

THE POLITICS OF VOICE: HOW CONTEMPORARY INDIAN NOVELS CHALLENGE SOCIAL HIERARCHIES

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the representation of social inequality and resistance in four contemporary Indian novels through the lens of discourse analysis, focusing on how language, narrative strategies, and characterization construct, contest, and negotiate systems of power. Drawing upon theories from critical discourse analysis (CDA) and postcolonial studies, the research explores how caste, class, gender, and religion intersect to shape social hierarchies and collective struggles in modern Indian fiction. The selected novels—spanning authors from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds—reflect India's multifaceted social realities and reveal how literary discourse functions as both a mirror and critique of society. Through a close reading of textual forms—dialogue, narrative voice, and symbolic representation—the study investigates how marginalized voices articulate resistance against dominant ideologies. It considers how the authors employ linguistic subversion, irony, and counter-narratives to expose structural oppression and challenge hegemonic norms. The novels are analyzed not merely as cultural artifacts but as sites of ideological struggle, where the politics of representation plays a crucial role in shaping readers' understanding of social justice and transformation. The research situates these novels within the larger framework of contemporary Indian socio-political contexts, including neoliberalism, communal tensions, and the persistence of caste-based discrimination. It highlights how literary discourse enables an alternative mode of resistance—through storytelling, re-appropriation of language, and reimagining of identities. By analyzing patterns of inclusion, exclusion, and silence, the study demonstrates how the texts contribute to the ongoing discourse on equality, dignity, and emancipation in postcolonial India.

Keywords: discourse analysis social inequality, social hierarchies, contemporary Indian novels

INTRODUCTION

Critical discourse analysis departs significantly from discourse analysis in its use of a more critical perspective, but otherwise they are rather similar. You can build this critical outlook or perspective on top of three pillars. The first is coming to see all societal issues through the lens of systemic or institutional difficulties. To illustrate, critical discourse analysis views societal problems like poverty, educational failures, and racial tensions as emanating from the society's systemic and institutional flaws. Rather of seeing them as distinct problems with straightforward solutions, it sees them as interconnected problems with their origins in the political or institutional structures. The second is that, primarily in literary works, critical discourse analysis seeks to critique what are seen as unfair systemic issues or social misfortunes in writings. Three, critical discourse analysis seeks to improve the society it examines. As a result of its focus on power dynamics, critical discourse analysis accomplishes all of these goals by illuminating the ways in which different viewpoints use language to build meaning relative to one another. As Jan Blommaert and Chris Bulcaen have stated. Language, discourse, and speech as well as its social structures are at the center of critical discourse analysis (CDA). The

critical dimension of CDA research is found in the researchers' identification of problematic social structure effects on discourse patterns, relations, and models (such as power relations and ideological effects) and their subsequent treatment of these relations as such. Exposing the societal aspects of language use is insufficient. These aspects are up for moral and political scrutiny, and the results of such scrutiny should have societal impacts, such as elevating the voiceless, revealing instances of abuse of power, and galvanizing support for social justice movements. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) advocates interventionism within the social activities it analyzes. even goes so far as to prescribe changes, saying that CDA should suggest updates and modifications to certain discourses. Therefore, CDA boldly declares its dedication to empowerment, change, and a focus on practice. Satire is one literary device that goes beyond the sentence to employ critical discourse analysis. The Chinese premier is satirically addressed in Aravind Adiga's *White Tiger*, a critique of the institutional flaws of postcolonial Indian society. The writing style is that of a conversational letter, and it uses colloquial terms of black humor and satire. As Alexander Adkins claims *The White Tiger* changes the hero from a country fighting neo-colonial forces to a misanthropic rogue who represents the invasion of neoliberalism into the developing world by giving the words of free enterprise to an illiterate immigrant who equates being successful as an entrepreneur with being willing to engage in bribery, extortion, and murder. "The novel's satire works not by caricaturing the normal agents of neoliberalism but, rather, by 'speaking otherwise'—an allegorical mode where the servant appropriates the language of his employer, the underclass the language of economic success, and the criminal the mantras of the entrepreneur," said Betty Joseph. Balram's double-edged storyline serves as both the target and the instrument of the novel's satire; it signifies the rise of a new economic subjectivity and discourse and the transformation of disgust from an opposing force into an ideology of global capitalism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mahbuba Sultana et.al [2025] This research compares and contrasts two major pieces of contemporary literature that deal with socioeconomic class: *A House for Mr. Biswas* by V.S. Naipaul and *Clear Light of the Day* by Anita Desai. In postcolonial contexts, both books explore the intricate web of interactions influenced by class dynamics among families and communities. In Naipaul's work, we follow Mr. Biswas as he fights for independence and self-discovery in the face of Trinidad's social stratification. The dynamic between individual ambitions and societal norms is emphasized in Desai's *Clear Light of the Day*, which focuses on the changing dynamics within an Indian middle-class family. This study examines how authors attack entrenched class structures and their repercussions for individual agency through themes such as economic dependency, identity development, and generational conflict. By contrasting postcolonial settings in India and the Caribbean, this study highlights the commonality of class struggles while also illuminating their distinctive sociocultural complexities.

Dr. Sarala Kisan Sanap et.al [2024] Examining the gender dynamics and female characters' difficulties, empowerment, and resistance in post-colonial Indian novels written in English today, this research study explores the representation of women in Indian literature. This

analysis delves into the way gender interacts with caste, class, and the ways in which globalization shapes the identities and lives of women in these works. This article delves into novels written by well-known Indian authors like Jhumpa Lahiri, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and others to shed light on the intricate nature of women's roles in both contemporary and traditional settings. Modern Indian writing has placed a stronger emphasis on feminist topics, yet patriarchal norms and cultural expectations still limit how women are portrayed as possessing agency. The essay contends that the novels' depictions of women mirror the continuous struggle between modernity and tradition; the women portrayed in these books challenge societal standards, stand up for themselves, and fight against patriarchal systems.

K.Jaya Prakash Narayana Reddy et.al [2023] Mulk Raj Anand was a major character in Indian literature, and this article takes a sociolinguistic tour of his works. By dissecting Anand's novels' linguistic choices, we can see how language reflects colonial and post-colonial India's complicated web of socioeconomic inequality and the struggle for social justice. We shed light on the connectivity of gendered language choices, code-switching, dialects, and linguistic variances made by Anand's characters with themes of justice and inequality through our work. We examine how characters' language choices are closely tied to their economic status, providing insights into their goals, challenges, and social mobility, in the sociolinguistic study of socioeconomic disparities. Simultaneously, we explore language aspects that support the social justice theme, illuminating the characters' efforts to confront injustices through language agency. Understanding the sociocultural dynamics present in Anand's literary work requires an appreciation of the complex relationship between language, power, and social norms, all of which are illuminated by these sociolinguistic characteristics.

Solveig Hillesund et.al [2022] Would you say that members of oppressed ethnic groups are more likely to choose violent over peaceful political tactics? Civil war is a common focal point for studies of horizontal inequality. Looking beyond civil war and into individual involvement in different forms of conflict, this essay dives below the macro level. Due to differences in opportunity structures, various forms and combinations of ethnic disadvantage encourage involvement in various conflicts. When people are politically excluded, it inspires them to take charge, which in turn helps to form movements. Due to a lack of financial resources, nonviolent strategies have a lower chance of success. This article uses several inequality constellations to plot certain aspects of groups' opportunity structures. They deliberately discourage participation in demonstrations when they occur in tandem with political exclusion. For political disadvantages alone, the evidence is less solid, but it does suggest toward more people being involved in protests.

Feminism and Gender Dynamics in Contemporary Indian Novels

Novels written in modern India provide a rare glimpse into the changing nature of gender roles and feminist thinking in the country. Novels like this provide a wealth of material for studying the ways in which cultural standards and social mores impact people's lives, both positively and negatively. The complex stories told in modern Indian literature shed light on the complex gender roles, the empowerment of women, and the obstacles presented by patriarchal societies.

The intersection of caste, class, religion, and geography has long been an important part of India's feminist movement. This diversity is encapsulated in modern Indian writing, which gives a voice to many different perspectives. The works of authors like Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Arundhati Roy among many others that skillfully combine personal and political stories have garnered them widespread acclaim. These writers provide new perspectives on femininity and gender relations via their narratives, which question conventional gender norms. Consider "The God of Small Things," a moving examination of patriarchy and caste that Arundhati Roy wrote.

Caste and Social Exclusion in Indian Novels

Many works of Indian literature vividly depict the persistence of caste-based prejudice and exclusion in modern Indian culture. The special dehumanization and brutality that Dalits face on a daily basis has been brought to light via literature by Dalit writers. Although there is a wealth of Dalit writing in regional languages, the prominence of Dalit authors writing in English has grown in the last several decades. The cruel reality of caste oppression is explored in one of the earliest works by Mulk Raj Anand, *Untouchable* (1935), through the character of Bakha, a young Dalit child. A criticism of the Hindu caste system and a depiction of the degrading consequences of untouchability are seen in Anand's work. by Omprakash Valmiki gives a first-person perspective on Dalit living in rural India and the social and psychological struggles that Dalits encounter. His story reveals the discrimination, brutality, and shame that Dalits face and emphasizes their fight for equality and respect. As Arundhati Roy demonstrates in *The God of Small Things*, the caste system is present in all facets of life, from the most private relationships to the operations of the state, and she so criticizes it. A love affair between Ammu and Velutha is shattered by the caste system, which reflects how individuals internalize caste-based divisions and let them shape their relationships and decisions.

Feminist Themes and Resistance

Feminist critiques of the pervasive patriarchy in Indian society have recently emerged as prominent subjects in modern Indian fiction, especially written by female authors. Defeating the systems that keep women at a disadvantage is just as important as reaching personal accomplishment for the female protagonists in these books. As tools for investigating the nuances of sexuality, autonomy, and the reproductive politics, women's bodies frequently serve as locations of resistance. Both the male-dominated political environment and the limiting conceptions of femininity are obstacles that Draupadi faces in *The Palace of Illusions*. As a protagonist, she fights for her own identity by rejecting the submissive roles that women usually play in epic stories. Thus, Divakaruni questions the conventional wisdom that women are either helpless victims of male dominance or docile objects of male dominance.

Women and the Impact of Globalization

Many modern Indian novels center on the ways in which globalization has changed the lives of women. Gender roles are shifting in modern Indian culture as a result of women's increased educational and occupational options and the country's growing economic integration with the global economy. The paradoxes of contemporary life and the persistence of conventional gender standards, however, frequently impede these changes. Globalization has widened the

divide between India's wealthy and poor, according to Aravind Adiga's argument in *The White Tiger* (2008). The gendered ramifications of the country's modernization are revealed in the story, which mostly centers on the problems of men like Balram. Even though they are members of a Westernized, globalized elite, the female characters—like Pinky Madam—are nevertheless confined by traditional gender norms. Women of the new global class experience the same conflicts as Pinky Madam had when she emotionally distant herself from her husband and decided to leave him. Despite having access to new kinds of autonomy, they are nevertheless ensnared in traditional gendered roles.

METHODOLOGY

A pragmatic method is taken in this research to analyze the discourse of four chosen Indian English novels. The theory of speech act and the principle of cooperation are applied. Using Searle's theory of speech acts and Grice's concept of collaboration, the three novels—*The White Tiger* and *A Corpse Bearer*—that make up the fourth and final chapter will be analyzed. Speech act theory delves into various avenues for analyzing the novels' utterances through the lens of their production context, which includes the fictional characters' intentions, attitudes, expectations, relationships, and, more broadly, the unspoken norms and standards that are believed to be at work during the production and reception of utterances. An approach to novels known as the "speech act method" directly satisfies the requirement to correlate "Literariness" with formal textual properties by viewing fictional works as speech acts that occur in speech situations and assume a shared body of knowledge among the involved parties (readers, writers, and characters). The investigation of the fictional work's implied ideals and transcendent significance actually rises above such characteristics. Dialogues are spoken between the characters in *A Corpse Bearer* and *The White Tiger*. There are a lot of cooperative principles and maxims that characters and participants follow in order to have fruitful conversations, but occasionally they disobey, exploit, or break these maxims to set themselves up for an implicature.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Discourse Analysis Of The Inheritance Of Loss And Disorderly Women

As has been already discussed in the third chapter, John Searle used the notion of illocutionary point to classify speech acts into five major categories. The four selected novels under the study have been analyzed within the framework of these five major speech acts called assertives, commissives, expressives, directives, and declaratives. Below the utterances selected from the four novels are categorized either in one of these five types of speech acts and then analyzed against the contextual background in which they occur in fictional discourse.

Assertive Speech Acts (ASERSAs)

The White Tiger and *A Corpse Bearer* mostly include strong speaking acts, as mentioned earlier in chapter three. They play an equally prominent role in *Disorderly Women* and *The Inheritance of Loss*. The following verbs fall within this category: to assert, to state, to criticize, to accuse, to suggest, to complain, to dispute, to deny, to hypothesize, to predict, to react, to conclude, etc. This study uses the following quotes from *Disorderly Women* and *The Inheritance of Loss* to demonstrate the use of forceful discourse.

Gyan is irritated that he had to walk so far in the cold for such a little sum that the judge paid him, so one day he is late getting to Cho Oyu. Sai tries to cheer him up by reminding him about the Christmas party when he's late and unhappy, but Gyan just ignores her and yawns instead. When Sai asks him why, he says he's bored with her. He then goes on to say, "I am not interested in Christmas!" before asking, "Why do you celebrate Christmas?" He informs her that she is a Hindu who does not observe any of the major Hindu festivals, including Navami, Durga Puja, Guru Nanak's birthday, Eid, or the Tibetan New Year. He goes on to accuse and criticize her for the same reason, using the following expression.

By drawing a clear comparison between Sai and slaves, Gyan has used the aggressive speech act to condemn Sai. Because Sai would rather celebrate Christmas than any Hindu celebration, he is accusing her of being a slave. Gyan accuses her of straying from Indian culture in favor of Western values, saying that she is ashamed of herself for pursuing Western religion and culture while ignoring her own. He goes on to say that she is to blame for the Indian people's inability to fully embrace either Western or Indian culture. In a roundabout way, he implies that they don't exist due of Sai and others like him. By not caring about Christmas, Gyan shows his anti-Western bias, whereas Sai shows her pro-Western bias by responding to Gyan with "If I want to celebrate Christmas, I will, and if I don't want to celebrate Diwali, then I won't." Gyan and Sai have diametrically opposed ideologies, and this conduct demonstrates that. The novel's central conflict, between Indians and Westerners, is illuminated by this incident.

A great deal of forceful discourse is displayed in Disorderly Women. We will be analyzing two of them here. Seshagiri Rao is overjoyed to see Vasudeva after all these years; nevertheless, Kamala declines Rao's invitation to meet with him. Here, Kamala does the following forceful speech act to deny seeing Vasudeva.

Kamala implies that she dislikes her father for turning down Vasudeva's marriage proposal by refusing to see him when he visits Himalaya, even after all these years. While she does reveal her father's identity, she uses the hypothetical question "Who is he?" to avoid receiving an answer from him, despite the fact that she has known him well since childhood. Here, she acts uninterested in Vasudeva due to the fact that everything has changed; she consciously chooses not to acknowledge Vasudeva in an effort to make her father regret his mistake. The use of the hypothetical question "What is he to me?" by Kamala forces Seshagiri Rao to recall and comprehend Vasudeva's affection for her. Another rhetorical question she uses in the same speech act is "Why should I see everyone that passes by on the street and comes in?" This question suggests that her father never allowed her to marry whoever she wanted. Additionally, by asserting that she will see whoever she pleases and not her father, she challenges his authority over her. In this passage, Kamala implies, though obliquely, that she will not comply with her father's orders and will instead make her own decisions about who to meet and who not to visit. In this case, Kamala's refusal to visit Vasudeva is motivated by two hidden agendas. Firstly, she is not an unmarried girl anymore; she is married to Gundanna, who is still her husband in this setting. As for her second goal, she is subtly trying to get her father to see how foolish it was for him to reject Vasudeva as a suitable suitor for her marriage by constructing this statement as an aggressive question. Simultaneously, in the same book,

Kamala uses another significant act of assertive speech to denounce and protest about her father's treatment of Vasudeva, who had come to seek for her hand in marriage, and to drive him insultingly out of the house. In order to attack her father, she uses the following forceful statement.

CONCLUSION

The intricate ways in which literature serves as both a product and a critique of its socio-political context are revealed through the use of discourse analysis to four modern Indian novels that deal with social inequity and resistance. The chosen novels all deal with oppression of some kind, whether it is caste, gender, economics, or community hierarchies. These novels provide a platform for the subaltern to express themselves through storytelling, language resistance, and symbolic subversion. This research adds to the larger effort of social reform in postcolonial India by examining the relationship between language, power, and ideology to show how literary discourse both reflects and resists pre-existing hierarchies. Inequality in these books has many levels, which is one of the most shocking things that came out of this study. Instead of viewing gender, religion, class, and caste as separate constructs, the writers see them as mutually reinforcing intersections. The study of discourse reveals that coded speech, metaphors, narrative perspectives, and silences all contribute to the normalization of dominance and exclusion, which in turn sustains social hierarchies. Concurrently, actions of defiance against and within these linguistic frameworks begin to take shape. In order to reassert their agency, marginalized characters repurpose dominant discourses, reshape their meaning, and proclaim new narratives about their own worth and identity. Language thus serves as both a tool for tyranny and a vehicle for freedom.

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