother in “Uchek Langmeidong”, the step-mother, Wasareima in “Hingchabigi Wari”, the step-mother in “Haoshi Namoinu” and the witch in “Lai

Khutsangbi” occupy first terms, executing the same role that is to abuse and torture their vulnerable second term counterparts.

Homogenising the five Manipuri folktales

On bearing the grounds that the genre like folktale stands to be the first genre that a human learns language, cultural and traditional values and cultural identity from (Suryakant, 2024), attempts are made in this study for valuable interpretations of the five folktales. Expressing the narrative in the form of dualism, the step-mother/step-daughter, it is the dualistic pair predominant in the narrative. On having the power exercised upon the step-daughter by the step-mother with no physical retaliation, the positions of the step-mother in the first term and the step-daughter in the second term are manifested. The manifestation of power regarding the space of the first term in the dualistic relationship configured in the frame of this narrative speaks volumes about the narrative, unfolding from the perspective of the first term occupied by the step-mother; given the fact that the step-mother holds absolute power to use at her own disposal over her step-daughter.

The afore-mentioned narratives under observation maintain the paradigm in the functions and roles of the characters in the folktales common in the fact that the functions are stable regardless how independent the characters are and under what circumstances the relevant functions are fulfilled. The pattern in the functions maintained by the characters is a “fixed sequence”, “rather than themes or plot details.” (Propp, 1968)

Conveying Plumwood’s theory of homogenisation in the dualistic relationship between step-mother/step-daughter in the folktales “Sandrembi and Cheishra”, “Uchek Langmeidong,” “Haoshi Namoinu” and “Hingchabigi Wari,” the fact that the step-daughters in the second terms are exceedingly made use of, around the house by the step-mothers, yet denying being depended on,

lays the base foundation for the theory of homogenisation. It is to the advantage of the step-mothers that the step-daughters initiate assistance in the house chores under compulsion. Yet, the step-mothers in the first terms, fails to identify the character step-daughters as individuals with kind hearts. The perspective of the step-mother appertains to the fact that the act of assisting the step-mothers is regarded a labour in exchange of the protection and food provided to the step-daughters by the step-mothers. The labour extended by Sandrembi in the narrative is under no circumstances referred to as a kind gesture of a daughter to a mother but it is in fact, associated with a stereotyped personality of a step-daughter developed in the society, who is imposed by a step-mother to do chores under compulsion with torture and abuse.

However, the folktale “Lai Khutsangbi” departs from the duality of step-mother/step-daughter, as the narrative focuses on a story of a long-armed witch, living on the flesh of the ordinary weaker women, who are not attended or rarely attended by their male counterparts as it can be pictured in the case of a widow with no husband or a son to accompany with, or having a very limited circle of friends. And as a matter of fact, a question arises here- as to why not a target on a man or a boy? The question in fact takes the variable to the point that- a woman as in the witch in the narrative, rather intends to make attempts, imposing threats to her own sex of weaker kinds. It is fundamental to note that the step-mothers in Sandrembi and Cheishra targets the step-daughter but not the step-son, which is almost out of the picture in the narratives, apart from an introduction of its existence at the very expositional part of the narrative, way before the climax, falling action and denouement hit the narrative. Having assessed the analysis in the narratives, the structure of this analysis shapes up to form the bottom-line that the entire nature of female and male is operated in terms of a food-chain, a hierarchical chain; where the stronger sex treats the weaker sex with discrimination and in contextualising the folktales, that is to conclude that women have the potential to abuse her own

sex of the vulnerable kinds like female kids and young step-daughters. In “Lai Khutsangbi”, psychologically stronger witch/ physically weak women victims is the dualistic pair maintained. And in critically homogenising the pair, it is found that the ordinary victims are homogenised by the long-armed witch in the tale and in not making attempts to identify the victims in terms of its mental and physical strengths, the witch meets her own doom.

Even though, the folktale, “Lai Khutsangbi” is considerably different from the rest of the four, in the sense that it is based not on the duality step-mother/step-daughter duality, all the five folktales form one common duality- psychologically and physically stronger female/psychologically and physically weaker female. Psychologically stronger in the sense that the psychological consciousness of possessing power over the another- the consciousness that certain elements are intimidated by the power, in fact, makes one psychologically stronger and the other weaker psychologically. With reference to these five narratives, the comparative psychological process of being conscious of the strength of their own is derived from their being aware of their own physical strengths in comparison to their predators or preys. Moreover, the questions like- why does the study execute an-in-depth study of gender dynamics in the folktales in particular? and how the gender dynamics rendered in the folktales relevant to the real-life scenario? are the chief interest of this research. A comprehensive answer directs to the fact that any sort of fiction is a construct of art, which projects a possible existence of it in real settings (Vischer, 18 Feb, 2024).

Conclusion

As much as the theory of homogenisation is delivered on account of the dualistic relationship between the coloniser/the colonised and the male/female in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, the study effectively extends the theory of homogenisation concerning the dualism psychologically and physically strong female/psychologically and physically weak female. The fact that the

colonisers are unconcerned to learn the entity of their colonised counterpart categorically, corresponds to the step-mothers in all the four narratives paying no heed to understand the labour extended by the step-daughters as the kind gestures of an individual; yet the gestures initiated are in fact acquainted with the stereo-typed labour of the step-daughters prevalent in the society. Additionally, the long-armed witch's understanding of the physical and psychological strengths of her female preys is rather homogenised; making no attempts to identify the victims before making attacks.

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Tech Meets Language: Exploring India's Evolving Learning Ecosystem

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Abstract

India's linguistic diversity is one of the richest and most complex globally, with over 22 scheduled languages and hundreds of dialects shaping everyday communication. This multilingual tapestry presents significant challenges and opportunities within the realm of education, particularly language learning. The intersection of advancing technologies and language education in India is creating innovative frameworks that leverage digital tools to make learning more inclusive, accessible, and effective. This article explores India's evolving language learning ecosystem, emphasizing the role of technology—from AI-powered language tools to government-supported digital platforms—and the country's efforts to preserve linguistic diversity while improving educational outcomes. Key government initiatives such as Bhashini, SWAYAM, and Anuvadini facilitate digital vernacular education and language preservation. Despite significant progress, challenges remain, including the digital divide, content quality disparities, and the need for teacher training to handle multilingual classrooms effectively. This paper assesses India's linguistic landscape in education, evaluates technology-driven transformation fueled by AI and digital infrastructure, and considers future prospects for an equitable, multilingual language learning ecosystem. It highlights the critical synergy of culture and technology in shaping India's educational future, particularly through the lens of the National Education Policy 2020 that prioritizes mother tongue learning up to at least grade 5. The article

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concludes with reflections on bridging gaps and scaling innovations for a truly inclusive learning environment across India's diverse linguistic communities ¹³⁵.

Keywords: language learning, digital tools, artificial intelligence (AI), digital vernacular education, language preservation

Introduction

India's linguistic diversity is among the richest and most complex in the world, shaping not only its cultural identity but also its educational landscape. With 22 officially scheduled languages and hundreds of regional tongues spoken across the country, India represents a vibrant multilingual society. This linguistic plurality presents both opportunities and challenges for education, where language plays a crucial role as both a medium of instruction and a cultural anchor. Historically, the dominance of English, a vestige of colonial legacy, has created disparities between regions and socio-economic groups, often marginalizing those whose mother tongue differs from the classroom language.

In response, the 2020 National Education Policy (NEP) marks a transformative moment for the country's education system by advocating for education in the mother tongue or regional language until at least the fifth grade. This emphasis on multilingual instruction recognizes that early education in one's native language significantly enhances cognitive development, conceptual understanding, and knowledge retention. By valuing linguistic diversity as an asset rather than a barrier, the NEP seeks to reshape how learning is experienced across India's diverse classrooms.

Parallel to policy evolution, technological advancements have emerged as catalysts for democratizing language learning. The widespread adoption of affordable smartphones and internet connectivity has brought digital learning within reach of millions. Artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, and language processing technologies now support vernacular education through tools like speech recognition, translation platforms, and AI tutors that provide personalized learning experiences. Mobile apps and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) in regional languages enable learners to access education beyond geographical and linguistic barriers.

Yet, these promising developments coexist with persistent challenges. The digital divide, uneven infrastructure, disparities in content quality, and the need for educator training to handle multilingual classrooms remain significant hurdles. Furthermore, while early mother tongue instruction is emphasized, higher education and competitive exams largely continue in English, creating a linguistic transition challenge for many learners. Urban-rural divides and socio-economic inequalities exacerbate these issues, demanding comprehensive solutions that integrate technology, policy, and pedagogy sensitively.

This article explores the dynamic intersection of technology and language education in India, examining how digital tools, government initiatives, and artificial intelligence converge to create an evolving language learning ecosystem. It highlights ongoing efforts to preserve linguistic heritage while promoting educational equity and inclusion. By analyzing India's multilingual educational context, digital transformation advances, and the role of AI-powered language technologies, this article provides an in-depth understanding of the opportunities and constraints shaping the future of learning in India.

As India continues to integrate technology into its diverse educational fabric, the synthesis of tradition and innovation holds the promise of making quality language education accessible to every learner. This exploration aims to shed light on the various dimensions of this evolution—from regional language empowerment to AI-driven multilingual tools—demonstrating how technology is not only transforming education but also reinforcing India's cultural and linguistic richness in the 21st century. The journey toward a truly inclusive and equitable learning ecosystem requires sustained commitment from policymakers, educators, technologists, and communities alike, fostering a future where language diversity is celebrated and learning is universally accessible ^{1 2 3 5 6}.

India's Linguistic Landscape and Learning Challenges

India is often celebrated for its unparalleled linguistic diversity, which is both a source of cultural richness and a fundamental challenge in education. According to the 2011 Census, India is home to 22 officially recognized scheduled languages and many hundreds of other languages and dialects—estimated around 780 by the People's Linguistic Survey of India. The major language families in India include Indo-Aryan, spoken by about 78% of the population; Dravidian

(approximately 20%); Austroasiatic; and Tibeto-Burman, among others. Hindi reigns as the most widely spoken first language at about 43.6% of the population, followed by Bengali (8%), Marathi (7%), Telugu (7%), Tamil (5.7%), and several others each spoken by millions. English, though spoken as a first language by less than 1%, remains a critical secondary language and serves as an important medium of instruction and administration across large parts of the country²³.

This linguistic multiplicity introduces considerable complexity into the Indian education system, where language is not only a medium of instruction but also a cultural identity marker. The three-language formula, intended to equip students with proficiency in their regional language, Hindi, and English, has been variably implemented—with urban centers often privileging English and Hindi, while rural and tribal areas primarily rely on regional tongues. This uneven implementation has resulted in disparities around language learning, negatively impacting school retention and learning outcomes, especially among marginalized groups.

One significant challenge is the language of instruction mismatch. Many children in rural or tribal areas enter schools where the medium of instruction is neither their mother tongue nor a language they comfortably understand. This disconnect has been linked to high dropout rates and poor foundational learning skills. Research and international experience support early education in the mother tongue or local language as beneficial for cognitive development and conceptual clarity. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020's emphasis on mother tongue instruction up to Grade 5 recognizes these findings and calls for a shift from the dominant English-medium schooling trend to more culturally and linguistically sensitive pedagogy.

However, while embracing mother tongue instruction at the primary level is gaining policy traction, the transition to secondary and higher education often reverts to English, which remains the lingua franca of higher education, governance, and employment. This creates a linguistic divide; students must bridge different languages as they advance, often without adequate language support. Such language shifts can hinder student confidence, subject mastery, and participation, particularly for socioeconomically disadvantaged learners.

Teacher preparedness is another critical challenge. Many educators lack training in multilingual teaching methodologies, especially in integrating regional languages with national and global

languages within the classroom context. Further, resource constraints limit the availability of high-quality teaching materials in many minority languages, impacting curriculum delivery and student engagement.

The issue of endangered languages further complicates the linguistic landscape. India's rich repository of tribal and minority languages faces the threat of extinction due to declining numbers of speakers and the dominance of major languages. This presents a cultural and educational dilemma: preserving linguistic heritage while ensuring children can effectively participate in mainstream education and economic opportunities.

Multilingual classrooms have become increasingly common, especially in urban and migrant-heavy areas, requiring pedagogical flexibility and resource diversification. Educators must address varied linguistic backgrounds within a single classroom, an often overlooked but crucial aspect of India's educational challenges.

In summary, India's linguistic diversity enriches its identity but demands innovative educational strategies and policy interventions. The NEP 2020's focus on multilingualism and mother tongue instruction marks progress, yet operationalizing this vision requires addressing the language-of-instruction mismatch, improving teacher training, resource development, and creating supportive transition frameworks. Bridging these gaps is essential for equitable educational access and fostering inclusive growth that respects and leverages India's linguistic plurality.

These complexities underscore the need for technology-enabled solutions, layered with policy support and community involvement, to transform language education in India while preserving its diverse linguistic heritage ^{4 11 5 12 2 3}.

Digital Transformation in Language Education

India's language education is undergoing a profound transformation driven by rapid advancements in digital technology. The convergence of affordable internet access, mobile device penetration, and breakthroughs in artificial intelligence (AI) and natural language processing (NLP) is reshaping how language learning happens across the country's diverse linguistic landscape. This digital revolution aligns closely with the National Education Policy

(NEP) 2020's emphasis on multilingual and mother tongue instruction, making education more inclusive and accessible than ever before.

One of the central pillars of this transformation is the development and deployment of AI-powered multilingual platforms such as Bhashini and BharatGen. These government-backed initiatives use cutting-edge AI models for machine translation, text-to-speech, speech recognition, and conversational agents in all 22 scheduled Indian languages and numerous dialects. By enabling seamless, real-time translation and voice-enabled interfaces, these platforms break down linguistic barriers to digital education and public services. For example, BharatGen leverages data repositories like SPPEL (Scheme for Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages) and Sanchika to train AI models that power educational and governance applications, ensuring that digital content is accessible in a learner's mother tongue.

Alongside language-AI, large-scale digital education platforms like SWAYAM serve as a backbone for nationwide multilingual content delivery. As of mid-2025, over 5 crore learners have enrolled on SWAYAM, accessing curriculum-aligned courses and study materials in multiple Indian languages. The government has mandated that all school and higher education textbooks be available digitally in regional languages within three years, accelerating content localization and digital inclusion. Together, these initiatives support schools, ed-tech firms, and higher-education institutions to deliver localized, interactive learning materials and teacher aids. This fusion of language technology and digital pedagogy bridges comprehension gaps and empowers learners at scale.

The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated adoption of digital tools, prompting innovations such as AI-driven personalized learning apps, gamified language learning, virtual classrooms, and hybrid models combining online and offline resources. Adaptive learning platforms tailor content difficulty and provide continuous feedback, enhancing engagement and retention. Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) applications are also beginning to offer immersive language learning experiences, especially for younger learners.

However, challenges remain. Despite progress, less than 60% of Indian schools currently have reliable internet access, and a significant digital divide persists between urban and rural areas. Content quality in many regional languages needs improvement, requiring continuous

investment in localized curriculum development. Teacher training programs have expanded remarkably, with millions gaining digital literacy and pedagogical skills, yet more are needed to effectively integrate multilingual digital instruction.

Moreover, policy frameworks are evolving to regulate data privacy and promote equitable technology adoption, with efforts to incentivize rural school modernization and bridge connectivity gaps. Public-private partnerships are integral to scaling digital education, bringing in expertise and innovation. In sum, India's digital transformation in language education is an ongoing, multifaceted evolution. Harnessing AI and computational linguistics innovations alongside robust digital infrastructure and policy support positions India as a global leader in multilingual education technology. This transformation not only enhances educational inclusion but also revitalizes India's linguistic diversity, ensuring its vibrant languages continue as functional vehicles of knowledge and culture in the digital age ^{1 5 3 4 6 7}.

Government Initiatives and Language Technology Ecosystem

The Government of India has been proactive in fostering a robust language technology ecosystem aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020's vision of multilingual education and mother tongue instruction as foundational pillars. Recognizing the country's vast linguistic diversity, policy and technology interventions have sought to promote the use, preservation, and development of Indian languages across education and digital platforms.

A landmark step in this direction is the government-backed Bhashini AI platform, which provides AI-powered services such as real-time translation, speech recognition, and text-to-speech capabilities in 22 scheduled languages. These innovations aim to bridge linguistic divides by enabling digital content and government services to be accessible in regional languages, thus ensuring inclusivity for millions of students and citizens.

In parallel, the Ministry of Education has pushed for digital education through programs like SWAYAM that offer multilingual curriculum-aligned courses, providing access to quality content in regional languages. Digital publication of school and higher education textbooks in all scheduled languages is underway, with initiatives like the Bharatiya Bhasha Pustak Scheme aiming to make study materials available digitally in 22 Indian languages within a few years.

Several new initiatives have further strengthened the language technology landscape. Partnerships between the University Grants Commission (UGC) and Bharatiya Bhasha Samiti have led to ASMITA, an ambitious project to produce 22,000 textbooks in 22 languages, making higher education resources more inclusive. The Bahubhasha Shabdkosh project is creating a comprehensive multilingual dictionary repository, a vital tool for linguistic research and learning.

Real-time Translation Architecture developed by the National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) facilitates seamless translation across Indian languages, contributing significantly to breaking language barriers in education and governance. Such technology supports the NEP's goal of using mother tongue/local languages as the medium of instruction at least up to Grade 5 and preferably up to Grade 8. State-level initiatives reflect localized responses to these national policies. For example, some states have actively enforced the three-language formula aligned with NEP, incorporating regional languages alongside Hindi and English from earlier grades. Multilingual teacher education programs, including the Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP), have been launched to equip educators with skills to teach in linguistically diverse classrooms using digital tools.

Public awareness campaigns like Bharat Bhasha Utsav aim to instill pride and appreciation for native languages among students, linking cultural heritage with educational outcomes. Expanding digital infrastructure in rural and underserved areas remains a priority to ensure the reach of these programs. Together, these government initiatives represent a cohesive strategy to build a sustainable, scalable, and inclusive language learning ecosystem. By leveraging cutting-edge technology, policy reform, and grassroots engagement, India is working toward preserving its linguistic heritage while democratizing education for future generations ²⁴⁵⁶¹⁸.

AI-Powered Language Tools and Multilingual Access

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become a transformative force in India's language education landscape, addressing the country's linguistic diversity and localized learning needs with unprecedented precision and scale. With the government and ed-tech sector embracing AI-driven innovation, a new generation of language tools is emerging that empowers both learners and educators by offering multilingual, personalized, and accessible educational experiences.

Key AI platforms such as Bhashini and BharatGen stand out for their pioneering work in multilingual support. Bhashini provides comprehensive AI-driven services including speech recognition, neural machine translation, and text-to-speech capabilities in all 22 scheduled Indian languages, facilitating content creation and access in learners' mother tongues. BharatGen complements these capabilities by building advanced AI models designed to convert text and speech across languages in real time. These platforms leverage vast linguistic databases like SPPEL and Sanchika, which include tribal languages, folklore, and oral traditions, ensuring inclusivity even for historically under-resourced languages. AI also powers classroom and individual learning tools extensively. Indian schools and students are increasingly using AI-enabled personalized tutoring systems that adapt to learners' pace and style, offering practice, assessments, and explanations in multiple languages. Apps like Khan Academy's AI tutor and Duolingo's language learning tools include vernacular support, allowing students to interact in Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, and other regional languages, fostering better comprehension and engagement.

Additionally, AI accelerates educational efficiency by automating grading, attendance, and lesson plan creation, giving teachers more time for personal interaction. Voice-activated interfaces and gesture recognition make AI tools accessible to learners with varying abilities, promoting inclusiveness. Multilingual chatbots provide round-the-clock language practice and query resolution, bridging gaps for students lacking private tutoring.

Furthermore, the integration of AI with low-bandwidth and offline capabilities helps overcome infrastructure challenges prevalent in rural areas. Machine learning algorithms optimize content delivery based on regional dialects and cultural contexts, making learning more relatable and effective.

However, implementing AI-based language tools involves challenges like algorithmic bias, data privacy, and the need for localized datasets to improve AI accuracy for rare languages. Ethical AI deployment and collaboration among linguistic experts, technologists, and communities are vital to creating trustworthy and culturally sensitive tools.

In summary, AI-powered language education tools are crucial pillars of India's evolving multilingual learning ecosystem. By making digital education accessible in native languages and

adapting to individual learner needs, AI not only boosts academic outcomes but also supports linguistic preservation and cultural identity. As AI technologies continue to mature, their role in bridging educational divides and fostering inclusive multilingualism will be indispensable to India's educational future^{2 1 4 5 6 7 8}.

Challenges and Opportunities in the Evolving Ecosystem

India's evolving language learning ecosystem, powered by technology, embodies great promise but faces significant challenges that must be addressed to realize its full potential. The persistent digital divide remains the most formidable barrier. Although internet penetration and smartphone usage have grown rapidly, a substantial portion of rural and marginalized communities still struggles with unreliable connectivity, lack of devices, and inconsistent electricity supply. According to recent studies, nearly 40-60% of school children in rural areas lack effective access to digital learning resources, limiting the reach of online education initiatives. Without equitable hardware access, digital education risks deepening existing educational disparities instead of bridging them.

Teacher preparedness and digital literacy constitute another crucial challenge. Many educators are unfamiliar with integrating technology into their pedagogy or lack training in digital language tools. This gap compromises the efficacy of digital interventions, especially in multilingual classrooms where teachers must navigate complex language dynamics and adapt technology to diverse learners' needs. Continuous professional development programs and supportive learning communities for educators are essential to enhance digital competence and pedagogical innovation. Additionally, students may resist technology-enabled learning due to anxiety, unfamiliarity, or preference for traditional classroom interaction, necessitating careful change management.

Content quality and linguistic inclusivity present critical concerns. While initiatives to develop digital textbooks and materials in multiple Indian languages are advancing, the availability of engaging, curriculum-aligned, culturally relevant content remains inadequate for many regional languages. Fragmented content development efforts sometimes result in inconsistent learning experiences. Moreover, some minority and tribal languages remain underrepresented due to limited digital resources and data.

Infrastructure issues extend beyond connectivity. Many schools lack adequate electrical outlets, hardware maintenance facilities, and cybersecurity protocols, which are vital for sustainable digital learning environments. These infrastructural deficits hinder scaling and reliability of technology-based education.

Despite these challenges, opportunities abound. The government's ambitious investments in digital infrastructure, AI research, and language technology platforms like Bhashini demonstrate commitment to overcoming barriers. Expanding public-private partnerships could harness private sector innovation and resource efficiency. Offline and low-bandwidth digital learning solutions offer ways to reach connectivity-poor regions. AI-powered personalized learning and real-time analytics provide possibilities for adaptive education tailored to diverse learner profiles. Strengthening localized content creation, teacher training, and digital inclusion programs will build a robust ecosystem capable of equitable multilingual education.

Strategic, impact-driven implementation, emphasizing accessibility, quality, and cultural sensitivity, is crucial. By addressing these challenges through coordinated policy, technology, and community engagement, India can transform its language learning landscape—preserving its rich linguistic heritage while enabling pluralistic and inclusive education for all learners^{1 2 3 5 7 6 8}.

Conclusion

India's evolving language learning ecosystem stands at the confluence of its rich linguistic diversity and the transformative power of digital technology. The country is uniquely positioned to leverage cutting-edge innovations such as artificial intelligence, natural language processing, and expansive digital repositories to democratize education and empower learners in their mother tongues and regional languages. Government initiatives like Bhashini, BharatGen, and SWAYAM, combined with new platforms supporting tribal and lesser-known languages, reflect a coordinated effort to preserve India's linguistic heritage while making education inclusive and accessible to all.

The National Education Policy 2020's emphasis on mother tongue instruction up to at least Grade 5—preferably until Grade 8—signals a paradigm shift in pedagogical approaches, recognizing language as a vessel of culture and cognition. Digital transformation, marked by AI-

powered multilingual tools, personalized learning applications, and digitally published vernacular content, addresses historical challenges related to language barriers and educational equity. Together, they create an ecosystem where language is no longer a barrier but a bridge to knowledge and opportunity.

Nevertheless, realizing this vision requires overcoming persistent challenges—digital divides in infrastructure and access, gaps in teacher training and digital literacy, content quality disparities in regional languages, and ethical considerations around AI deployment. Sustained investment, public-private collaboration, and inclusive policy-making must focus on infrastructure expansion, capacity-building, content localization, and community engagement.

Looking ahead, the synergy of technology, policy, and cultural sensitivity can enable India to become a global leader in multilingual education technology. By making its vast linguistic heritage vibrant and functional in the digital age, India will not only promote educational inclusion but also foster socio-economic development and cultural sustainability. This journey toward a digitally empowered, linguistically diverse educational future will define India's identity and innovation for decades to come, ensuring that its many languages remain living mediums of knowledge, creativity, and opportunity for all citizens.

In conclusion, “Tech Meets Language” in India is more than just infusing technology into education—it is about nurturing the essence of India's plurality through a digitally inclusive learning ecosystem that bridges gaps, enriches experiences, and empowers every learner to thrive. This evolving ecosystem promises a future where tradition and innovation coalesce for an equitable, multilingual society poised for global engagement and sustained growth^{1 5 3 4 6 7}.

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