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Sahridayata as a Pathway to Peace: Examining Its Implications in Conflict Resolution within the Context of the Ethnic Conflict in Manipur

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[**Note:** A preliminary version of this article was presented as a paper at the International Seminar on Two Decades of the Sadharanikaran Model of Communication, organized by the Department of Languages and Mass Communication, Kathmandu University School of Arts (KUSOA), on 26 May, 2024.]

Abstract

This paper seeks to unravel the implications of Sahridayata-based interventions, including indigenous peace-making traditions, citizen-centric dialogues, and truth-telling initiatives that have been applied in Manipur for conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Also, this scholarly endeavour aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of empathy-driven approaches in conflict resolution and pave the way for sustainable peace initiatives in Manipur and beyond.

Manipur, a northeastern state of India, recently witnessed unprecedented violence in the first week of May 2023 between the Meitei and the Kuki ethnic communities. When most of the news media reports pointed out the 3rd May incident in the Kuki-majority district of Churachandpur to be the root cause of the violence, an alternative forum advocated that it was the Meitei groups' act of blocking the roads in the Imphal East District.

Sahridayata acts as a powerful facilitator of understanding, empathy, and reconciliation that are necessary for successful conflict resolution. In the context of conflict resolution, it makes individuals

and parties related to one another by making them put themselves into other individuals or parties' shoes and understand their emotions. Sahridayata encourages individuals and parties involved in a conflict to create a comfortable and safe space for dialogue and communication. Sahridayata is also related to forgiveness and the ability to move on and heal after the end of the conflict. By fostering a culture of forgiveness and promoting reconciliation processes, Sahridayata contributes to building bridges and repairing fractured relationships.

Keywords: conflict resolution, ethnic conflict Manipur, reconciliation, sahridayata

Introduction

Manipur (India) has a population of around 2.7 million people who inhabit a vast area of 22,000 square kilometers. It lies between Myanmar to the east and southeast and Nagaland, Assam, and Mizoram in India, its neighboring countries. The state's position is such that it is the major gateway between the subcontinent, Myanmar, and Southeast Asia. Manipur is a diverse state with multiple ethnicities and religions, often considered a prototype of India. The Meitei ethnic group is mainly Vaishnavite Hindu, accounting for almost two-thirds of the state's population, with Christian tribes (the Nagas and Kukis being the largest) and Muslims making up the rest. (Buchanan, 2011). The population is disproportionately concentrated in the Imphal valley, which accounts for 10% of the state's total territory and is predominantly Meitei. The tribes primarily reside in the nearby highlands.

The ethnic conflict between the Meiteis and Kukis in Manipur is a result of the complex interaction of historical, social, and political issues. The Meiteis form the primary group in the Manipuri society, with a cultural legality that is unique to their territory. Previously, they lived in the Imphal valley, and they had a large influence on the socio-political life of Manipur. Although

the Kukis are distinguished by several subgroups—including the Thadou, the Paite, and the Hmar—they have one thing in common: an observed migration into and settlement of hill areas in Manipur and neighboring states.

In the research paper on "Armed Violence in Manipur and Human Rights" published in *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, Jitendra Singh Oinam (2011) has enumerated three causes of violence in Manipur. While the first one is political, the second and the third are considered to be the types of the psychological factor. Oinam (2011) opines that manipulative structural violence at political level in Manipur means no democratic rights for the Manipuri people at grassroots level for several years. According to Oinam, Manipur was turned into a 'C' state, and a 'corrupt civilian bureaucracy' managed by Delhi took the reins.

Secondly, on Oinam's (2011) view, the focal factor relates to economic consequences. Out of the 29 states that comprise India, Manipur was an agriculturally based state that yielded more rice than the requirement of the state and the nation. Since the economy was centralised and rationed, it did not offer ample opportunities for families and their necessities. Jitendra Oinam Singh has been complaining that Manipur had become a haven for corrupt bureaucrats where the dreams of constructing a productive base for an economy were being thrown into the dustbin. Local actions were totally excluded; that means there could be no question of considering them.

The third cause of the conflict as identified by Oinam (2011) is social, associated with the movement of people after Manipur's integration into India. It clearly shows that people from other parts of the state migrated towards it in large numbers and the indigenous population felt threatened structurally by the large number of new immigrants from the mainland. They thought their culture and hence their identity were under threat from the Indo-Aryan people, and as a consequence of this, their oppressed culture was in the process of assimilation.

Along with separatist struggles by largely Meitei groups against the rule of India, other important issues are those involving the differences between the Meitei tribesmen, who mostly reside in the Imphal Valley and other tribes such as Kukis, Nagas, those who are mainly from the hilly regions. There is prolonged Meitei resentment against the Kukis, Nagas, and other tribal minorities for the special educational and employment privileges that these tribes accrued under India's affirmative action program. During the colonial period, Kuki's tribal tendencies toward land and resources and the imposition of the administrative policy of the land tenure system led to the conflict of land tenure between the Kukis in the hills and the Meiteis in the valley (Buchanan, 2011).

Following the independence of India, the inclusion of Manipur into the Indian Union and later on, in 1972, statehood was established, which gave birth to new challenges and new opportunities. Though the historical issues were not and the ethnic identity politics were still boiling, the divided societal groups alongside nationalists finally formed conflict and war.

During the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the indigenous community's movement of identity in some parts of Meitei and Kuki emerged, and they fought for recognition, autonomy, and cultural preservation in the process. Such movements were usually linked to political needs and fought for more representation and rights. One of the attributes of collective consciousness is the creation of separate political identities by the tribes of the concerned region. What is more, they are able to put their early-existing identities together as a distinct cultural and political array or group, and they are in the process of adopting a new kind of assertion, which by nature helps to culturally adopt and accept the new ethos of political life. These tribes of the states are not the only ones who are engaged in a process of rediscovering their tribal consciousness through this new fine spirituality, but many of the larger, almost

largest, community-based tribes are changing tribal identity to an ethnic community identity (Oinam, 2003).

According to the assertion of the Meitei community, although Indian tribes with “Scheduled” status secured privileges in political structure, employment in government sectors, university entry, and grants-in-aid or scholarships in independent India, preference in most governmental facilities and processes. The said measures of positive discrimination are elaborately enshrined under the Indian Constitution. The following are some of the examples of constitutional implementation: The SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989; the PESA Act, 1996; and the FRA, 2006.

In this regard, the ethnic war between the Kuki and Meitei communities started on May 3, 2023, after a solidarity march rally was conducted by ATSUM across several districts of Manipur. This march was conducted after a recent order of the Manipur High Court; it fastens the process of the recommendation of the Scheduled Tribe status for the Meitei community by the state government (Mamo, 2023).

The tussle between Meiteis and Kukis erupted, and some of the casualties witnessed the worst possible cases, such as clashes, displacement, and human rights abuse. Elements like weapon dispersion, the intervention of external powers, and age-old disputes decrease the sight of peace. Subsequently, civic society oversees various peacebuilding activities, wherein the implications of Sahrdayata become evident.

Attaining Sahrdayata and Sadharanikaran Model of Communication (SMC) Based Intervention

The Sadharanikaran Model of Communication (SMC), which has been constructed and further developed by Dr. Nirmala Mani Adhikary, gives a detailed analysis of the whole process of communication from a Hindu perspective (Adhikary, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2014). This communication model relies on the phenomenon of Sahrdayata. This model holds more importance especially for

situations when there are conflicts in between, as they clearly show how in order to get over the clashed side one must communicate properly.

Sahridayata is a concept that has grabbed several scholars' attention in communication and conflict studies. As Adhikary (2014) explains, "The concept *Sahridayata* comes from the word *Sahridaya*. Whereas the former refers to a quality, characteristic, or the state of being or becoming; the latter names a person of that faculty. Thus, a *Sahridaya* is one who has attained *Sahridayata*" (p. 308). According to Adhikary,

Sahridayata, as a 'technical term' or the 'construct', represents wide range of relationship between communicating parties. In the broadest sense, *Sahridayas* are any such people who have capacity to send and receive messages. However, ideally, *Sahridayata* is the state of common orientation, commonality or oneness, and *sahridayas* are those who have attained the state. It is *Sahridayata* that makes communication for communion possible. (p. 313)

There are plenty of themes and values that are demonstrated within the philosophy of Sahridayata, which is the principal topic of the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Upanishads*, and the ideas of great personalities such as Mahatma Gandhi and other famous thinkers. These lessons reveal that these moral values, such as feelings, empathy, and non-violence, are key to the well-being of a community, where the community of people should be the main value. Sahridayata is a device that helps people to rise above their own egocentric perspective and to feel what others are living through, which is the premise for empathy and sympathy.

To highlight empathy as a crucial element in conflict resolution, the appropriate approach would be to act empathically. Empathy is one of these things that makes it possible to resolve disputes, whether they are about feelings and opinions of the other

person or the person's feelings and needs. This multi-paradigm style of problem solution enhances communication, eliminates hostility, and provides for more compassion in situations. Sympathy is the next feeling of sadness, which includes the care and involvement of other people's lives. This is because emotion is used to make the conflict and the despair antecedent, and therefore, compassion has to be embraced.

In international peace initiatives such as talks, agreements, mediation procedures, and so on, Sahrdayata is exemplified in practice. Community reconciliation initiatives, interfaith discussions, and conflict resolution seminars showcase the best forms of empathy, active listening, and cooperative problem-solving in evaluation. Similar to the idea of Sahrdayata, which emphasizes the importance of oneness, differences are not permitted to sabotage the harmony of interpersonal relationships and foster the building of trust that leads to the establishment of enduring peace.

The conflict between Kuki and Meitei has its origin in ethnic, territorial, and socio-political dimensions. Due to the immense complications in these issues, essential and efficient cohesion has been hampered through misunderstandings between the given communities. Given the climate of intense extremism in contemporary norms, it is the principles of the Sadharanikaran Model that may help to negotiate and restore balance in the country.

Sahrdayata generally means the syncing of feeling or the empathetic understanding of the feeling of both the communicants. In brief, Sahrdayata, as a 'technical term' or the 'construct,' represents a wide range of relationships between communication parties. In the broadest sense, sahridayas are any such people who have the capacity to send and receive messages. However, ideally, Sahrdayata is the state of common orientation, commonality, or oneness, and sahridayas are those who have attained this state (Adhikary, 2010a, 2010b, 2014). If reference to the Kuki-Meitei conflict, Sahrdayata

means being able to heed the feelings as well as complaints of each other's stories instead of simply transacting business relationships.

According to Adhikary (2009), the SMC outlines a dynamic and cyclic model based on the idea of *preshaka* as the sending side and the *prapaka* on the receiving side. In enhancing two-way flow of information, emotions communicated by one party have to be encoded through *abhivyanjana* while the other party has to decode this message through *rasaswadana*. In the conflict, this involves providing special forums in which the Kukis and Meiteis have an opportunity to share what they feel and think freely and without threat.

In a conflict situation feedback loops are necessary between the transmitting and receiving entities so that both can provide their feedback. Again, the acceptance of constructive criticism is the key to helping both parties wake up from the competitive cloud that they are in and help diffuse and work for a change in the ways of both the Kuki and the Meitei. This is consistent with the SMC view where the 'mutual dynamics' lead to *Sahridayata*.

Intercommunity Dialogs

As a result of the crisis in Manipur, the Interfaith Forum was established on June 5, 2023, with heightened priorities on creating unity and starting dialogue processes at the grassroots level. This was followed by a grand palace rally on July 13. Approximately 500 people, representatives of various religious and ethnic groups, as well as people with spiritual orientations, are involved in the rally for dialogue and the return of humanity.

Thus, aspiring for the establishment of peace in the state, the Pangal community also resorted to native forms of managing crisis and unrest and held torch marches and human chains. The demonstration was held up at Bishnupur Keithel after passing through Tongjel Maril and Bishnupur Muslim Leikai. The Yairipok Singa Form, Yairipok Bamol Leikai Form, and Yairipok Kekru Form

people marched a torch as a part of a function organised by UMPCO Wangkhem Kendra, an umbrella formation of 20 local Pangal clubs. It asked Manipur to refrain from altering the map of the country and wondered why the prime minister had not said anything about the incident.

In fact, about the Meitei Pangal community, it was reported that they only extended aid in the form of edible and other necessary items to seven relief camp inmates on a relief basis bearing humanitarian consideration. On similar lines, the Ramakrishna Mission is perceived as being involved in peacebuilding since it has been noted to be providing food hampers and handwashing sets to affected people in various regions. Aside from the rallies and the peace movements, the community has been engaged in the build-up of peace through lives being saved as well.

To a certain extent there have been incidents as to where certain individuals have provided the needful, which might have prevented other individuals from facing their death irrespective of their religion.

The local people assisted the police in rescuing a kidnapped Kuki youth in Sekmain while the Meira Paibis of Yairipok Khoirom Mathak Leikai were in the process of rescuing a family consisting of four members who were taken hostage. In other news, a Meitei teacher, name unknown, helped 29 other students from being killed by carrying a 6-year-old Kuki boy on her back while tear gas shells and guns were shot.

Truth and Reconciliation

The Christian Forum Dimapur which by the way, is centred around the faith in Christ, tries to alleviate the crisis in Manipur which is conflict-prone at the moment, through integrated efforts of peace and relief. To support the work of the Kuki and Meitei on AMC and AGROEI, the Catholic Church was routed through 'Peace Channel,' a Catholic congregation of Clerical. Organizations responded to the

needs of the victims, old and new, in harmony by telling the story that everyone was together and that the nationality was not an issue anymore. The statement of purpose of the Christian Forum Dimapur also proposed that it should make contact with Meitei intellectuals as well as with interreligious groups in order to experience full safety for interaction of different groups within the community and in this way achieve harmony.

Indigenous Peace-making Initiatives

Peacebuilding involves confessions and forgiveness rituals so that the communities that have been merciless are able to recover again. In H Wajang village, central district of Chandel, state of Manipur, the people's expressions change after a series of inter-tribal fights since May 3 with striking evidence of cooperation and mutual trust. Since a white flag which is a symbol of reassurance, peace, and harmony that unites two worlds has been flown in the community, we can say that the two communities are in harmony.

Thus, the conflicts of the Meiteis and Kukis resulted in grief feelings and contradictory thoughts on the interaction between different communities, but the white flag, which was symbolized in the H Wajang village, became the clue to the elimination of the difference and the integration of the feelings among people.

The devastation led to truth-telling, and the inhabitants in the village, whether Kukis or Meiteis, found a way to send a peaceful and reassuring message to the outside world, which was filled with hatred and violence, and refused to be pulled by feelings of hatred even in those moments. Through the debates, people on both sides voiced their anxieties and aspirations, which consequently led to the opening of a path towards reconciliation and living peacefully together. These meetings enabled the two sides once more to declare their ideals of lasting peace in the region in a solemn manner. The two guarantees from either side have been a source of comfort to the people, and they now believe their security will not be threatened again.

Women in Peacebuilding

The involvement of women from Manipur has been seen during the present confrontation between the Meitei and Kuki groups, being both as protectors of their tribes and as active combatants. In Manipur, the local women's groups, Meira Paibis, are actually civil rights agitators who were highly appreciated in the past for readily supporting organic progressive issues. Meira Paibis are an endowed part of Meitei society, and they have emerged and were brought into the international plane in 1977. At that time, they, holding torches, fought against the Armed Forces Special Powers Act and for the paramilitary forces to quit violating human rights (Editors' Guild of India, 2023).

These women, known as Meira Paibis, or torchbearers, are revered figures in Meitei society who have a history of advocating for justice and socio-political reforms. During the current conflict, they have taken on the role of vigilantes, patrolling the streets at night and guarding their villages during the day. They have also been accused of preventing the supply of essential items to Kuki areas and destroying documents that the police use to communicate with the hill districts.

However, some say that the Meira Paibis have exclusively been fighting for the Meitei community, and that their transition from protectors to instigators reflects the deep tensions in Manipur society. For example, some Meira Paibis have checked the vehicles of the armed forces to see if they are transporting Kuki people or relief material, and one Meira Paibi has even called herself a "foot soldier" sent by God to finish the "Kuki terrorists" (Sabir, 2023).

Speaking to the global 16 days of activism campaign against gender-based violence in Churachandpur, activist Mary Beth Sanate from the Kuki Zo community said that while the Meira Paibis and other tribal women are indeed taking sides, there is a difference between the two ways it is done. Khumujamba Leikai, a Meitei

neighborhood in Churachandpur, was attacked in May, and tribal women protested by forming a human chain around Meitei boys to prevent their exploitation by other tribal males (Sitlhou, 2024).

At the 5th Northeast Indigenous Women's Peace Congregation held on March 26, the participants, who included women from different communities of Northeast India, decided to apply several tradition-based conflict resolution reconciliation and peacebuilding methods practiced in different states of Northeast India. The NEIWIP and the MWGSN took the action by extending an invitation to other indigenous women's groups to be part of the peace congregation that claimed to promote gendered peace, non-violent conflict solutions, and the rights of self-stipulated indigenous nations of Northeast India (5th NE India Indigenous Women's Peace Congregation Adopts Ways for Conflict Resolution, 2024).

Conclusion

Although the methodology of Sahridayata seems quite attractive, its implementation is not always easy to accomplish. The cultural barriers, power imbalances, and resistance to empathy-based strategies are the main challenges that the idea of Sahridayata faces. Unlike the past research and practice, future research should focus on the discussed challenges. Also, a sense of empathy should be cultivated among the peacekeeping forces, and Sahridayata principles must be included in the institutional frameworks for the peacebuilding.

Through empathy and compassion, empathy, and understanding, the scholastic pathway gives the solid base to peace and processes reconciliation and working out problems collectively. This research paper reveals the theory behind, the practicality of, and the problems in Sahridayata for conflict resolution. The adaptation of Sahridayata ideals could make citizens capable, societies competent, and communities conducive to establishing a society that adores empathy, dialogue, and nonviolence.

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Relevance of Bharata Muni's *Natyashastra* in the Digital Era

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Abstract

Bharata Muni's *Natyashastra*, an ancient Sanskrit treatise persists as a pivotal text even in the digital age. This study asserts that *Natyashastra* not only maintains its considerable academic and artistic significance but also contributes significantly to fostering creativity and nurturing cross-cultural dialogue in the contemporary digital context. The research employs a comprehensive methodology, including theoretical analysis, historical contextualization, and contemporary case studies, to explore how *Natyashastra* principles are utilized by digital platforms. These platforms craft immersive storytelling experiences and navigate diverse emotional responses among global audiences. Findings reveal that *Natyashastra* excels in facilitating cross-cultural understanding and enhancing artistic expression in the digital landscape. It transcends cultural boundaries, offering insights into multicultural interactions and promoting artistic innovation. The study underscores the relevance of integrating traditional artistic wisdom with digital advancements, impacting artistic practices, empathy, and cultural exchange on a global scale.

Keywords: cross-cultural understanding, cultural divides, emotional responses, multi-cultural interaction, *Natyashastra*

Introduction

Natyashastra, an ancient treatise composed by Bharata Muni over two millennia ago, stands as a monumental text in the realm of Indian performing arts and aesthetic theory. This seminal work, crafted amidst the rich cultural landscape of ancient India, serves as a profound repository of knowledge that delves into the essence of aesthetic contemplation, dramatic expression, and the human condition. It embodies a timeless testament to the depth of ancient Indian artistic wisdom, echoing through the annals of human civilization with its enduring insights. Bharata Muni's *Natyashastra* is not merely a manual of theatrical techniques but a comprehensive exploration of the human spirit. The text is deeply rooted in the philosophical underpinnings of metaphysics and Hindu cosmology, transcending the limitations of time and cultural boundaries. (Gokhale, 2023) In its opening verses, Bharata Muni proposes that the divine art of dramatic performance is intrinsically linked to the cosmic dance of creation, a sacred ritual mirroring the eternal rhythms of the universe (Ghosh, 1950). Within this framework, the concept of “*rasa*”—the aesthetic sentiment pervading all artistic expression—encourages a sublime journey of self-discovery where the boundaries between performer and spectator dissolve into a shared experience of artistic communion (Datta, 2013; Coorlawala, 2019). In the contemporary epoch, characterized by rapid globalization and multicultural evolution, the principles enshrined in *Natyashastra* remain highly relevant. As the world navigates a period of profound transformation, *Natyashastra* emerges as a beacon of timeless artistic principles that transcend tradition, language, and geography. It provides a universal language for exploring human experience through performance, resonating with creators and audiences across diverse cultural environments (Singh, 2019).

Bharata Muni's exploration of "rasa" theory highlights the transformative power of artistic expression, a force that elevates human experience to sublime realms beyond the ordinary. In the digital age, *Natyashastra* continues to inspire and guide contemporary artistic practices. Digital scholars and creators are leveraging technology to pioneer innovative forms of creativity, such as digital storytelling, virtual performances, and interactive multimedia experiences (Srinivas, 2010). By embracing the timeless wisdom of *Natyashastra*, artists from various backgrounds can transcend cultural barriers and foster connections that go beyond mere differences. This manuscript, with its detailed insights, remains highly relevant in today's digital era, offering invaluable guidance to creators and performers worldwide.

The contemporary relevance of *Natyashastra* has been further substantiated with the construction and development of the Sadharanikaran Model of Communication (Adhikary, 2009, 2014). Adhikary (2014) emphasizes that Bharata Muni's treatise should not be viewed merely as an ancient text on performing arts but as a profound guide to emotional and communicative expression. He highlights the universality of the "rasa" theory, which categorizes human emotions into nine primary types, noting its increased relevance in the digital era. Contemporary creators harness this ancient wisdom to evoke enduring emotions across diverse platforms, thereby revitalizing *Natyashastra*'s principles and engaging global audiences. Adhikary's analysis underscores how these principles continue to shape creative practices and foster empathy in our technology-driven society.

Despite the rich theoretical insights provided by *Natyashastra*, there remains a critical research gap in exploring its practical applications in the digital epoch. While theoretical studies abound, empirical research on how *Natyashastra*'s principles can be applied to foster cross-cultural dialogue and shape artistic endeavors in

the modern era is sparse. This research aims to address this gap by deepening our understanding of *Natyashastra*'s relevance and its potential to influence contemporary artistic and cultural discourse. There exists an unacknowledged influence in AI content creation, where principles derived from the *Natyashastra* are often utilized without proper recognition of their origins. This lack of acknowledgment not only undermines the historical significance of such artistic frameworks but also contributes to the underrepresentation of diverse global artistic communities. As a result, the generalizability and applicability of AI-generated content can be limited. Furthermore, while the relevance and applicability of *Natyashastra* have been highlighted, there remain unexplored challenges and opportunities for creators when integrating these ancient principles into modern AI-driven contexts. Addressing these gaps could enhance the richness and cultural inclusivity of AI content.

This study utilizes a descriptive and analytical methodology to examine the enduring relevance of Bharat Muni's *Natyashastra*, emphasizing its concept of "Rasa" in the digital age. To assess the dramaturgy's impact on digital storytelling and cross-cultural dialogue, the research integrates theoretical analysis, historical contextualization, and contemporary case studies.

Qualitative data were meticulously gathered from case studies that employ storytelling principles of *Natyashastra* in digital media. To identify platforms that exemplify innovative use of "Rasa," a purposive sampling method was employed. The sample size for case studies was determined using Cochran's formula to ensure statistical validity. For qualitative research, data were obtained through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), expert interviews, and case studies. This targeted approach ensures a focused analysis of relevant and exemplary cases. The case study analysis explores how these platforms integrate *Natyashastra* concepts, critically assessing

their impact on audience engagement and their role in fostering cross-cultural dialogue.

This research conducts a comparative analysis to juxtapose traditional applications of *Natyashastra* with contemporary digital adaptations. By systematically examining the similarities and differences across modern and historical contexts, this analysis elucidates the evolution of *Natyashastra*'s principles and their influence on current artistic practices. This analysis offers a nuanced understanding of *Natyashastra*'s impact in the digital age.

Qualitative data collection involved focus group discussions (FGDs), expert interviews, and case studies. During this session, we unveiled the themes and insights that emerged from our analysis. This segment navigates the intricate terrain of knowledge acquisition, revealing the timeless relevance of *Natyashastra* amidst the constantly evolving realm of digital innovation.

Moreover, this study involved 28 participants and two moderators, who facilitated the online focus group discussions (FGDs) to maintain the coherence and rigor of the dialogue. The participant cohort comprised individuals from diverse backgrounds, including global performing artists, digital media specialists, and educators. Participants were strategically selected based on their expertise in three distinct categories: familiarity with *Natyashastra* (5+5=10 participants), proficiency in the digital era (5+5=10 participants), and a combination of both areas of knowledge (4+4=8 participants). The discussions were conducted via the digital platform Zoom. Different participants were selected for each session of group discussion to enhance the breadth of perspectives and insights on the topic. The total number of participants in group discussions was 28, plus 2 moderators. The first session lasted 40 minutes, and the second session lasted 43 minutes. Nine open-ended questions were posed for discussion, and 10 closed-ended questions were given to be answered during the session. Responses were documented, and

participants were requested to maintain their camera presence for observational purposes.

Additionally, three expert interviews were conducted to enhance our understanding of the topic. Each interview was scheduled for 40 minutes and included 10 open-ended questions. Quantitative data analysis was performed considering 10 parameters to determine whether *Natyashastra* maintains its relevance in the digital epoch. The expert interviews, involving scholars with significant expertise in Indian aesthetics, digital media, and cross-cultural communication, were conducted both online and offline. The interviews were recorded to ensure transparency in the research findings.

During the FGDs, participants familiar with *Natyashastra* exhibited keen interest in discussing the concept of “Rasa” and enthusiastically shared additional insights on the topic. Their engagement underscored the enduring relevance of *Natyashastra* in the contemporary digital epoch. They emphasized that while technology and time may evolve, the underlying emotions portrayed in artistic expression remain constant. Participants from the digital realm concurred, asserting that *Natyashastra* serves as the quintessential source of inspiration. Although creators may not always be aware of their roots in *Natyashastra*, their insights prompted a realization that contemporary endeavors build on the foundational principles outlined in the ancient text. Participants who had experience in both domains cited digital archives and repositories as crucial for conserving and disseminating *Natyashastra* texts and ancient documents. For example, “Nrityagram Online” offers live-streamed dance performances, instructional videos, and interactive workshops, empowering global audiences to engage with classical Indian dance forms regardless of geographical location. They also discussed synergetic projects that blend *Natyashastra*’s aesthetics with modern digital innovations, such as “Dance of the Devadasis,” a virtual reality

experience that immerses audiences in traditional Bharatanatyam performances while providing historical context and educational insights into *Natyashastra*'s influence on classical dance traditions. Expert interviews provided valuable insights into the theoretical foundations of *Natyashastra*, its application, and relevance in the digital epoch, emphasizing the adaptability of *Natyashastra*'s principles to digital platforms and its potential to foster cross-cultural dialogue and creativity. The conversation also highlighted the importance of ethical considerations in the digital representation of cultural heritage and the need for responsible use of technology in artistic endeavors.

The results have been meticulously categorized into three distinct sections to ensure a clear understanding of the research outcomes. The first section elucidates the respondents' understanding of *Natyashastra*. The second section examines the transformative impacts observed with the advent of the digital era on *Natyashastra*, integrating insights from both respondent feedback and an extensive literature review. The third section presents findings derived from FGDs and expert interviews, revealing nuanced perspectives and emergent themes.

Foundation and Developments

Natyashastra is an ancient treatise that comprises 6,000 couplets in Sanskrit and is spread over 36 chapters, expounding the relationship between performers and audience through Rasa-Bhava Anubhava (for further discussion on the contents of *Natyashastra*, see: Adhikary, 2014; Ghosh, 1951). The text is written with a broader perspective of Bharatavarshiya philosophical and artistic heritage, drawing on philosophy, mythology, and aesthetics. It emerged during a period of significant intellectual and cultural ferment in ancient Bharatavarsha and reflected the synthesis of diverse cultural influences, including Vedic rituals, classical Sanskrit literature, folk traditions, and regional performing arts.

It is perhaps the most inclusive and expansive theatre and dance manual globally, serving as an enduring source of inspiration for contemporary creators and performers worldwide. It has also helped shape the theory and practice of classical dance forms like Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Odissi, and Kuchipudi, as well as classical Indian music. It influenced the cultural traditions of Southeast Asia, particularly in countries like Thailand, Cambodia, and Indonesia, where Indian performing arts were assimilated into local art practices. *Natyashastra* has had a significant influence on various aspects of the film industry as well. The ancient principles outlined in the text, such as the classification of emotions (*rasa*), types of characters (*nayikas* and *nayakas*), and dramatic structure, continue to influence the way stories are told in films today and are used to convey emotions convincingly on screen (Sridhar, P., 2021). Its principles have also induced aspects such as costume design, set design, makeup artistry, music and dance choreography, and cinematography, adding depth and cultural authenticity to cinematic productions. *Natyashastra* gives the narrative connections and shapes broader cultural attitudes and values, which are reflected in the themes, motifs, and symbolism depicted in films. Thus, Bharat Muni's *Natyashastra* has relevance in both old and new media forms.

Abhinav Gupta, a scholar, esteemed philosopher, and aesthete from medieval India, made noteworthy contributions to the elaboration and interpretation of *Natyashastra*. (Dutta, 2020) Through his work *Abhinav Bharati*, he provided reflective insights into the methods and principles of dramatic theory as elucidated in *Natyashastra*. He expanded Bharata Muni's concept of *rasa* theory and developed it into a comprehensive framework, highlighting the role of emotional resonance and resonance and recommendation by evoking aesthetic experiences among the audience. Adding to it, he introduced the concept of *Dhvani* (suggestion or resonance), which he considered to be central to the supremacy of drama and

poetry. Through his interpretations and commentary, he enriched the understanding of *Natyashastra*, focusing on its spiritual significance, philosophical depth, and practical applications in classical arts. His commendable work in expanding and explaining *Natyashastra* has inspired many in shaping the discourse on aesthetics and nurtured cross-cultural dialogue, adaptation, and collaboration.

Bharata Muni's *Natyashastra* stands as an esteemed cornerstone, as its ideologies and teachings have helped shape the contours of Indian artistic culture and have been mentioned by many in their texts. In the realm of historical research, a refined exploration of *Natyashastra* demands consideration of varied scholarly voices, offering discrete critiques and evaluations. Many writers have both admired and dissected its teachings, including Abhinav Gupta and the Nobel Laureate and polymath Rabindranath Tagore. Abhinav Gupta's reflective commentary illuminates the philosophical depth of the text, while Rabindranath Tagore advocated its enduring relevance in the modern age. In his work *The Religion of Man*, Tagore mentioned *Natyashastra* and has drawn parallels between its insights and his own theories of spiritual expression and universal humanism (Tagore, 2013).

Conversely, *Natyashastra*'s canonical status was questioned by Sheldon Pollock, who posited ideological foundations and critical examinations of its historical context. Pollock challenged prevailing interpretations, stating, "The *Natyashastra* cannot be read as a timeless and unified text; its meanings are contingent upon historical and cultural context" (Pollock, 2018). Similarly, post-colonial analysis by Dipesh Chakrabarty raises questions about conventional readings, emphasizing the intricate processes of cultural translation and appropriation inherent in its reception (Krishnan, 2009). Scholars like Kapila Vatsyayan, have also contributed diverse insights into its multifaceted legacy, addressing intersections of aesthetics, identity, and politics (Mohanty, 2020).

***Natyashastra* in the Digital Age**

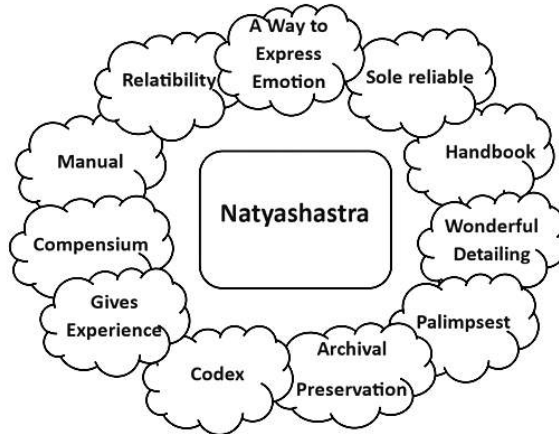
The digital age has brought a profound transformation in the way information is created, accessed, shared, and consumed. Ubiquitous connectivity, data abundance, digital innovation, personalization, customization, automation, and efficiency are the key features of the digital age. Digitization has further accelerated technical advancements and transformations after the advent of artificial intelligence (AI). Enhanced automation, predictive analytics, personalized experiences, natural language processing (NLP), and AI-driven innovation are the key contributors of AI to the digital age.

It has brought a renewed interest in *Natyashastra*, both in India and internationally (Sridhar, P., 2021). Performers, scholars, artists, and cultural enthusiasts continue to explore its rich insights into aesthetics, performance, and the human experience, nurturing cross-cultural comprehension and empathy. *Natyashastra*'s timeless principles and directives for artistic expression in stagecraft, music, acting techniques, and dance forms remain relevant and inspire creators to innovate and experiment with new forms of digital storytelling, immersive experiences, and multimedia presentations. The concept of "rasa," which explores the emotional essence of artistic endeavors, is utilized by creators to evoke and convey emotions, fostering deeper audience engagement and connection. Employing the purposive sampling method facilitated a nuanced exploration wherein respondents familiar with *Natyashastra* were well-versed in its significance, regarding it as a paramount text in dramaturgy. Conversely, participants initially unaware of *Natyashastra* were astonished to learn that many contemporary forms they unknowingly employed were rooted in *Natyashastra*. The connection of modern innovations to the foundational 'rasas' (emotions) detailed in *Natyashastra* was particularly striking. Respondents well-versed in the text and its application in the digital

era eagerly shared their insights, elaborating on their understanding and the innovative techniques they had derived from its study and practice in the digital era.

Figure 1

Understanding of Natyashastra



The Confluence of the Digital Era and *Natyashastra*: Modern Impacts and Innovations

The intersection of the digital era and *Natyashastra* has led to a contemporary evolution of traditional practices. Historically, theatregoers relied on natural light during the day and fire at night to create dramatic effects. Today, technological advancements have simplified these processes; however, the foundational concept of ‘Rasa’ remains unchanged. The experience has transformed, but the essential techniques that generate theatrical magic endure. Makeup application methods have evolved, but the essence of expressive portrayal persists, rooted deeply in *Natyashastra*.

The advent of the digital era has brought about rapid technological integration, widely embraced across the globe. As tasks became easier to execute, creativity flourished, leading to the emergence of hybrid performances that blend traditional elements

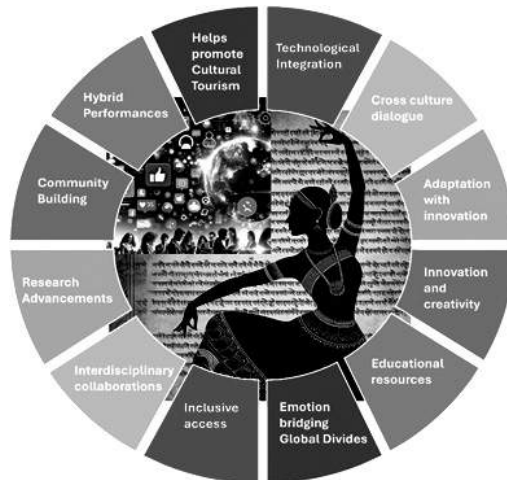
with modern technology. This constant pursuit of innovation spurred advanced research, further enriching the creative landscape. Technology's borderless nature, coupled with universal emotions, has facilitated cross-cultural dialogue, bridged global divides, and promoted inclusive access.

The digital era also revolutionized education—a transformation accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The shift to online learning necessitated the creation of digital educational resources, significantly increasing the popularity of online classes by eliminating the need for physical attendance (Swargiary & Roy, 2024). This surge in online education has fostered interdisciplinary collaborations and built global communities.

The application of *Natyashastra* principles in the digital era has significantly promoted cultural tourism, attracting diverse audiences. These contemporary impacts and innovations were meticulously gathered through focus group discussions, expert interviews, and comprehensive literature reviews.

Figure 2

The Confluence of the Digital Era and Natyashastra: Modern Impacts and Innovations



***Natyashastra* in the Digital Age: Key Findings**

The study identified four major findings that emerged from focus group discussions (FGDs) and expert interviews, which were subsequently verified against reliable sources. The findings include:

Sustained and revitalized youth participation: Cultural practices with contemporary relevance have sustained and revitalized youth participation in traditional art forms through the proliferation of digital media.

Facilitation of intergenerational exchanges: Digital platforms have enabled intergenerational exchanges, allowing different generations to share skills and experiences, which fosters both technological adeptness and cultural literacy.

Enhanced emotional expression and well-being: The digital medium provides a platform for individuals to express emotions and share experiences without fear of judgment, contributing positively to physical and mental well-being.

Global connections and cross-cultural sharing: Diverse digital platforms facilitate global connections with cultural and spiritual interests, promoting cross-border sharing of opinions and creative expressions grounded in *Natyashastra* principles. These findings underscore the transformative impact of digital media on traditional practices, promoting engagement, dialogue, well-being, and cross-cultural connections.

Increased youth engagement: Respondents observed a notable increase in youth involvement in various art forms, including those influenced by *Natyashastra*, following the 2019 quarantine due to COVID-19. The period of enforced inactivity at home led young people to explore new and engaging pursuits. Contributing factors included the ease of accessing and utilizing technology creatively, the opportunity to participate in organized activities within their own time zones without fear of judgment, and the allure of gaining recognition and praise for their work. Additionally, the potential for

monetary compensation and the chance to voice opinions and gain fame were significant motivators for youth participation in these creative endeavors.

Intergenerational transmission: Respondents reported a notable increase in their interactions with grandparents, emphasizing that seemingly mundane conversations and shared artistic activities hold significant educational and cultural value. They highlighted that grandparents often share valuable life experiences, while youth engage in creative projects—such as creating and sharing art forms influenced by *Natyashastra*—that enhance their fame and cultural appreciation. Social media has heightened awareness of the challenges associated with aging and the realities of loneliness and physical constraints, leading to closer connections between generations. Technology has enabled unprecedented levels of communication and learning, with the integration of *Natyashastra* principles further enriching these exchanges.

Physical and mental health well-being: Respondents reported that engaging in art refreshes the mind and promotes physical movement. They noted that *Natyashastra*'s concept of 'rasa' facilitates the expression and processing of pent-up emotions. The physical movements required in these art forms necessitate concentration and mindfulness, which enhance mental focus, foster a sense of inner calm, and reduce distractions. Additionally, dance contributes to overall health by increasing physical activity, improving mood, enhancing coordination, and alleviating stress. Participation in group performances fosters a sense of belonging, combats loneliness, and enhances emotional well-being. *Natyashastra*'s holistic approach to performance integrates the spirit, body, and mind, helping both performers and audiences develop empathy and a deeper understanding of themselves. Furthermore, engaging in these artistic practices from childhood supports cognitive development, speech

and language skills, and instills creativity, activity, and intelligence in young minds.

Increased cultural and spiritual connection: Respondents reported a significant enhancement in cultural and spiritual connections due to the integration of *Natyashastra* with digital platforms. The widespread accessibility of digital media has enabled traditional art forms, deeply rooted in *Natyashastra*, to reach global audiences, thereby fostering a greater appreciation for both cultural heritage and spiritual practices. Today's youth have unprecedented access to cultural and religious content online, and the fear of losing loved ones, combined with a desire to honor their roots, has driven increased engagement with religious and spiritual practices. This engagement is often reflected in the creation of digital content, such as reels on religious and cultural topics, which not only garners social media attention and financial rewards but also necessitates a deeper understanding and presentation of *Natyashastra* principles. This process of content creation encourages further research and enhances the performer's connection to their cultural and spiritual heritage, providing a sense of grounding and stability.

Discussion

This research has been guided by a primary research hypothesis positing *Natyashastra*'s continued importance in the transformative digital epoch and its potential to facilitate multicultural transformation through cross-cultural dialogue and collaboration.

Supporting Evidence for Youth Engagement Enhancement. The findings align with a longitudinal study conducted by PubMed Central, an official repository of the United States Government, which analyzed youth engagement in art forms from 2005 to 2022. The study, published in 2022, provided an extensive overview of trends over 17 years and found that 61% of young people had not participated in organized art-related activities prior to 2019. The research highlighted a significant shift in this trend

post-2019, supporting the increased youth engagement reported by our respondents (Bone, 2022). This shift underscores the impact of the COVID-19 quarantine on promoting creative pursuits and enhancing youth involvement in art forms.

Corroborating Data on Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer. Supporting these findings, a study conducted by PubMed Central examined the frequency, quality, and potential of various media in Grandparent-Grandchild (GP-GC) relationships using the Media Richness Theory. The 2021 cross-sectional survey revealed a substantial increase in digital media use and highlighted the advent of innovative media, such as augmented reality (AR) and social robot-based systems, which offer enhanced communication opportunities and potential benefits for GP-GC interactions (Döring, 2022). This research underscores the role of advanced media in fostering enriched and effective intergenerational connections.

Validation of Health and Well-being Improvement. These findings are supported by a report published by the World Health Organization, which highlights the significant role of the arts in improving health and well-being (Finn, 2019). The report underscores that art plays a crucial role in enhancing both mental and physical health, aligning with the respondents' observations that art, mental well-being, and physical health are closely interrelated. This evidence corroborates the assertion that artistic practices, particularly those informed by *Natyashastra*, contribute to holistic development and well-being. Pandey and Tripathi (2022) also discuss the classification of brain activity associated with Indian rasas.

Substantiation of Cultural and Spiritual Enrichment. The observations align with the broader trends highlighted in recent studies, which indicate that technology has significantly impacted cultural and spiritual engagement. Comparing images of Ganga Aarti from the 1990s to those from today reveals not only infrastructural

changes but also a noticeable increase in youth presence at religious sites. This shift underscores the role of technology in promoting religious tourism and fostering youth interest in cultural and spiritual practices. According to a comprehensive review of studies, spirituality is increasingly recognized as a vital component of mental health for Generation Z, suggesting that digital applications addressing mental health should incorporate spiritual dimensions (Cardoso, 2024). This integration of *Natyashastra* into the digital realm thus plays a crucial role in enhancing cultural and spiritual connections, reflecting broader trends in youth engagement with heritage and spirituality.

Case Studies

Case Study 1: *Natyashastra* and Contemporary Indian Dance

Prominent figures like Mallika Sarabhai and Astad Deboo exemplify the integration of *Natyashastra* with contemporary Indian dance (Katrak, 2024). Sarabhai has gained acclaim for her innovative reinterpretations, merging traditional forms with modern multimedia, thereby affirming *Natyashastra*'s relevance in today's digital age. (Pardee School of Global Studies, 2010) Deboo, through his fusion of classical and modern dance, demonstrates the principles of *Natyashastra* in his work, reflecting its enduring impact and pushing artistic boundaries.

Case Study 2: Virtual Reality and Traditional Theatre Revival

The Rasa VR project highlights the adaptation of classical Indian theatre through immersive virtual experiences (Jayanthi & Maheswari, 2024). This initiative showcases how *Natyashastra*'s ancient wisdom transcends temporal and spatial limits, offering audiences an enriched aesthetic experience. The "Dance of Devadasis" VR experience vividly illustrates this convergence of tradition and technology, providing insight into South India's cultural heritage through intricate Bharatnatyam choreography (Shankar & Ganesan, 2021).

Theoretical Framework: Rasa and the Essence of Artistic Expression

This study is anchored in *Natyashastra*, the seminal treatise on classical Indian performing arts, which introduces ‘Rasa’ as the essence of emotional expression in art. *Natyashastra* offers a robust framework for understanding how art evokes and communicates complex emotions, thereby engaging deeply with cultural heritage. This research examines how contemporary digital platforms align with and expand upon *Natyashastra*’s principles by enhancing global access to artistic content. These platforms not only facilitate the global dissemination of ‘Rasa’ but also promote cross-cultural dialogue. Integrating contemporary findings on the therapeutic benefits of artistic practices—emphasizing holistic body-mind-spirit integration—the study explores how digital media transforms traditional art forms. It assesses how such media impact mental and physical well-being, strengthen cultural and spiritual connections, and support intercultural exchange, thus re-envisioning *Natyashastra*’s ancient insights in the digital era.

Areas for Future Investigation

Inclusive representation: Future research should focus on ensuring the representation of a broader spectrum of global artistic communities in examining the relevance of *Natyashastra* in the digital age, aiming to enhance the generalizability of findings and promote inclusivity.

Intersection with emerging technologies: Further studies are needed to explore how the core principles of *Natyashastra* may evolve and intersect with emerging digital technologies, assessing their impact on cultural authenticity, artistic integrity, and audience reception in the digital epoch.

Limitation

Time Constraints on Data Collection. The study was conducted within a restricted timeframe, which limited the ability

to capture the full range of perspectives and insights pertinent to the research topic.

Limited Participant Diversity. Despite efforts to ensure diversity in focus group discussions and expert interviews, time constraints confined the study largely to the Indian cultural context. Although participants provided valuable insights as creators navigating global landscapes, the perspectives shared may not fully represent the breadth and diversity of global artistic communities.

Conclusion

Bharata Muni's *Natyashastra* endures as a profound reservoir of artistic wisdom, offering timeless insights into the realms of artistic expression and emotional depth within the digital epoch. This study elucidates the treatise's continued relevance through several pivotal findings. Firstly, *Natyashastra* provides enduring principles that are crucial for understanding and navigating contemporary artistic practices. Secondly, its doctrines significantly enhance youth engagement in the arts, facilitating a bridge across generational divides. Additionally, the treatise plays an indispensable role in the intergenerational transmission of cultural and artistic heritage, ensuring its preservation and ongoing relevance. Furthermore, *Natyashastra* fosters enriched cultural and spiritual connections while contributing positively to physical and mental well-being. As we advance, integrating the timeless teachings of *Natyashastra* with modern technological innovations promises to further enrich our cultural milieu. This research highlights the dynamic interplay between ancient wisdom and contemporary technology, illustrating how such a synergy can preserve traditional arts and promote cross-cultural dialogue in a rapidly evolving global context.

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Harmony in Communication: Integrating Sadharanikaran Principles with AI

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Abstract

This paper explores the intersection of artificial intelligence (AI) design, Sadharanikaran communication principles, and various theoretical frameworks to enhance mutual understanding in human-computer interaction. Drawing upon insights from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and evaluating the effectiveness of custom instructions and prompt engineering on ChatGPT, this study analyzes the implications of diffusion of innovation theory, human-computer interaction theory, cognitive load theory, emotional design theory, and social learning theory within the context of Sadharanikaran and AI design. By synthesizing these theoretical perspectives and empirical findings, this paper explores scopes for designing AI systems that promote Sahrdayata, or mutual understanding among users.

Keywords: AI communication, Sadharanikaran, artificial intelligence, future technology, interconnectedness, digital harmony, ChatGPT, machine learning

Introduction

Modern times are rapidly changing with the advancement in artificial intelligence (AI) technology. However, approaches

in creating an AI model that encourage mutual understanding between humans and computers have not been adequately discussed. Therefore, this article sets on a journey to study Sadharanikanan principles and discusses various theories about how AI systems are designed and developed with the focus on enhancing communication between users.

The diffusion of innovation theory discussed in this paper contributes to the understanding of the adoption process and the outreach of new AI features. Custom instruction for users in ChatGPT is one of the areas of focus in this study. With the understanding of how innovations are created by the communities and how they get traction, AI designers can customize various strategies that allow the community to adopt the innovations seamlessly as a part of their everyday practice. Various research has been conducted to study the adoption of AI, and they have found their importance for small- to medium-sized enterprises (Rawashdeh et al., 2023). This paper also examines how well-informed and clearer prompts and requests trigger artificial intelligence systems to respond optimally while also enhancing and fostering communication and interaction.

Human-computer-interaction theory advocates that the main purpose of AI development is human-centered design: to take the users' requirements and pain points into account (Kurosu, 2016). Digitalization provides excellent opportunities and prospects for entrepreneurs to stand out in the market and grow their businesses (Ghobakhloo & Iranmanesh, 2021; Richter et al., 2017). Therefore, bringing in the general ideas of human-computer interactions is important to help designers create a system that is easy, accessible, and which gives power to people and therefore promotes Sahridayata, i.e., mutual understanding between computers and humans. Likewise, cognitive load theory advocates that the design of AI features impacts users' cognitive processing and task performance that involve human attention and cognitive involvement. Sweller (2011) highlights

that very large amounts of organized information stored in the information store can be processed to generate complex action. By optimizing the cognitive load related to AI-based communications, AI designers can contribute both to improved efficiency and better performance of AI systems by growing the mutual understanding among the users.

Likewise, the emotional design theory emphasizes how emotional responses can affect what we feel and how we behave. Zhou et al. (2020) proposed a systematic process for emotional design, including affective-cognitive needs elicitation, affective-cognitive needs analysis, and affective-cognitive needs fulfillment to support emotional design to advance emotional design. Integrating psychological design fundamentals into AI design or UI (user interface) design enables the production of better interfaces for good relationships and builds emotions and rapport among users (Carroll, 1991). This also helps in creating Sahrdayata as mentioned in the Sadharanikaran theory (Adhikary, 2009, 2014a). AI designers also have the potential to implement social learning theory and principles that enable the foundation of communities of practice where communities share experience and help each other out; therefore, people feel as a part of the group and become more involved with others. Bandura et al. (1977) identified that people learn from observing others' behaviors, including their attitudes, beliefs, and emotions, and that this learning is influenced by various factors such as attention, retention, reproduction, motivation, and feedback. This can also be considered a step into design thinking.

The fusion of theoretical frameworks and empirical findings from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) helps to draw some actionable insights for designing inclusive, empathetic, and effective AI systems to enhance mutual understanding with the users. AI designers may achieve better results by considering Sadhranikaran and existing

theoretical approaches to create empathic, human-like AI systems that will shape and enrich human experiences in the future.

Integrating AI Design with Sadharanikaran Principles

Sadharanikaran principles suggest that authentic relationships cannot be entirely limited and understood by monologues. It also includes emotions, shared experience, and mutual understanding (Adhikari, 2009). The AI design in terms of Sadharanikaran concepts directs two things: not only does the AI need to be able to understand and differentiate words of all kinds, including humor, satire, jokes, and slang, but it also needs to understand various non-verbal expressions. This thought looks at AI as a tool that is not just for data retrieval but also as a companion that will interact empathetically with users.

In the growing domain of AI research in recent times, designing and developing AI systems that are capable of genuine and human-like communication has become one of the main focuses. Alongside the language processing mechanics, researchers are also delving into philosophical principles like Sadharanikaran related to human interactions and communications. Adhikary (2015) argues that Saharidayata is characterized by human communion. Such integration of the AI with Saddharanikaran principles can also be considered a significant departure from traditional approaches, emphasizing mutual understanding and shared experiences in AI interactions.

Interweaving Sadharanikaran principles and thoughts into AI design reflects the change in paradigm—shifting from traditional linguistic processing to something more profound—suiting the needs and complexity of human beings and their interactions with AI. By equipping AI systems with empathy and understanding, simplifying prompts, and leveraging user feedback, scholars and researchers can develop designs to create intelligent AI companions that can have real human interactions. However, the study of emotion not only

includes cognitive aspects but also physiological and expressive ones, as well as subjective experience (Pfeifer, 1988). This outlook gives emphasis on shared experiences and understandings to create more inclusive AI that is capable of human-like and meaningful interactions in an AI ecosystem.

The integration of Sadharanikaran principles into AI design has the prospect of creating a revolutionary human-machine communication. Researchers will be able to overcome the human-machine gap by making AI systems reflect empathy and simplicity by improving the AI design methods. This ensures balance between human and machine, which in turn results in enlarging the scope and quality of communication in the digital age.

Understanding Sadharanikaran Principles

Sadharanikaran, which has deep foundations in Hindu and eastern philosophy, offers an in-depth perspective on communication. At its core, Sadharanikaran suggests that genuine connection is more than just verbal exchange. In addition to that, it also encompasses sharing of emotions, sharing of experiences, and mutual understanding between Saharidayas—the sender and the receiver (Adhikary, 2009). In the context of AI design, integrating Sadharanikaran principles requires AI with the capacity to understand and interpret not only linguistic expressions made by a user but also various emotional variants. This can elevate AI beyond its conventional role as a tool for information retrieval, transforming it into a companion capable of empathetic engagement with its users.

Applying Diffusion of Innovation Theory

The Diffusion of Innovation theory brings some enlightening perspective into how technological tools and innovations spread throughout society. Uzumcu et al. (2023) also identified that individuals with high levels of individual innovativeness are more likely to adapt to and use new applications or technologies than other individuals. When introducing AI to the general public, it

is also necessary to ensure widespread adoption necessitates like technological readiness to make it accessible and user-friendly across diverse demographics around the world (Alsheibani et al., 2018). Looking at AI design with Sadharanikaran principles facilitates designing universal usability, which can be achieved by simplifying user interface (UI), facilitating varying user needs, and ensuring inclusivity (Miraz et al., 2021). By leveraging the principles of the Sadharanikaran and Diffusion of Innovation Theory, AI designers can design their system and interface to resonate with a broader audience, which helps in accelerating the adoption and acceptance of AI technologies. Ward (2013) has also identified that it is important to examine socio-technical factors such as individual and organizational characteristics, which lead to the adoption or rejection of new technologies, and consider these at all stages of the design, implementation, and dissemination process.

Harnessing Prompt Engineering for Sahridayata

Prompt engineering is one of the fundamental aspects of human-computer interaction, which involves communicating with direct, clear, and concise messages to facilitate effective communication with the AI. White et al. (2023) define prompt engineering as a form of programming that can customize the outputs and interactions with a large language model (LLM). This approach is an added advantage as it directly affects the quality of interactions between users and AI. By using straightforward prompts in AI use and by also integrating Sadharanikaran principles, AI systems can convey information more comprehensibly to the user. In addition, by adding emotional cues (Rasa as defined in Sadharanikaran as emotions) into prompts, AI systems can develop deeper connections with users, which will enhance the overall user journey and experience.

The Role of Feedback in AI Evolution

Feedback mechanisms, or Pratikriya, as identified by Sadharanikaran, have important roles in the evolution of AI systems

and design. They enable machines to learn and behave based on user interactions. It helps in the improvement and refinement of AI models and systems (Liu et al., 2024). By continuously addressing and incorporating user feedback, AI models can constantly enhance their conversational abilities. Aronsson et al. (2021) identified different maturity levels that a conversational AI development platform may exhibit in understanding and responding to user inputs. By aligning user preferences and communication patterns, analyzing user behavior, and conducting usability and A/B testing, AI models can improve the performance of AI systems and develop strong connections between humans and AI. This will ultimately enhance the overall user experience (UX) and user journey and help in developing Saharidayata among the machine and humans.

Method of Study

A qualitative approach was used to understand the relationship between AI design, Sadharanikaran principles, and UX by integrating focus group discussions (FGDs) to gather in-depth insights. Two separate FGDs were conducted first, and an additional FGD was conducted after the release of GPT-4. A purposive sampling approach was adopted, combining convenience and criterion sampling. This allowed the researcher to select participants who aligned with the research goals, including individuals from diverse backgrounds and a tech enthusiast group. Convenience sampling made data collection efficient by leveraging participants accessible to researchers in Melbourne, while criterion sampling ensured relevance by including tech enthusiasts based on their studies or work in tech and media. This mixed method effectively balanced diversity, convenience, and specific expertise.

The first FGD focused on testing the effectiveness of custom instructions on ChatGPT to sustain Saharidayata in chatbot-human communication. Eight participants participated in various interactions with ChatGPT, both with and without adding custom

instructions. The participants of the first FGD provided feedback on the response quality and personalization of answers from ChatGPT before and after adding custom instructions. The second FGD explored prompt engineering and its results and overall user experience. Participants of the second FGD were given a set of simplified prompts. This assessed ChatGPT responses and results. Clarity, relevance, and ease of comprehension were some variables of interest for this study. The third FGD was conducted after the release of GPT-4, which had added capabilities and features. The participants of the third FGD engaged in the discussion on various themes, particularly relating to GPT-4o, and explored and created a custom chatbot on LifeLike (an AI-based chatbot application). Likewise, unlike the first two, the third FGD was conducted with a group of tech enthusiasts.

Responses from the focus groups were analyzed by identifying common themes, patterns, and preferences. This approach helped in identifying key insights and metrics regarding the effectiveness of AI design as informed by Sadharanikaran principles. Informed consent was obtained from all research participants. There were eight participants in all three focus group discussions. The participations in the FGDs were voluntary, and all FGDs were carried out online for the convenience of both the researcher and research participants. The FGDs provided valuable insights regarding the adaptation of Sadharanikaran principles, AI design, and user experience. However, the sample size may limit the generalizability of findings to broader populations.

Findings and Discussions

The findings from the FGDs shed light on the effectiveness of custom instructions and prompt engineering in enhancing AI and human interactions and experiences based in the context of subscription-free ChatGPT, powered by both GPT3.5 and GPT4o. The findings resonate with principles of the Sadharanikaran

communication model that emphasizes mutual understanding and commonality in the communication process. In the conducted FGDs, all participants acknowledged the value of custom instructions. Participants found that custom instructions in ChatGPT helped in training the AI to their specific preferences and requirements. This customization in ChatGPT allows users to add custom instructions aligned with the principle of Sahridayata, which suggests mutual understanding and commonality between communicating parties. By providing custom instructions on ChatGPT, users can fulfill their unique needs. It also nurtures Sahridayata and facilitates more meaningful interactions with the GPT model.

Participants also highlighted the importance of prompt engineering. It was found that by clarifying prompts, users can enhance their communication with ChatGPT. It was found that proper encoding of prompt, *Abhivyanjana*, as highlighted in *Sadharanikaran*, aids in the communication process between human and AI (Adhikary, 2009). Effective prompts are clear, concise, and easily interpretable by AI (Lin, 2024). This optimizes the encoding process and enhances the quality of communication in general. Likewise, the findings also found that the role of custom instructions and prompt engineering helps in minimizing *doshas* and communication barriers and maximizing the accessibility of AI systems. Participants were satisfied with the personalized responses generated by ChatGPT when custom instructions were added. This idea of *Sandarva*, which emphasizes the contextual relevance and situational appropriateness of communication, is also rooted in the *Sadharanikaran* model of communication (Adhikary, 2009). Integrating *Sadharanikaran* principles into AI suggests going beyond keyword recognition to build systems that get the deeper context (*Sandarva*) and emotional core (*Rasa*). *Sandarva* provides contexts that include cultural norms, social cues, personal history, or any external factors influencing how a message is interpreted. Likewise, *rasa* is defined in the

Sadharanikaran as the emotional layer that adds depth to a message like joy, sorrow, curiosity, or empathy.

To make AI truly empathetic and engaging, it must understand more than words; it must interpret by blending Sandarva and Rasa—context, emotions, cultural cues, and nuances. (Shank et al., 2019) In their study, they also found that participants reported personal encounters with minded AI, and over half of the research participants reported experiencing emotions in these interactions.

This could mean training models on datasets rich in diverse, context-specific interactions to teach AI when empathy, humor, or even silence is appropriate. Plus, adding custom instructions would let AI evolve with user feedback, building up a memory that makes each interaction feel more personal over time (Rai, 2021). By embedding Sadharanikaran, AI could shift from a simple tool to a genuine conversational partner, creating interactions that truly connect with users emotionally and culturally.

Participants found that by providing specific context and preferences in custom instructions, ChatGPT can deliver responses that further meet users' needs and desires. It was also found that it provides a stronger sense of connection and engagement. In addition, participants found that well-written prompts helped them in having clear and effective communication with the chatbot. Well-written prompts resulted in more accurate and relevant responses. This also aligns with the concept of Rasaswadana (decoding as described in Sadharanikaran), emphasizing the decoding process of messages in the communication process (Adhikary, 2009). By simplifying prompts and giving clear directions, prompt engineering helps in the effectiveness of decoding that accurately reflects the meaning of the user's input. In addition to that, it was found that GPT-4 was preferred over GPT-3.5, particularly because of its human-like, fast response time and its ability to talk. Participants also discussed LikeLife, an AI chatbot application, and created custom bots on Lifelike, which

also had abilities of voice cloning. Participants found that engaging with an AI with voice prompts and conversation is more effective and efficient than chatting with an AI. The findings from the FGDs regarding the relationship between AI design principles, such as custom instructions and prompt engineering, and the foundational principles of Sadharanikaran can be adapted by AI designers and developers to design inclusive, accessible, and user-centric communication experiences.

This paper argues that the integration of Sadharanikaran principles with human-centric design principles in the design and development of an AI model helps in creating a symbiotic relationship between machines and humans. Sadharanikaran emphasizes mutual understanding (*Sahridayata*) between communicators (*Adhikary*, 2009). Ideas from this principle derive an understanding that if adapted properly, AI systems may not only execute tasks but also engage with users in meaningful, human-like interactions (*Horvatic et al.*, 2021). Integrating Sadharanikaran principles into AI design also involves developing systems emotional intelligence and sensitivity. This will help AI to interact with users on a deeper level. Elements of emotional connection, *Rasa*, as identified by Sadharanikaran, can help AI systems to better understand user preferences and to respond empathetically to the user's needs. This will also help AI to establish strong connections with users. This empathetic response is very important for enhancing user trust and loyalty.

Nasution et al. (2021) designed a web application adopting principles of design thinking. It is evident that the user-centric design principles and design thinking emphasize placing users at the center of the design process by prioritizing their needs, preferences, and experiences. When integrated with the principles of Sadharanikaran, this approach ensures that AI systems are designed and developed with an in-depth understanding of user behavior and communication patterns. *Jimmerman et al.* (2020) found that AI and UX are often

observed separately. However, AI designers must empathize with users, then define their needs, ideate creative solutions, prototype designs, and iterate based on user feedback to create AI systems that can fulfill diverse needs effectively. By encouraging *Sahridayata* between human and AI, integrating *Sadharanikaran* principles into AI design will help in promoting inclusivity and cultural sensitivity. This approach minimizes linguistic and cultural *doshas* (noises and barriers in communication as identified by *Sadharanikaran*), which will enable an AI model to communicate and interact in a natural way. The findings of this study suggest that the convergence of AI, *Sadharanikaran*, and user-centric design principles guides the way for more empathetic, inclusive, and human-like AI experiences.

As AI continues to evolve, understanding the factors that may influence its adoption is also crucial. The theory of diffusion of innovations suggests that the adoption of innovations follows a predictable pattern. It is characterized by the stages of knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation (Bird, 1956). The diffusion process begins with the dissemination of existence and awareness about AI technologies and their uses and benefits. This requires raising awareness among individuals of the society about the uses of AI and its various applications, like healthcare, finance, education, entertainment, etc. Effective communication strategies, educational campaigns, workshops, and demonstrations may play a vital role in disseminating information for a better understanding of AI and its uses among the adopters. The Diffusion of Innovation theory also discusses the importance of effective communication for the spread of innovations. Likewise, in *Sadharanikaran*, effective communication is not just the flow of *Sandeha* (information or awareness) but also about achieving mutual understanding and resonance between parties (Adhikary, 2009). This paper recognized that the understanding of *Sadharanikaran* principles will help in developing efficient frameworks for the adoption and diffusion of AI

technologies to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of AI. This will also promote mutual understanding and shared experiences among AI and humans. By integrating Sadharanikaran principles with AI adoption, organizations and communities can create deeper connections and collaboration, which will result in inclusive and human-centric AI ecosystems.

This paper argues that AI systems that adopt Sadharanikaran principles should prioritize user-centric design, empathy, and inclusivity. It is evident that human needs, values, and perspectives are crucial to the design, development, and deployment of AI models and technologies. This paper finds that Sadharanikaran principles should be adopted into AI during the design and development of AI models to prioritize user experience and engagement. AI applications can deliver more personalized and relevant experiences by incorporating empathy and understanding of users' needs, preferences, and cultural backgrounds (Stige et al., 2023).

In addition, AI systems can leverage Sadharanikaran principles to enhance overall communication with their stakeholders. By promoting transparency, openness, and inclusivity, AI can build trustworthy and credible decisions (Larsson, 2020). For instance, involving end-users, industry experts, and community representatives, along with different levels of users, in the co-design and co-development of AI models can ensure diverse perspectives, which will lead to more inclusive and equitable outcomes. Moreover, AI technologies can also serve in promoting Sahrdayata in communication processes by facilitating language translations and context-aware interactions. AI models can overcome linguistic and cultural barriers, enabling meaningful exchanges and interactions with users from different backgrounds and communities. They require a degree of awareness and background knowledge (Sereda, 2020). This paper finds that by adopting Sadharanikaran, AI technologies can contribute to building more harmonious and interconnected communities.

Sadharanikaran Principles and AI-driven Communication

I would like to argue again that integrating Sadharanikaran principles with AI can enhance mutual understanding, empathy, and inclusivity in human-AI interactions. As discussed earlier, this leads to more meaningful and harmonious exchanges (Adhikary, 2014a, 2014b). Sadharanikaran emphasizes the importance of Sahrdayata, or mutual understanding, in the communication process. It highlights the need for empathy, compassion, and shared experiences to develop deeper connections and relationships between people. Shaw (2009) also found that a successful Sadharanikaran leads towards universalization. In the scope of AI-driven communication, the principles of Sadharanikaran can guide the design and development of AI models and systems by encouraging universality, user-centricity, transparency, and inclusivity. Pelau et al. (2021) have also found that empathy and understanding of users' needs, their preferences, and cultural contexts will help AI in facilitating in a more authentic and engaging fashion. This will help in making users feel valued, respected, and understood. By integrating natural language processing (NLP) algorithms with sentiment analysis and affective computing techniques, AI chatbots can recognize and respond to users' emotions. This interaction will help in developing deeper connections and rapport (Rajput, 2020). AI technologies can also help in promoting Sahrdayata by facilitating cross-cultural understanding and collaboration. Language translation, cultural adaptation, and context-aware interactions can help AI-driven communication tools to bridge linguistic and cultural barriers.

Addressing Communication Challenges with AI-driven Sadharanikaran Principles

Incorporating Sadharanikaran principles into AI-driven communication processes can address various challenges and limitations encountered in traditional methods. Among different challenges, one challenge in communication is misinterpretation

or misunderstanding or lack of symbolic logic. AI-driven communication platforms can address these issues by using NLP algorithms and models to accurately interpret and translate messages. It was evident from FGDs that AI technologies can facilitate more personalized communication experiences with prompt engineering and custom instructions. Personalized content mechanisms will help AI-driven communication platforms to optimize user experience and user journey. Similarly, another challenge in communication is the need for inclusive and accessible communication channels that address diverse users (Avellan, 2020).

AI models can also offer assistive features like text-to-speech (TTS) capabilities to make communication more accessible to individuals with different abilities (Morris, 2020). AI-driven communication tools can address this challenge by offering multiple options, such as text, graphics, and audio-visual inputs. Participants of the third FGD found that GPT-4 is more likeable because of the different multiple inputs it offers. This will help in accommodating users with different communication preferences and abilities.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the intersection of Artificial Intelligence (AI) development and Sadharanikaran principles. Through a comprehensive analysis of various theories, including Design Thinking, Diffusion of Innovation, and the Sadharanikaran model, along with empirical findings from focus group discussions (FGDs), it can be agreed that integrating Sadharanikaran principles into AI design and development processes can be beneficial. The FGDs conducted for this research revealed that participants found that adding custom instructions to ChatGPT and prompt engineering to be highly effective in enhancing AI-human interactions.

It is found that AI can understand and respond accurately to interactions by adapting mechanisms to compute both situational context (Sandarva) and emotional tone (Rasa). This could be

achieved by training models on diverse, context-specific datasets and utilizing algorithms capable of recognizing subtle cues like phrasing, sentiment, and cultural context (Picard, 1997). Adding Sandarva and Rasa in prompts or interactions using custom instruction layers allows AI to adjust its responses based on user feedback, building conversational memory that refines its sensitivity to users over time. With these enhancements, participants of the FGDs found that AI interactions not only improved in accuracy but also resonated more deeply with users, creating richer, more meaningful exchanges.

The theoretical frameworks explored in this paper share the importance of user-centric design and the diffusion of innovation in AI design. This paper concludes that a user-centric, co-design approach and the adoption of Sadharanikaran, innovative design methodologies, such as Design Thinking, will help AI designers develop more accessible and user-friendly AI systems. By prioritizing user-centric design principles and encouraging meaningful communication between humans and AI models, developers can reduce the risk of digital divides and enhance the overall user experience. In summary, the adaptation of Sadharanikaran principles in AI design and development has great potential in creating superhuman-like AI systems that are capable of mutual understanding and empathizing. Such superhuman-like AI models may be dominant to humankind, but the understanding of Sadharanikaran principles can also help in creating harmonious coexistence between humans and AI.

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Relevance of Bhartrihari's *Vakyapadiya* in the Digital Age

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Abstract

In the digital age, where media are diverse and constantly evolving, Bhartrihari's ancient text, the *Vakyapadiya*, remains profoundly relevant. This paper highlights how Bhartrihari's insights into language and meaning can be applied to modern digital communication, which often involves emojis, slang, and varying contexts. The study emphasizes the importance of Bhartrihari's concept of Apabhramsa, which helps in interpreting new language by relating it to familiar terms. Additionally, the paper explores how the *Vakyapadiya*'s ideas about words representing both general concepts and specific instances are crucial for understanding the wide range of digital content. Bhartrihari's notion that a single word can have multiple meanings is also examined for its role in accurate digital interpretation. Through this exploration, the research demonstrates how Bhartrihari's principles can offer valuable insights into effective communication and inclusivity in today's interconnected digital world.

Keywords: digital era, ekaśabdadarśana, language and meaning, universals and individuals, *Vakyapadiya*

Introduction

Bhartrihari's *Vakyapadiya* is a significant work in philosophy and linguistics that provides timeless insights into language and communication.¹ Written over a thousand years ago, it addresses the complexities of understanding and cognition, making its wisdom applicable even in today's digital age. This research paper aims to explore how Bhartrihari's ancient ideas about language can be valuable in our modern digital world. It focuses on key concepts such as understanding context, the idea of Apabhramsa (linking words to familiar concepts), and the recognition that words can have multiple meanings, all of which are essential for effective digital communication. To achieve this, the paper employs three main methods: textual analysis to delve deeply into Bhartrihari's concepts, comparative analysis to relate these ideas to contemporary online communication, and case studies that illustrate how these ancient principles can be applied in today's digital tools and content. Ultimately, the paper seeks to demonstrate that the wisdom of the past can guide us through the complexities of current digital interactions. Here, some points from Bhartrihari's *Vakyapadiya* have been presented, demonstrating their relevance in today's context.

Understanding Linguistic Diversity: Insights from *Vakyapadiya*

अस्वगोण्यादयः शब्दाः साधवो विषयान्तरे। निमित्तभेदात् सर्वत्र साधुत्वं च व्यवस्थितम्॥ १४९॥

ते साधुष्वनुमानेन प्रत्ययोत्पत्तिहेतवः। तादात्म्यमुपगम्येव शब्दार्थस्य प्रकाशकाः॥ १५०॥

न शिष्टैरनुगम्यन्ते पर्याया इव साधवः। ते यतः स्मृतिशास्त्रेण तस्मात्साक्षादवाचकाः॥ १५१॥

अम्बाम्बेति यथा बालः शिक्षमाणः प्रभाषते। अव्यक्तं तद्विदां तेन व्यक्ते भवति निश्चयः॥ १५२॥

¹ The contemporary relevance of *Vakyapadiya* has been further substantiated with the construction and development of the Sadharanikaran Model of Communication (Adhikary, 2009, 2010, 2014). Adhikary has incorporated insights from *Vakyapadiya* in order to explain the process of attaining Moksha-in-life through the process of spiritual communication (Adhikary, 2010).

एवं साधौ प्रयोक्तव्ये योऽपभ्रंशः प्रयुज्यते तेन साधुव्यवहितः कश्चिदर्थोऽभिधीयते॥ ॥१५३॥
पारम्पर्यादपभ्रंशा विगुणेष्वभिधातृषु प्रसिद्धिमागता येषु तेषां साधुरवाचकः॥ ॥१५४॥
दैवी वाग्यतिकीर्णयमशक्तैरभिधातृभिः। अनित्यदर्शिनां त्वस्मिन् वादे बुद्धिविपर्ययः॥ ॥१५५॥
उभयेषामप्यविच्छेदादन्यशब्दविवक्षया। योऽन्यः प्रयुज्यते शब्दो न सोऽर्थस्याभिधायकः॥ ॥१५६॥
asvagoṇyādayaḥ śabdāḥ sādhave viṣayāntare, nimittabhedāt
sarvatra sādhutvaṃ ca vyavasthitam. ||149||
te sādhuṣvanumānena pratyayotpattihetavaḥ,
tādātmyamupagamyeva śabdārthasya prakāśakāḥ. ||150||
na śiṣṭairanugamyante paryāyā iva sādhaveḥ, te yataḥ smṛtiśāstreṇa
tasmātsākṣādavācakāḥ. ||151||
ambāmbeti yathā bālaḥ śikṣamāṇaḥ prabhāṣate, avyaktaṃ tadvidāṃ
tena vyakte bhavati niścayaḥ. ||152||
evaṃ sādhou prayoktavye yo'pabhraṃsaḥ prayujyate, tena
sādhuvyavahataḥ kaścīdartho'bhidhīyate. ||153||
pāramparyādapabhraṃsā viḡuṇeṣvabhidhātṛṣu, prasiddhimāgatā
yeṣu teṣāṃ sādhuravācakaḥ. ||154||
daivī vāgvyatikīrṇeyamaśaktairabhidhātṛbhiḥ, anityadarśināṃ
tvasmin vāde buddhiviparyayaḥ. ||155||
ubhayeṣāmapyavicchēdādanyaśabdavivakṣayā, yo'nyaḥ prayujyate
śabdo na so'rthasyābhidhāyakaḥ. ||156||

These shlokas explore how words convey different meanings depending on their usage, context, and linguistic background. They discuss how the righteousness or unrighteousness of words can vary, with terms like “asva” and “gavi” being perceived as pure in some contexts (e.g., “poor” or “milking vessel”) but impure in others (e.g., “horse” or “cow”). The righteousness of a word is thus context dependent. The shlokas also delve into Apabhramsa, where meanings are inferred through associations with pure words, akin to interpreting gestures in a secret conversation. Despite apparent differences, Apabhramsa retains its meaning through these connections. Furthermore, the shlokas explain why Apabhramsa

words are not directly synonymous with pure words, noting that their organization differs, which means they do not convey meaning in the same way or serve as direct synonyms (Jha, 2002, pp. 545–562).

Bhartrihari suggests that Apabhramsa words, arising from communities without Sanskrit knowledge, convey meaning effectively through established usage. He compares this to the gradual distortion of divine speech, where both pure Sanskrit and distorted forms are equally valid in communication. Despite differences in grammatical purity, both saintly and unsaintly words possess unique powers and significance in conveying meaning.

In today’s digital age, written communication is widespread across platforms like emails, messages, and social media posts. Words can carry different meanings based on their context, including the use of emojis and slang like “lit.” Therefore, choosing words carefully is essential to avoid misunderstandings online. As people encounter various languages and dialects on the internet, understanding languages like Apabhramsa—known for their reliance on connections between words—can help grasp meanings even with limited proficiency. Recognizing similarities between languages, such as Spanish and English, also aids in understanding messages.

Accurate translation requires acknowledging the distinct treatment of Apabhramsa words compared to pure words, preventing confusion in translation tools. Understanding language acquisition in children and the preservation of native languages is vital. Language apps that focus on dominant languages might hinder the learning of mother tongues, risking the loss of cultural identity. Supporting native languages promotes inclusivity, allowing people to communicate comfortably in their own languages.

As languages, including dialects like Apabhramsa, evolve, it’s important to understand these changes for effective communication. Acknowledging linguistic diversity enriches digital communication and contributes to cultural preservation. Integrating

these insights into language processing technologies can enhance translation accuracy and foster inclusivity online.

Unravelling the Universal and Individual: Insights from *Vakyapadiya*

सर्वशक्त्यात्मभूतत्वमेकस्यैवेति निर्णयः । भावानामात्मभेदस्य कल्पना स्यादनार्थिका ॥२२॥
तस्माद् द्रव्यादयः सर्वाः शक्तयो भिन्नलक्षणाः । संसृष्टाः पुरुषार्थस्य साधिका न तु केवलाः ॥२३॥
यथैव चन्द्रियादीनामात्मभूता समग्रता । तथा सम्बन्धिसम्बन्धसंसर्गेषु प्रतिीयते ॥२४॥

sarvaśaktyātmabhūtatvamekasyaiveti nirṇayaḥ,
bhāvānāmātmabhedasya kalpanā syādanarthikā. ||22||
tasmād dravyādayaḥ sarvāḥ śaktayo bhinnalakṣaṇāḥ,
saṁsṛṣṭāḥ puruṣārthasya sādḥikā na tu kevalāḥ. ||23||
yathaiiva cendriyādīnāmātmabhūtā samagrata, tathā
sambandhisambandhasaṁsarge'pi pratīyate. ||24||

Bhartrihari's Advaita view asserts that Brahman, the One, is the foundation of all existence, with all distinctions—such as universals and particulars—being mere manifestations of Brahman's powers. This contrasts with earlier discussions where terms like “ākāśa” (space) denoted universal concepts. Bhartrihari emphasizes that even distinctions in perception, where senses, mind, and object converge, are not separate from Brahman. This perspective upholds monism, asserting the unity of all things without diminishing the singular reality of Brahman, where all perceived divisions are ultimately interconnected within the One (Dissanayake, 1993, pp. 9-15). Bhartrihari explains how the eternal universal aspect influences everything:

न तदुत्पद्यते किञ्चिद्यस्य जातिर्न विद्यते । आत्माभिव्यक्तये जातिः कारणानां प्रयोजिका ॥२५॥
na tadutpadyate kiñcidyasya jātirna vidyate, ātmābhivyaktaye
jātiḥ kāraṇānām prayojikā. ||25||

Nothing comes into existence without its universal aspect already existing within it. The universal aspect initiates the causes necessary for the particular thing to manifest itself (Iyer, 1971, p. 22).

kāraṇeṣu padaṁ kṛtvā nityānityeṣu jātayaḥ,

कारणेषु पदं कृत्वा नित्यानित्येषु जातयः । क्वचित्कार्येष्वभिव्यक्तिमुपयान्ति पुनः पुनः ॥२६॥
kvacitkāryeṣvabhivyaktimupayānti punaḥ punaḥ. ||26||

Universals, once they are established among both eternal and non-eternal causes, repeatedly appear in various outcomes (Iyer, 1971, p. 22-23).

Bhartrihari explains that universals, akin to general concepts, prompt the creation of specific individuals. Referred to as “prayojikā” or “nimittakarana,” they are intrinsic to an object’s material and manifest when the individual form emerges. Universals are believed to preexist within the material, becoming visible upon the creation of the individual. Thus, they aid in the creation process, remaining eternal as they exist prior to the individual’s appearance.

निर्वर्त्यमानं यत्कर्म जातिस्तत्रापि साधनम् । स्वाश्रयस्याभिनिष्पत्तौ सा क्रियाणां प्रयोजिका ॥२७॥

nirvarttyamānaṃ yatkarma jātistatrāpi sādhanam,
svāśrayasyābhinīṣpattau sā kriyāṇāṃ prayojikā. ||27||

The universal is also responsible for creating newly formed objects. It encourages actions to happen so that the foundation for these objects can be established (Iyer, 1971, p. 23).

In a sentence like “sa Katam Karoti” (he makes a mat), the word “mat” refers to the object of the action, which is making. It functions as an accessory to the act of creating. However, a key question arises: how can something that doesn’t physically exist yet be considered an accessory to the action?

The answer lies in the concept that even though the physical mat isn’t yet present, its essence or universal aspect exists within its causes. This universal aspect is the inherent idea or essence of the mat that drives its production. Before the mat is physically made, this essence, or “sadhana,” serves as the accessory to the action. Once the physical mat is created, it becomes the “effect” or “karya.”

Importantly, the universal and individual aspects of the mat are not entirely separate entities like a cow and a horse. Instead, they are intertwined, representing different facets of the same thing.

The universal aspect is referred to as “prayojikā” or the accessory because it represents the initial idea that motivates the creation of the mat. This concept functions as the spark that initiates the action of making the mat.

विधौ वा प्रतिषेधे वा ब्राह्मणत्वादिसाधनम् । व्यक्त्याश्रिताश्रिता जातेः संख्याजातिर्विशेषिका ॥२८॥

vidhau vā pratiṣedhe vā brāhmaṇatvādisādhanam,
vyaktyāśritāśritā jāteḥ saṁkhyājātirviśeṣikā. ॥28॥

In commands or prohibitions, something general like “brāhmaṇahood” serves as an additional factor. This general aspect is specified by the individual it pertains to (Iyer, 1971, p. 23-24).

In the *Vedas*, actions, commands, or prohibitions often refer to something general, like a universal concept. When these instructions are followed, it’s this general concept that becomes the means or accessory, known as “sadhana.” Additionally, the general concept is further specified by the individual it pertains to, indicated by the suffix expressing the number.

Since the general concept is always associated with the individual, it’s questioned whether the word only expresses the general concept.

यथा जलादिभिर्व्यक्तं मुखमेवाभिधीयते । तथा द्रव्यैरभिव्यक्ता जातिरेवाभिधीयते ॥२९॥

yathā jalādirbhivryaktam mukhamevābhidhīyate, tathā
dravyairabhivyaktā jātirevābhidhīyate. ॥29॥

Similar to how a face seen in a reflection on water is still recognized as a face, regardless of its connection to the water, a word represents only the universal concept revealed by individual instances (Dissanayake, 1993, pp. 13-15).

We always encounter the universal concept together with the individual object it represents. However, when we use a word, it typically conveys only the universal aspect through its power of expression (abhidha). For instance, when we say “mukha” (face), we refer to the face itself, not the mirror reflecting it. Similarly, a word conventionally signifies the pure universal idea, not the individual

object embodying it.

In contrast, when we perceive something directly, we perceive both the universal and the individual simultaneously. However, when we use language, we adhere to conventional norms, and words convey meaning based on these conventions.

Bhartrihari now discusses how, if words don't convey individuals through their expressive power, then how can we distinguish between different universals?

यथेन्द्रियगतो भेद इन्द्रियग्रहणादुते । इन्द्रियार्थेष्वदृष्टोऽपि ज्ञानभेदाय कल्पते ॥३०॥

yathendriyagato bheda indriyagrahaṇādṛṭe,
indriyārtheṣvadrṣṭo'pi jñānabhedāya kalpate. ||30||

Just as the distinction between different sense organs, even if not directly perceived, still results in the recognition of differences in the knowledge obtained from each sense regarding their respective objects (Dissanayake, 1993, pp. 13-15).

तथात्मरूपग्रहणात् केषाञ्चिद् व्यक्तयो विना । सामान्यज्ञानभेदानामुपयान्ति निमित्तताम् ॥३१॥

tathātmārūpagrahaṇāt keṣāñcid vyaktayo vinā,
sāmānyajñānabhedānāmupayānti nimittatām. ||31||

Similarly, certain individuals, even if not directly perceived, can still cause variations in the understanding of universals (Dissanayake, 1993, pp. 10-15).

The idea presented here is that although words don't explicitly convey individual objects, those objects still influence our understanding of the universals conveyed by the words. This is similar to how our senses, even though not directly perceived, help us differentiate between different sensory perceptions. Now, there are three views regarding how words convey meaning:

1. Conveying the universal only: This view suggests that words convey only the universal aspect of things. For example, when we use the word “dog,” it conveys the universal concept of a dog, rather than any specific individual dog.
2. Conveying the individual qualified by the universal: This

perspective proposes that words convey the individual object but in association with its universal characteristics. So, when we say “dog,” it conveys not just the concept of a dog in general but also a particular dog, defined by its universal attributes.

3. Conveying the individual: This view argues that words directly convey individual objects without necessarily emphasizing their universal characteristics. So, when we say “dog,” it refers to a specific, identifiable dog without emphasizing the broader concept of dogs in general.

Bhartrihari explores diverse views on language’s role in conveying meaning, underscoring linguistic complexity. He suggests that the distinction between universals and individuals arises from the belief in a singular ultimate reality, implying that worldly diversity stems from varied expressions of this reality.

सत्यासत्यौ तु यो भागौ प्रतिभावं व्यवस्थितौ । सत्यं यत् तत्र सा जातिरसत्या व्यक्तव्यः स्मृताः ॥३२॥

satyāsatyau tu yau bhāgau pratibhāvaṃ vyavasthitau, satyaṃ yat tatra sā jātirasatyā vyaktavyaḥ smṛtāḥ. ||32||

Within every object, there are components that are considered real and others that are deemed unreal. The real aspect pertains to the universal aspect, while the unreal aspect pertains to the individual aspect (Iyer, 1971, p. 25).

सम्बन्धिभेदात् सतैव भिद्यमाना गवादिषु । जातिरित्युच्यते तस्यां सर्वे शब्दा व्यवस्थिताः ॥३३॥

sambandhibhedāt sattaiva bhidyamānā gavādiṣu, jātirityucyate tasyāṃ sarve śabdā vyavasthitāḥ. ||33||

Being, when differentiated based on the object it resides in, is termed as the universal. All words originate from this universal aspect of Being (Iyer, 1971, p. 25-26).

These shlokas explore the concept of universals and individuals within objects, rooted in the philosophical idea of monism. Universals, representing enduring essences, and individuals, referring to transient characteristics, are both aspects of Being present in all objects.

In the analogy of gold ornaments like *rucaka*, *svastika*, and *kundala*, the specific shape of each ornament is impermanent, differing from one another. However, the underlying substance of gold remains constant across all these variations. This enduring essence of gold is what qualifies as real or *satya*. However, even this reality is relative when compared to a more pervasive element like fire (*tejas*).

The ultimate reality, Brahman, is omnipresent and manifests in all things as their universals, such as ‘cowness’ in a cow or ‘horseness’ in a horse. These universals represent aspects of the great Being expressed through the characteristics of individual objects.

In essence, all words ultimately denote this supreme reality, and it is through their association with limiting factors that they appear as specific qualities like ‘gotva’ (cow-ness) or ‘aśvatva’ (horse-ness).

In the digital era, recognizing the difference between the universal and the individual helps us navigate and interpret the vast information available online. Let’s break this down with an example: When you search for “Golden Retrievers,” you’re looking for general information about the breed’s characteristics, traits, and history—universal aspects rather than details about a specific dog.

Now, imagine you come across a social media post about someone’s Golden Retriever named Max. Here, you’re encountering the individual aspect—a specific dog with unique qualities and experiences. Understanding this distinction is crucial for effective communication in various digital contexts. For instance:

Search engines: When using search engines, we typically seek universal information on broad topics. Recognizing this helps refine our searches for relevant, generalized information.

Social media: On platforms like social media, we encounter individual stories and experiences. Understanding these as specific instances within broader concepts allows us to appreciate diverse

content while recognizing underlying patterns.

Online communication: Whether writing emails, messaging, or posting online, being mindful of conveying universal concepts or individual experiences enhances clarity and understanding.

By applying this understanding of the universal and individual in digital contexts, we can engage more effectively with information online, leading to clearer communication and deeper comprehension.

Shabda in *Vakyapadiya*: Insights into Creation, Behaviour, and Knowledge

शब्दस्य परिणामोऽयमित्याम्नायविदो विदुः । छन्दोभ्य एव प्रथममेतद् विश्वं व्यवर्तते ॥१२०॥
इतिकर्तव्यता लोके सर्वा शब्दव्यपाश्रया । यां पूर्वोहितसंस्कारो बालोऽपि प्रतिपद्यते ॥१२१॥
आद्यः करणविन्यासः प्राणस्योर्ध्वं समीरणम् । स्थानानामभिघातश्च न विना शब्दभावनाम् ॥१२२॥
न सोऽस्ति प्रत्ययो लोके यः शब्दानुगमादुते । अनुविद्धमिव ज्ञानं सर्वं शब्देन भासते ॥१२३॥

śabdasya pariṇāmo'yamityāmnāyavidō viduḥ, chandobhya
eva prathamametad viśvaṃ vyavartata. ||120||
itikartavyatā loke sarvā śabdavyapāśrayā, yām
pūrvāhitasamkāro bālo'pi pratipadyate. ||121||
ādyah karavinyāsaḥ prāṇasyordhvaṃ samīraṇam,
sthānānāmabhihātaśca na vinā śabdabhāvanām. ||122||
na so'sti pratyayo loke yah śabdānugamādrte, anuviddhamiva
jñānaṃ sarvaṃ śabdena bhāsate. ||123||

These shlokas delve into the profound impact of words on life, encompassing creation, behavior, language development, and knowledge.

1. Creation through sound (shabda): The Vedas suggest that the universe originated from the divine sound “Shabda,” underscoring the fundamental role of sound in creation and existence.
2. Behavior and understanding: Words shape our behavior and perception. Children learn through verbal interactions, absorbing rituals and duties, indicating that words are powerful tools that influence how we understand and interact

with the world.

3. Language development: Language development in children is influenced by innate knowledge from past experiences. They instinctively learn to articulate words, demonstrating a deep connection to language from previous lives.
4. Connection between words and knowledge: Words are intimately linked with knowledge, shaping our understanding of objects and the world. All forms of knowledge—whether through perception, inference, or instruction—are intertwined with words.

These shlokas emphasize the inseparable bond between words and how we perceive and interact with the world (Varma, 1970, pp. 117-120).

In the digital age, the Vedic idea that the universe was created through sound is highly relevant, especially considering how sound is integral to technology and communication.

1. Sound in digital technology: Digital devices convert sound waves into signals for music, videos, and communication, making sound essential for digital experiences.
2. Digital communication: In emails, texts, and social media, words shape interactions and influence how others perceive and respond to us.
3. SEO and digital marketing: The language used in digital marketing affects consumer behavior, while search engines use words to provide relevant results.
4. Language learning: Children engage with language through technology, and their innate understanding of language influences their learning on digital platforms.
5. Words and knowledge: Much of our knowledge is communicated through words online, highlighting the importance of understanding language to navigate digital information and express ideas effectively.

Exploring the Principle of “Ekaśabdadarśana” in *Vakyapadiya*

यथा सास्नादिमान् पिण्डो गोशब्देनाभिधीयते । तथा स एव गोशब्दो वाहीकेऽपि व्यवस्थितः ॥२५२॥
yathā sāsnādīmān piṇḍo gośabdenābhidhīyate, tathā sa eva
gośabdo vāhīke’pi vyavasthitaḥ. ||252||

Just like how the word ‘cow’ refers to an animal with certain physical features like a dewlap, it also refers to a vāhika (vehicle) similarly (Pillai, 1971, p. 95).

सर्वशक्तेस्तु तस्यैव शब्दस्यानेकधर्मणः । प्रसिद्धिभेदाद् गौणत्वं मुख्यत्वं चोपवर्ण्यते ॥२५३॥
sarvaśaktestu tasyaiva śabdasyānekadharmaṇaḥ,
prasiddhibhedād gaṇatvaṃ mukhyatvaṃ copavarṇyate. ||253||

The importance of a word, whether it’s considered primary or secondary due to its ability to represent multiple meanings, is determined by how often it’s used. In simpler terms, the more frequently a word is used to refer to different things, the more significant it becomes in conveying those meanings (Pillai, 1971, p. 95).

The concept being discussed here is called “ekaśabdadarśana,” which means the view that when a single word refers to different things, it remains the same word. Let’s break down this explanation further.

When we use a word like “cow,” it generally refers to a specific animal with certain physical traits, such as having a dewlap. This is the words “abhidha” power, meaning its ability to convey a direct and specific meaning. However, according to ekaśabdadarśana, the word “cow” maintains its identity even when used in a different context, such as metaphorically referring to a vehicle (vahika). Though the word now refers to a different object, it still carries its inherent meaning and identity. The continuity and consistency of the word remain intact, showcasing the adaptability of language and the ability of words to convey meaning beyond their literal interpretations.

The principle of ekaśabdadarśana suggests that a single word can denote multiple meanings based on context. For instance,

the word “gauḥ” (cow) primarily refers to the animal we commonly recognize—a cow with four legs, a tail, and horns. This primary meaning is ingrained through frequent use and cultural understanding. Yet, the same word can also carry secondary meanings. For example, “gauḥ” might be used to refer to a vehicle (vahika) in a metaphorical sense, or to describe specific individual cows in a herd.

Ekasabdadarśana also explores how “gauḥ” can denote different meanings depending on the context. It can represent the universal concept of a cow, an individual cow within a herd, or even metaphorically describe something like a vehicle if it shares certain attributes with a cow, such as endurance or appetite.

The key idea is that the word retains its identity across these various uses. Whether it’s conveying a primary or secondary meaning, the word adapts to its context while still maintaining its essential nature. This flexibility highlights the richness of language, where a single word can carry multiple interpretations based on usage and context, reflecting both its literal and metaphorical capacities.

In the digital era, the concept of “ekasabdadarśana,” which means that a single word can have multiple meanings depending on its usage, is highly relevant. Let me explain this with an example. Think about how we use words like “cloud” or “mouse” in the digital world. Normally, “cloud” refers to a collection of water vapor in the sky, and “mouse” refers to a small rodent. However, in the digital context, “cloud” can also refer to online storage services, and “mouse” can refer to a computer accessory.

Despite these different meanings, the words “cloud” and “mouse” retain their identity and integrity. When we talk about saving files to the cloud or clicking with a mouse, we’re still using the same words, even though they now refer to different things.

This shows the versatility of language in the digital age. Words can adapt and take on new meanings to fit the context in

which they're used. Just like "cow" can refer to both an animal and a vehicle, words in the digital world can have multiple interpretations depending on how they're used.

Understanding this concept is important for effective communication and comprehension in the digital era. It helps us navigate the complexities of language in online interactions, whether it's reading articles, sending emails, or using social media.

So, in the digital age, the principle of "ekaśabdadarśana" reminds us of the flexibility of language and how words can evolve to convey new meanings in different contexts, enhancing our ability to communicate and understand in the digital world:

संसर्गो विप्रयोगश्च साहचर्यं विरोधिता । अर्थः प्रकरणं लिङ्गं शब्दस्यान्यस्य सन्निधिः ॥३१५॥
सामर्थ्यमौचिति देशः कालो व्यक्तिः स्वरादयः । शब्दार्थस्यानवच्छेदे विशेषस्मृतिहेतवः ॥३१६॥
saṁsargo viprayogaśca sāhacaryaṁ virodhitā, arthaḥ
prakaraṇaṁ liṅgaṁ śabdasyānyasya sannidhiḥ. ||315||
sāmarthyamaucitī deśaḥ kālo vyaktiḥ svarādayaḥ,
śabdārthasyānavacchede viśeṣasmṛtihatavaḥ. ||316||

Analyzing Word Meaning and Relevance across Eras

The Vrtti and Punyaraja explain that the ability or capacity of a word helps us understand its meaning when it's not clear. They say that the factors listed earlier only reveal this capacity. Some believe that it's the ability alone that determines the meaning, as different interpretations depend on this ability (Sarmā, 1980, pp. 382-383). They provide examples to illustrate this:

1. Connection (Samsarga): When we say "sakiśora dhenur aniyatām," the connection between "dhenuḥ" and "kiśora" suggests that a mare (female horse) is meant, not a cow
2. Separation (Viprayoga): In "akisora dhenur aniyatām," "dhenu" without "kiśora" implies a mare because only a mare can be without a foal
3. Association (Sahacarya): "Ramalakṣmaṇau" means Rama associated with Lakshmana, indicating Rama as the son of

Dasaratha.

4. Opposition (Virodha): “Rāmārjunau” suggests Parasurama due to his well-known opposition to Arjuna
5. Meaning (Artha) and Context (Prakarana): Illustrated in the previous verse
6. Indication (Linga): In “akṭaḥ sarkarāḥ,” indications elsewhere suggest that butter is used for mixing
7. Presence of another word: “Rāmārjunau” indicates meaning through the presence of another word.
8. Suitability (Samarthya): “Abhir upaya kanya deya” suggests giving the girl in marriage to a suitable, good-looking person
9. Propriety (Auciti), Place (Desa), Time (Kāla): Explained earlier.
10. Accent (Suara): In the Vedas, the meaning of a word is often determined by its accent.

These factors help clarify a word’s meaning by examining its connections to other words, context, relationships, contrasts, significance, appropriateness, placement, timeframe, gender, and pronunciation. Each aspect contributes to a deeper understanding of the word’s meaning and usage in various contexts.

In the digital era, understanding the capacity of words to convey meaning is crucial, just like it was in ancient times. Let’s break down how these factors are relevant today:

1. Connection (Samsarga): When we’re searching online for “fast cars,” the word “fast” connects with “cars” to suggest vehicles that are speedy, not necessarily vehicles moving quickly on their own.
2. Separation (Viprayoga): If we’re looking for “phones without cameras,” the absence of “cameras” indicates that we want phones lacking this feature, which is only possible with certain types of phones.
3. Association (Sahacarya): When we search for “Apple

iPhones,” the association with “Apple” directs us to iPhones made by the company Apple Inc., not iPhones from other manufacturers.

4. Opposition (Virodha): If we search for “Mac vs PC,” the opposition between “Mac” and “PC” directs us to articles or comparisons about the differences between Mac computers and PCs running Windows.
5. Meaning (Artha) and Context (Prakarana): Understanding the context of a word’s usage, like in product descriptions or reviews, helps us grasp its intended meaning in a specific situation.
6. Indication (Linga): For instance, if we search for “best laptops for gaming,” indications in reviews or specifications guide us to laptops with powerful graphics cards and processors suited for gaming.
7. Presence of another word: If we search for “Tesla Model S vs Model 3,” the presence of “vs” indicates that we’re comparing the two models, not looking for information about each model separately.
8. Suitability (Samarthya): When we search for “best smartphones for photography,” the suitability of certain smartphones for photography becomes evident based on their camera specifications and features.
9. Propriety (Auciti), Place (Desa), Time (Kāla): Adapting to the appropriate language, location-specific terms, and timing of searches ensures relevant results tailored to our needs
10. Accent (Suara): While less relevant in digital text, nuances in language, such as tone or emphasis in reviews or articles, can still influence our understanding of a product or topic.

Understanding how these factors shape the meaning of words helps us navigate the vast amount of information available online and find what we’re looking for more efficiently.

Conclusion

In a world where digital interactions dominate, Bhartrihari's *Vakyapadiya* offers a beacon of linguistic understanding and harmony. The text reveals the profound influence of words on creation, behavior, language development, and knowledge acquisition. As we navigate the digital landscape, *Vakyapadiya*'s principles help us decipher language's complexities, fostering inclusivity and understanding. By embracing linguistic diversity and the universality of words, we can bridge digital divides, creating connections across cyberspace. Honoring the wisdom of *Vakyapadiya* paves the way for a more enlightened and interconnected digital age.

[Dr. Pooja Tripathi is an Independent Researcher.]

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Implications of Rasa Siddhānta in Digital Storytelling: An Analysis of Selected Episodes of the Web Series ‘Navarasa’

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Abstract

Rasa Siddhānta, rooted in the ancient Sanskrit text *Nāṭyaśāstra* by Bharata Muni, is a fundamental concept in philosophy, art, and communication, focusing on evoking emotional responses known as Rasas. Originally derived from theatre, an audio-visual form of communication, the principles of the theory have transcended time and technology, now influencing contemporary digital platforms such as television, cinema, and OTT services. This study examines the relevance of Rasa Siddhānta in modern digital storytelling through a framing analysis of Netflix’s Tamil anthology series *Navarasa*, produced by Mani Ratnam and Jayendra Panchapekesan. The study analyzes selected episodes using a systematic random sampling method. The total number of episodes in the web series is nine, and the episode number 2, 4, 6, and 8 are chosen for the study. The research investigates how technical elements such as lighting, costumes, sets, and camera angles align with Bharata Muni’s theory. In this article, theoretical triangulation has been employed for data analysis, using both Rasa Siddhānta and color theory. The findings

suggest an alignment between the use of technical elements in digital storytelling and the principles suggested in Bharata Muni's *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

Keywords: *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Rasa Siddhānta, Navarasa, Bharata Muni, Netflix

Introduction

Rasa theory, originating from Bharata Muni's ancient text *Nāṭyaśāstra*, is a cornerstone of Indian aesthetics, philosophy, and cultural discourse. It explores the evocation of specific emotional responses, known as Rasas, in the audience through various art forms, including theatre, dance, music, and poetry. According to the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the primary objective of these art forms is to invoke emotions that already exist within the audience, creating a deep and resonant aesthetic experience. Rasa emerges from the interplay of Bhāvas—emotional states or contexts—conveyed by the artist, which are essential to the performance. In this dynamic, Bhāva represents the mental attitudes and emotions of characters, while Rasa is the emotional essence that artists convey, eliciting a cherished response from the audience.

Nāṭyaśāstra outlines nine primary rasas: Shringāra (love), Hāsya (laughter), Kāruṇā (compassion), Bībhatsā (disgust), Bhayānaka (fear), Vīra (heroism), Adbhutā (wonder), Raudra (anger), and Śhāntā (tranquillity). Each Rasa reflects a distinct emotional state that contributes to the overall aesthetic experience. These Rasas are typically communicated through the main character's expressions, gestures, and emotions, making them integral to the audience's engagement with the performance.

The Netflix anthology series *Navarasa* serves as a contemporary exploration and interpretation of Rasa Theory. Each episode of the series is dedicated to one of the nine traditional Rasas, offering a platform for modern artists and creators to delve into the nuances of these emotions within the context of Indian culture

and society. Through narrative storytelling, *Navarasa* reinterprets these age-old concepts, blending traditional Indian aesthetics with contemporary digital media.

This study aims to critically analyze the application and implications of Rasa theory in *Navarasa*, focusing on how the series utilizes technical aspects of digital storytelling—such as lighting, costumes, set design, and camera angles—to evoke these traditional rasas. By examining selected episodes of the series through the lens of Rasa theory, this research seeks to uncover the multifaceted dimensions of emotional expression, artistic representation, and cultural significance embedded within each narrative. The study endeavors to demonstrate the enduring relevance of Rasa Theory in modern digital storytelling and its transformative potential in enhancing audience engagement and artistic expression in contemporary media.

Literature Review

Rajendra Kumar Dudrah, in “Bollywood: Sociology Goes to the Movies,” explores how Bollywood serves as a platform for alternative cultural and social representations, distinct from dominant Western influences. Similarly, M. Madhava Prasad, in “Ideological Construction of National Cinema,” delves into the ideological underpinnings of Bollywood and its role in constructing narratives of nationhood and identity.

According to Edwin Gerow’s *Rasa as a Category of Literary Criticism*, there are three types of Indian films—socials, mythologicals, and the films made by Satyajit Ray—which, barring Ray’s films, have been considered inferior to those developed in the West. The “socials,” especially, are viewed as “an Indian version of social realism” (Gerow in Baumer and Brandon 247), dealing with contemporary problems related to caste or community, while the “mythologicals” are seen as “escapist musical-comedy fare” that “exploit the rich Puranic [ancient Indian scriptures] mythology

still so vivid to the Indian masses” (Gerow in Baumer and Brandon 247). On the other hand, the films by Satyajit Ray are “terribly well received in the West” because they do not appear to “respond to any Indian need,” and because these films “conform recognizably to our notion of a direct personal statement of the human condition” (Gerow in Baumer and Brandon 247).

Bharata Muni defined nine fundamental Rasas, or *Navarasa*, which encompass the full spectrum of human emotions: Shringāra (erotic love), Hāsya (laughter), Kāruṇā (compassion), Raudra (anger), Vīra (heroism), Bhayānaka (fear), Bībhatsā (disgust), Adbhuta (wonderment), and Śhāntā (peace). These Rasas are integral to Indian arts such as dance, music, theatre, painting, sculpture, and literature, although their application and interpretation can vary across different art forms.

Maithili Rao’s article “Heart of the Movies” highlights how Bollywood storytelling echoes the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and the ancient *Navarasa* Theory, drawing parallels with traditional Indian performance arts like Nautanki and Kathakars. Rao notes that Bollywood’s narrative style has “astonishing elasticity,” similar to the dynamic storytelling of wandering Kathakars and Harikatha exponents, who blend songs and dance into their performances. This approach predates and parallels Brechtian techniques, reflecting a deep-rooted “living Indian tradition” in Hindi cinema’s song and dance routines.

Research Objectives

- To identify the dramatic elements utilized in *Navarasa* to establish “Rasa.”
- To study the role of dramatic elements in *Navarasa* to evoke “Rasa.”

Research Methodology

The study employs framing analysis, a qualitative research method, to analyze how individuals understand situations and activities

depicted in the *Navarasa* series. Framing analysis examines various elements such as images, stereotypes, metaphors, actors, messages, and more, to uncover the underlying framing mechanisms used in the series.

The research design for this study adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing framing analysis to examine the Netflix series *Navarasa*. Framing analysis is chosen for its suitability in exploring the representation of diverse emotions and storytelling styles within the series.

Data Analysis Technique

The primary data analysis technique utilized in this study is framing analysis. This technique is employed to dissect the underlying framing mechanisms used in *Navarasa* and to understand how different elements contribute to the portrayal of emotions and storytelling styles. Specifically, the analysis focuses on how the technical aspects of digital storytelling—including lighting, costumes, sets and properties, angles, and shots—contribute to framing specific emotions and narratives within each episode.

Codebook for Technical Aspects

To facilitate the analysis, a codebook is utilized to systematically capture and categorize the technical aspects of digital storytelling present in each episode of *Navarasa*. These technical aspects include lighting, costumes, sets and properties, angles, and shots. The codebook given in table 1 serves as a structured tool for identifying patterns, trends, and variations in the visual elements employed throughout the series.

Table 1

Description of Camera Angles, Camera Shots, Lighting Techniques, and Color Themes

Category	Code	Abbreviation	Description
C a m e r a angles	Dutch angle	DA	a shot where the camera rotates around the lens axis relative to the horizon or vertical lines.
	low angle	LA	a shot positioned below the subject's eye line and points up
	high angle	HA	a shot where the camera looks down on the subject from an elevated perspective.
C a m e r a shots	close-up shot	CU	a shot taken at close range to show greater detail
	medium shot	M	a shot captured at a medium distance from the subject
	long shot	L	a shot showing the full length of the subject and its surroundings
	over the shoulder shot	OTS	a shot capturing the subject's perspective over someone's shoulder

Lighting techniques	soft lighting	SL	the lighting technique for creating a gentle, diffused glow
	hard lighting	HL	the lighting technique for creating harsh, well-defined shadows.
	natural lighting	NL	utilization of available light sources like sunlight
Color themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • monochromatic color scheme • vibrant colors • earthy tones • muted tones • warm color tones (red, orange, yellow) • cool color Tones (blue, green, purple) • complementary colors 		

Rasa and Colour Theory Integration

In addition to framing analysis, the study integrates Rasa and colour theory to deepen the understanding of emotional portrayals within each episode. The correlation between specific Rasas and colours provides insights into the emotional resonance and aesthetic choices made by the creators of *Navarasa*. This theoretical framework enhances the analysis by contextualizing the emotional experiences evoked by different scenes and narratives.

Table 2

Correspondence between Rasas, Colors and Meanings

Rasa	Color	Meaning
<i>kāruṇā</i>	grey	sorrow, compassion
<i>kāśya</i>	white	joy, laughter
adbhuta	yellow	wonder, surprise
bibhatsya	blue	disgust
<i>shāntā</i>	white	peace
<i>raudra</i>	red	anger
bhayanka	black	fear
<i>vīra</i>	pale orange	heroism, courage
<i>shringāra</i>	pale light green	love, beauty, attraction

By combining framing analysis with the integration of rasa and color theory, this study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how emotions and narratives are framed and communicated through visual storytelling in *Navarasa*. The comprehensive analysis of technical aspects and thematic elements contributes to a deeper exploration of the series' artistic and cultural significance.

Sampling

The episodes are selected according to a systematic random sampling technique. The total number of episodes in the web series is nine. The episodes chosen for the study are in even numbers: episodes 2, 4, 6, and 8. The selected episodes, along with their corresponding rasas, time duration, and directors, are outlined in the table 3 below.

Table 3

Episodes of Navarasa Anthology Series

Episode No.	Episode	Rasa	Directed by	Duration	Cast by

2	Summer of '92: <i>Hāsya</i>	<i>Hāsya</i> rasa	Priya-darshan	33:59	Yogi Babu Nedumudi Venu Ramya Nambeesan Y.Gee. Mahendran Master Shakthivel Naas (Dog)
4	Payasam: <i>Bībhatsā</i>	<i>Bībhatsā</i> rasa	Vas-anth S. Sai	34:31	Delhi Ganesh Rohini Aditi Balan Bhagavathy Perumal Kathadi Ramamurthy Kumar Natrajan
6	Roudhram: <i>Raudra</i>	<i>Raudra</i> rasa	Arvind Swami	37:54	Riythvika Sree Raam Azhagam Perumal Ramesh Thilak Geetha Kailasam
8	Thuninta Pin: <i>Vīra</i>	<i>Vīra</i> rasa	Sarjun KM	34:33	Atharvaa Kishore Anjali Azhagam Perumal Bava Chelladurai

Origin of the term 'Rasa'

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* is the earliest and most comprehensive treatise on Sanskrit drama and poetics, attributed to Sage Bharata. Often referred to as the Father of Sanskrit Poetics, Bharata's work is an encyclopedic guide that not only covers acting and stagecraft but also provides intricate details on makeup, costumes, accessories, props, and even the construction of performance spaces. This extensive work

is comparable to Aristotle's *Poetics*, though it is far more detailed in its scope.

Central to the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is the concept of *rasa*, which forms the foundation of Indian aesthetic theory. The *Rasa* theory posits that the emotions conveyed by performers directly influence the emotions experienced by the audience, creating a shared emotional journey. For example, if a character expresses love on stage, the audience is likely to feel love as well, establishing an empathetic connection between the performer and the viewer. Patrick Colm Hogan elaborates that this empathetic response is key to the enjoyment of a performance, as audiences resonate with the emotions displayed by the actors.

Each *rasa* corresponds to a specific emotion that performers aim to evoke, much like how different film genres are designed to elicit certain emotional responses from viewers—horror films provoke fear, while comedies aim to generate laughter. Although this comparison simplifies the deep emotional and spiritual connotations of *rasa*, it helps to convey the essence of how these emotions function within the framework of Indian performance art.

According to the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, there are nine fundamental *rasas*:

- *shringāra*, or love/desire
- *hāsyā*, or humor/laughter
- *kāruṇā*, or pity/grief
- *raudra*, or anger
- *vīra*, or energy/vigor
- *bhayānaka*, or fear/shame
- *bībhatsā*, or disgust
- *adbhuta*, or surprise/wonder
- *shāntā*, or peace/bliss

Each *rasa* evokes a specific emotion, similar to how film genres target particular feelings, illustrating its role in Indian performance art.

Rasa and Bhāva

In Bharata's drama theory, *rasa* is the emotional essence

experienced by the audience, closely connected to Bhāva, the emotional states portrayed by characters. The playwright creates Bhāva, the core of mental states, which the director conveys to the actors. Actors then use Abhinaya, the art of expression, to transform Bhāva into rasa, which brings pleasure and empathy to the audience. Rasa enhances the artistic experience by bridging the external and internal worlds and is akin to savoring flavors. The process involves Vibhāva (cause), Bhāva (emotion), Anubhāva (expression), and rasa, reflecting elements of Stanislavsky's acting method. Bharata outlines eight Sthayi Bhāvas, or durable emotional conditions, each manifesting specific Anubhāvas. These Bhāvas evoke eight corresponding Rasas which are listed in the table 4 below.

Table 4

Rasas and Sthayi-Bhāva

Rasa		Sthayi-Bhāva	
<i>shringāra</i>	passion	rati	love
<i>hāsya</i>	comedy	<i>hāsa</i>	jest
<i>karunā</i>	compassion	shoka	sorrow
<i>raudra</i>	fury	krodha	anger
<i>veera</i>	heroism	utsāha	willpower
<i>bhayānaka</i>	horror	bhaya	fear
<i>bibhatsa</i>	revulsion	jugupsā	disgust
<i>adbhuta</i>	amazement	vismaya	astonishment

The ninth rasa, shāntā (bliss and peace), introduced later, serves as the foundation of aesthetic bliss, harmonizing the other eight Rasas and enriching the spectrum of emotional experiences in art.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Interpretation of Technical Aspects in *Summer of '92: Hāsya (laughter)*

The episode, *Summer of '92*, is directed by Priyadarshan and has a duration of 33 minutes and 59 seconds. It primarily

evokes Hāsya rasa, which is the emotional experience of joy and laughter. *Summer of '92: Hāsya*, directed by Priyadarshan, is a nostalgic comedy set in 1992, centered around laughter (Hāsya). Velusamy, a famous comedian, revisits his old school, where humorous anecdotes unfold, particularly involving a teacher named Lakshmi and her dog, King. Despite comedic mishaps, the narrative explores themes of forgiveness and redemption, culminating in a heartwarming reconciliation. With a talented ensemble cast and a blend of humor and nostalgia, the episode offers an enjoyable viewing experience.

The episode concludes with a heartwarming reconciliation, emphasizing the enduring bonds of friendship and the healing power of laughter. Overall, *Summer of '92: Hāsya* offers a delightful mix of comedy, nostalgia, and heartfelt moments, providing an enjoyable viewing experience for audiences.

Camera Shots

- **0 to 10 min.** Low angles dominate, which can create a sense of empowerment or importance for the subjects. A single high-angle shot is used, possibly to establish the setting or environment.
- **10 to 20 min.** Low angles are again prevalent, maintaining the sense of importance or empowerment for the characters. No high-angle shots are used in this interval.
- **20 to 30 min.** Low angles continue to be the dominant choice, with high-angle shots being introduced. The use of high-angle shots may provide a different perspective or add visual interest to the scenes.

Camera Angles

- **0 to 10 min.** Low angles dominate, which can create a sense of empowerment or importance for the subjects. A single high-angle shot is used, possibly to establish the setting or environment.

- **10 to 20 min.** Low angles are again prevalent, maintaining the sense of importance or empowerment for the characters. No high-angle shots are used in this interval.
- **20 to 30 min.** Low angles remain predominant, with high-angle shots introduced to offer new perspectives or enhance visual interest.

Lighting Techniques

- **0 to 10 min.** Soft lighting and natural lighting are used, creating a warm and naturalistic atmosphere. The absence of hard lights suggests a desire for a softer and more subdued lighting style.
- **10 to 20 min.** Natural and soft lighting are maintained, contributing to the consistent atmosphere established in the previous interval.
- **20 to 30 min.** Similar to the previous intervals, soft and natural lighting techniques are employed. The absence of hard lights suggests a continued preference for a subtle and natural lighting style throughout the episode.

Color Themes

In *Summer of '92*, the integration of the Hāsya rasa (laughter and joy) with the color white creates a vibrant and uplifting atmosphere throughout the episode. The use of white in various elements of the episode serves to reinforce the theme of laughter and joy, enhancing the viewer's experience and immersion in the comedic narrative. White, as suggested by Robert Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions, represents purity, lightness, and positivity. In the context of the Hāsya rasa, white reflects the innocence and joviality associated with laughter and joy.

Table 5

Camera Shots, Camera Angles, and Lighting Techniques Used in Production Over Different Time Intervals in Episode 2

Camera shots				
Time	CU	M	L	OTS
0-10 min	4	20	22	11
10-20 min	3	11	9	8
20-30 min	4	13	19	14
Camera angles				
Time	DU	LA	HA	
0-10 min	-	4	1	
10-20 min	-	4	-	
20-30 min	-	4	4	
Lighting techniques				
Time	SL	HL	NL	color themes
0-10 min			✓	monochromatic colour scheme (soft neutral and whites), muted tones
10-20 min			✓	
20-30 min			✓	

Rasa and Color Theory Integration in *Summer of '92*

In *Summer of '92*, the *Hāsya* rasa (laughter and joy) is enhanced by the use of white, which creates a vibrant and uplifting atmosphere. White, symbolizing purity and positivity according to Robert Plutchik’s “Wheel of Emotions,” aligns with the innocence and joviality of the comedic narrative, reinforcing the theme of laughter and joy throughout the episode.

In the episode, white is prominently used—seen in the white car, attire of board members, protagonist’s audience, and students’ uniforms—reinforcing the theme of laughter and joy. This consistent use of white visually complements the comedic tone and enhances the emotional impact of *Hāsya* rasa.

Interpretation of Technical Aspects in *Payasam: Bībhatsā*

“*Payasam: Bībhatsā*,” directed by Vasanth S. Sai, explores the theme of disgust, focusing on Samanadhu’s resentment towards his successful nephew during a family wedding. Samanadhu’s envy

escalates to a shocking act of sabotage, symbolized by his false claim of finding a dead rat in the Payasam dessert. Through adept performances and gripping storytelling, the episode offers a poignant exploration of envy and resentment's destructive nature. It serves as a cautionary tale, urging audiences to confront and overcome negative emotions. Overall, "*Payasam: Bībhatsā*" captivates with its compelling narrative and thought-provoking themes in the *Navarasa* anthology series.



Camera Shots

- **0-10 min.** A mix of medium and long shots predominates, with fewer close-ups and over-the-shoulder shots, focusing on characters within their environment and their interactions.
- **10-20 min.** Close-ups increase, highlighting more intimate character moments, while medium and long shots continue, balancing character interactions with environmental views.
- **20-30 min.** Close-ups become more frequent, emphasizing character emotions and expressions. Medium shots remain common, but long shots decrease, focusing more on character interactions.
- **30-40 min.** The variety of camera shots narrows, with one close-up, one long shot, and four over-shoulder shots, suggesting a more focused perspective.

Camera Angles

- **0-10 min.** The segment uses low and high angles to create dominance or vulnerability, with Dutch angles adding visual interest or tension.
- **10-20 min.** Low and high angles remain prevalent, maintaining the sense of dominance or vulnerability, but Dutch angles are used less frequently.
- **20-30 min.** Low angles continue, but high angles decrease. Dutch angles are not used, suggesting a more straightforward visual approach.
- **30-40 min.** No specific camera angles are mentioned, indicating a focus on standard or neutral angles.

Lighting Techniques

- **0-10 min.** Soft, hard, and natural lighting create a warm, dynamic atmosphere, enhancing visual appeal and mood.
- **10-20 min.** Lighting techniques remain consistent, continuing to emphasize visual appeal and atmosphere.
- **20-30 min.** Soft and natural lighting are used, with hard lighting

absent, resulting in a more subdued or naturalistic style.

- **30-40 min.** Only natural lighting is used, suggesting a focus on realism or intimacy in the scene.

Color Scheme

The warm color palette of orange and yellow enhances the episode’s atmosphere, especially in the first half. These hues, reminiscent of a sunset, evoke coziness and nostalgia for a 1965 Kumbakonam family wedding. They add vibrancy and warmth to outdoor scenes, symbolizing happiness, celebration, and joy, and effectively capture the festive spirit of the wedding.

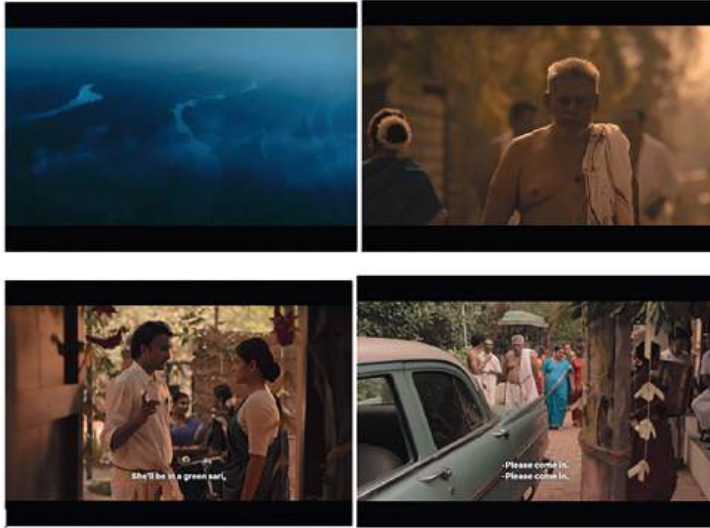
Table 6

Camera Shots, Camera Angles, and Lighting Techniques Used in Production Over Different Time Intervals in Episode 4

Camera shots				
Time	CU	M	L	OTS
0-10 min	2	11	13	3
10-20 min	7	8	8	3
20-30 min	17	18	4	2
30-40 min	1	✘	1	4
Camera angles				
Time	DU	LA	HA	
0-10 min	✘	2	4	
10-20 min	✘	4	1	
20-30 min	✘	✘	1	
30-40 min	✘	✘	1	
Lighting techniques				
Time	SL	HL	NL	color themes
0-10 min	✓	✓	✓	warm colours (orange/yellow)
10-20 min	✓	✓	✓	
20-30 min	✓	✘	✓	
30-40 min	✘	✘	✓	

Rasa and Colour Theory Integration in *Payasam*

In “Payasam,” blue is used to represent Bībhatsā rasa (disgust), enhancing emotional depth. As per Plutchik’s “Wheel of Emotions”, blue symbolizes sadness, reinforcing themes of discomfort and unease throughout the episode.



A notable use of blue in “Payasam” is Samanandu’s interactions with his deceased wife, represented in a blue sari. This highlights his longing and sorrow, while also emphasizing the themes of disgust and aversion as he confronts his past and present realities.





Shades of blue in Samanandu's widow daughter's attire add complexity to the storytelling. While she appears happy at her cousin's wedding, her blue attire subtly reveals her inner turmoil and dissatisfaction with her own misfortunes.



Interpretation of Technical Aspects in *Roudhram: Raudra*

Roudhram: Raudra, directed by Arvind Swami, delves into the destructive force of anger, portrayed skillfully by the ensemble cast led by Rhythvika and Sree Raam. The narrative revolves around Arul, who, driven by rage and betrayal after witnessing his mother's ordeal with a loan shark, violently confronts the perpetrator,

leading to his arrest. The story unravels Arul's past struggles and familial turmoil, paralleled with his sister Anbu's inner turmoil as she grapples with unresolved resentment. Themes of betrayal, forgiveness, and the lasting impact of anger are explored, urging reflection on the necessity of healing and reconciliation. Through powerful performances and compelling storytelling, *Roudhram: Raudra* offers a profound exploration of unchecked emotions and their consequences.

Camera Shots

- **0-10 min.** Medium shots and close-ups focus on characters' emotions and interactions, with long and over-the-shoulder shots setting the scene.
- **10-20 min.** Medium and long shots are more prevalent, with fewer close-ups. Over-the-shoulder shots highlight dialogue and interactions.
- **20-30 min.** Medium shots are dominant, balanced with long shots and close-ups. Over-the-shoulder shots are used moderately, mixing dialogue and introspection.
- **30-40 min.** Close-ups and medium shots are evenly distributed, emphasizing intense moments. Long shots and over-the-shoulder shots decrease, focusing on individual characters.

Camera Angles

- **0-10 min.** No Dutch angles are used. Low and high angles dominate, highlighting character dynamics and power shifts.
- **10-20 min.** No Dutch angles, with increased low and high angles suggesting shifts in power or heightened tension.
- **20-30 min.** Dutch angles remain absent. Continued use of low and high angles enhances dramatic impact and emphasizes character conflicts.
- **30-40 min.** One Dutch angle appears, possibly indicating narrative tension. Low and high angles persist, contributing to visual storytelling.

Lighting Techniques

- **0-10 min.** Soft lighting creates warmth, complemented by hard and natural lighting for depth and realism. The absence of some lighting techniques suggests a focus on natural light.
- **10-20 min.** Soft and hard lighting are used, enhancing the visual mood and dramatic impact of the scenes.
- **20-30 min.** Soft, hard, and natural lighting are all employed, providing a well-rounded approach that enhances visual depth and emotional resonance.
- **30-40 min.** All three lighting techniques are present, maintaining visual cohesion and contributing to the overall aesthetic appeal of the narrative.

Color Scheme

The introduction scene showcases the vibrant energy of the fish market with colorful stalls, boats, and marigold flowers, creating a lively atmosphere. As the episode progresses, the color scheme shifts to warmer tones, reflecting the chawls and crowded lanes. These warm colors convey familiarity and intimacy while also emphasizing the stifling atmosphere and underlying tension, deepening the emotional impact as characters navigate their struggles.

Table 7

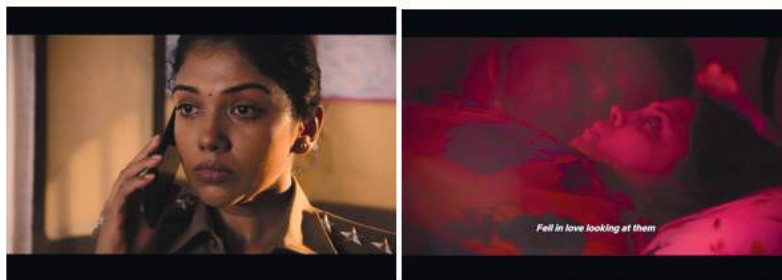
Camera Shots, Camera Angles, and Lighting Techniques Used in Production Over Different Time Intervals in Episode 6.

Camera shots				
Time	CU	M	L	OTS
0-10 min	10	12	9	8
10-20 min	4	13	-	11
20-30 min	6	10	8	5
30-40 min	7	7	1	2

Camera angles				
Time	DU	LA	HA	
0-10 min	-	3	7	
10-20 min	-	5	7	
20-30 min	-	5	5	
30-40 min	1	3	2	
Lighting techniques				
Time	SL	HL	NL	color themes
0-10 min		✓		vibrant colour (red)
10-20 min		✓	✓	warm colour
20-30 min	✓	✓	✓	(tone palette)
30-40 min	✓	✓	✓	

Rasa and Color Theory Integration in *Roudhram: Raudra*

In *Roudhram: Raudra*, the use of vibrant red hues to depict Raudra rasa (anger) creates a visually intense and emotionally charged atmosphere. Red symbolizes strong emotions like anger, enhancing the narrative’s depiction of turmoil. Complementary colors, such as green or blue, contrast with red, intensifying the emotional tension and adding depth to the storytelling. This color scheme effectively enriches the viewer’s emotional experience.





The use of red colors and complementary tones effectively amplifies the Raudra rasa (anger) in the episode, highlighting the raw intensity and destructive power of anger. This color scheme adds depth and resonance to the narrative, immersing the audience in the tumultuous emotions experienced by the characters.

Interpretation of Technical Aspects in *Thunintha Pin: Vīra*

Thunintha Pin: Vīra, directed by Sarjun KM, celebrates courage amidst the backdrop of the Naxalite insurgency in Tamil Nadu. The narrative follows Vetri, a rookie in the Special Task Force, tasked with transporting an injured Naxalite to police headquarters.

As Vetri faces challenges in the treacherous Sathyamangalam forest, he confronts his fears and moral dilemmas, showcasing unwavering determination. Through intense moments of conflict, the episode captures the essence of courage, portrayed authentically by the cast led by Atharvaa and Kishore. With a gripping cliffhanger, *Thunintha Pin: Vīra* inspires audiences with its portrayal of resilience and fortitude.

Camera Shots

- **0 to 10 min.** Long shots dominate, establishing the setting with a broader view, while close-up and medium shots add detail and depth.
- **10 to 20 min.** Medium shots are emphasized, focusing on character interactions and significant actions, with a balanced use of close-ups and long shots.
- **20 to 30 min.** Close-up, medium, and long shots are well-balanced, providing detailed and comprehensive portrayals of both characters and scenes. Over-the-shoulder shots add perspective.
- **30 to 40 min.** There is a shift to fewer close-ups and more long shots, indicating a broader focus on the environment and overall actions as the narrative progresses.

Camera Angles

- **0 to 10 min.** High angles dominate, suggesting authority or surveillance, with Dutch and low angles adding tension and visual interest.
- **10 to 20 min.** High angles remain prominent, continuing to emphasize power dynamics, while Dutch angles are not used.
- **20 to 30 min.** A balanced mix of Dutch, low, and high angles introduces visual variety, enhancing the mood and atmosphere.
- **30 to 40 min.** Dutch angles are absent, and low angles decrease, indicating a shift to more straightforward angles,

possibly reflecting a calmer tone.

Lighting Techniques

- **0 to 10 min.** Soft and natural lighting techniques are utilized, creating a warm and inviting atmosphere. The absence of hard lights contributes to a sense of authenticity and realism.
- **10 to 20 min.** The continuation of soft and natural lighting maintains consistency in the visual style, ensuring a seamless transition between scenes and enhancing continuity.
- **20 to 30 min.** Similar lighting techniques are employed, reinforcing the established mood and tone of the narrative while effectively illuminating the scenes.
- **30 to 40 min.** Soft lighting and natural lighting are once again utilized, providing consistency and coherence throughout the episode's duration.

Table 8

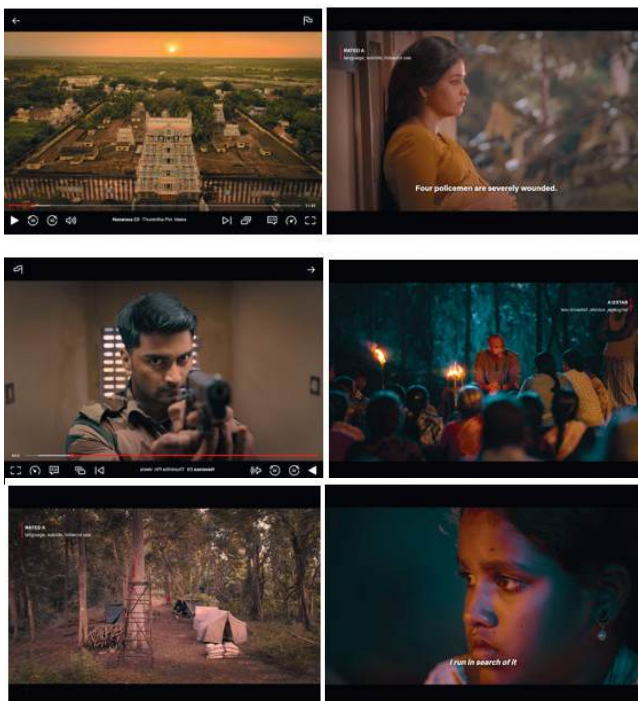
Camera Shots, Camera Angles, and Lighting Techniques Used in Production Over Different Time Intervals in Episode 8.

Camera shots				
Time	CU	M	L	OTS
0-10 min	12	14	24	3
10-20 min	9	20	10	8
20-30 min	9	8	8	4
30-40 min	2	3	9	3
Camera angles				
Time	DU	LA	HA	
0-10 min	1	7	12	
10-20 min	-	4	10	
20-30 min	1	6	5	
30-40 min	-	2	4	

Lighting techniques				
Time	SL	HL	NL	Color Themes
0-10 min	✓		✓	muted colours earthy tones
10-20 min	✓		✓	
20-30 min	✓		✓	
30-40 min	✓		✓	

Rasa and Colour Theory Integration in *Thunintha Pin: Vīra*

In *Thunintha Pin: Vīra*, the Vīra rasa (courage and heroism) is portrayed through pale orange and muted earthy tones. These colors, according to Robert Plutchik’s ‘wheel of emotions’, symbolize bravery and resilience. The soft pale orange represents warmth and determination, reflecting the protagonist Vetri’s inner strength as he faces the Naxalite insurgency.



In *Thunintha Pin: Vīra*, the integration of pale orange with muted and earthy tones enhances the depiction of Vīra rasa (courage and heroism). The pale orange symbolizes bravery and warmth, while the muted and earthy hues provide grounding and stability, reflecting the characters' steadfast resolve. This color palette captures the essence of courage and heroism, adding depth to the storytelling and enriching the viewer's emotional connection to the themes.

Conclusion

In summary, the *Navarasa* anthology series masterfully explores human emotions by blending technical filmmaking with deep thematic narratives. From the comedic *Summer of '92: Hāsya* and the discomfort in *Payasam: Bheebhatsya* to the intense drama of *Roudhram: Raudra* and the inspiring resilience in *Thunintha Pin: Vīra*, each episode skillfully employs color theory to evoke strong emotional responses and enhance storytelling.

Analyzing camera shots, angles, lighting, and color schemes reveals how these elements contribute to the portrayal of Rasas (emotions) and shape the narrative impact. Using Robert Plutchik's wheel of emotions, the series employs color symbolism to deepen our understanding of characters' inner struggles and external conflicts.

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Is Communication a Vidya or an Avidya according to Hinduism?

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[**Note:** This was prepared as a resource material for the International Seminar on Two Decades of the Sadharanikaran Model of Communication, organized by the Department of Languages and Mass Communication, Kathmandu University School of Arts (KUSOA), on 26 May, 2024.]

Abstract

This article discusses the discipline of communication as a vidya (true knowledge) according to Hinduism. The present article is a revisit to an older article (Adhikary, 2010). It presents Hindu perspective on communication concerning the Sadharanikaran Model of Communication, employing the message- or artifact-oriented research approach. This article observes moksha as the highest of purushartha chatustaya (four goals of human life) based on Hindu belief and presents an appraisal on verbal communication as a means for attaining moksha-in-life. In addition, the article recognizes different kinds of yoga, such as jnanayoga, karmayoga, and bhaktiyoga in Hinduism and examines whether the process of communication qualifies to be regarded as the sancharyoga. Then, it concludes yoga is a communication model, and the discipline of communication is a vidya itself, being relied on perspectives of Hinduism

Keywords: communication, Hindu perspective, moksha-in-life, sancharyoga, Sadharanikaran Model of Communication, vidya

Vidya and Avidya in a Continuum

Vidya as a word is used in different ways in Hindu scriptures. Sometimes it is used to refer to mere theoretical knowledge of the scriptures or meditation on various deities (for instance, in Brihadaranyaka Upanishad-4.4.10; Ishavasya Upanishad-9; also see, Vipashananda, 2006). But in its positive sense, the same term refers to true knowledge, Brahmajnana, which leads to immortality (Kena Upanishad-2.4). It is in the latter sense vidya has been used in this article. Opposite to vidya is the avidya, which is “[t]o know about world and worldly things” (Vipashananda, 2006). Spirituality and moksha attainment are the concerns of vidya.

According to Hinduism, the dignity of any discipline of knowledge would be high only when it qualifies as a vidya (true knowledge). This implies that every discipline of knowledge must be a discipline (shastra) of moksha at its peak (Adhikary, 2007, p. 2). Accordingly, the communication discipline also needs to align with this Hindu belief if it is to earn the status of Sanchar-shastra according to Hinduism. In other words, the communication discipline would be regarded as true knowledge (vidya) in the Hindu milieu if and only if the process of communication qualifies as a means for the attainment of moksha.

The Sancharyoga

The term sancharyoga consists of two words: sanchar and yoga. Sanchar has several meanings in Sanskrit, and one of them is the same as what is understood by communication in English. In fact, in various languages of Sanskrit origin, including Hindi and Nepali, sanchar has been the common word used as an equivalent to the word communication. It has been used here in the same manner. Yoga is also used in a variety of senses in Hinduism. Here, it denotes such means or system through which one attains moksha — the highest goal of human life in Hindu belief. Thus, sancharyoga would

signify the process of communication that succeeds as a means for the attainment of moksha (Adhikary, 2010, 2014, 2016).

Hindu society represents a civilization with a known history of thousands of years and a distinct cultural identity of its own. It is the inheritor of a culturally rich civilization rooted in the Vedic period. As such, a communication tradition, rich and refined both in theory and practice, has been an inseparable part of Hindu society. As Dissanayake (2003) observes, “No civilization is possible without a vigorous system of communication” (p. 18). According to Dissanayake (2006),

It is evident that countries of Asia ... have fashioned vibrant and complex civilizations that have evolved over the millennia. One cannot conceive of any sophisticated civilization without the presence of a multi-faceted order of communication. This makes it imperative that we probe into how scholars in Asia have sought to formulate and conceptualize their respective understandings of human communication. (p. 4)

Communication, as an academic discipline, has been witnessing “the multicultural turn” (Miike, 2007, p. 272). Consequently, the sphere of communication discipline has been broadened and various indigenous insights from philosophy, arts, literature, religion, and also other branches of knowledge are being incorporated. Particularly, “a great upsurge of interest in the study and research in Asian theories of communication” (Dissanayake, 2009, p. 7) has been noticed. Theorizing communication from Asian perspectives is advancing in such an extent that even the Asiatic School of communication theories is said to be emerging and developing, and becoming increasingly significant (Chen, 2006; Edmondson, 2009, p. 104). This marks “the promotion of universal humanity and the preservation of cultural diversity in an age of glocalization” (Miike, 2008, p. 69).

Both communication and theorizing communication are indigenous to Hindu society. Various Hindu texts consist of inquisition/exposition on communication. In other words, diverse and enormous sources are available in this regard. But very few of them have been studied so far from the vantage point of communication discipline. However, the field of theorizing communication from a Hindu perspective is also emerging and evolving.

An account of the Hindu perspective on communication has been presented with the help of the sadharanikaran model of communication (SMC) in the following section. Then, the article presents an appraisal of verbal communication as a means for attaining moksha-in-life. Moreover, it examines whether communication, as envisioned in Hinduism, qualifies to be regarded as a kind of yoga. Finally, it is observed that the discipline of communication can be considered a vidya in Hinduism. In this course, the researcher has employed the message- or artifact-oriented research approach.

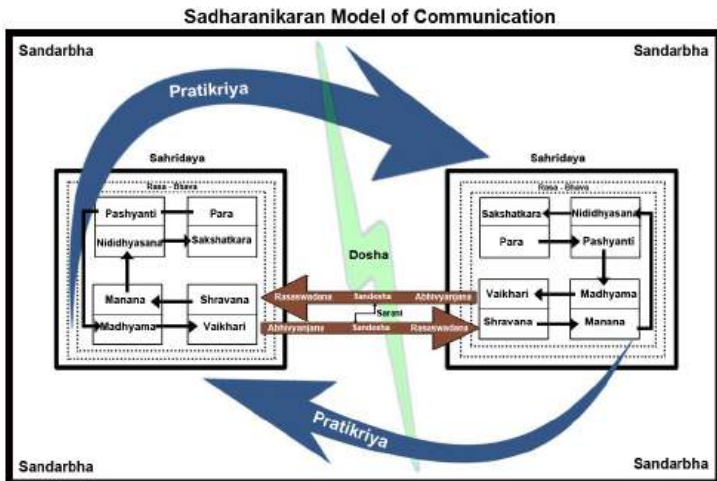
Understanding Communication from a Hindu Perspective

There are many conventional concepts, theories, and methods in Hinduism, which have their contemporary relevance and significance to the discipline of communication. With vast diversities within the Hindu society, there is scope for many theories and models of communication. Various efforts (such as Adhikary, 2003, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2014, 2016; Babbili, 2001; Davis, 1988; Dhole, 2006; Dissanayake, 1981, 1982a, 1982b, 1983, 1986, 1987, 1988a, 1988b, 2003, 2006, 2009; Gangal and Hosterman, 1982; Gumperz, 1964; Gunaratne, 1991; Jain and Matukumalli, 1996; Jayaweera, 1988; Kirkwood, 1987, 1989, 1990, 1997; Kumar, 2005a, 2005b; Lloyd, 2021; Majumdar, 1958; Miike, 2017, 2024; Mohan, 1992; Oliver, 1971; Saral, 1983; Sitaram, 2004; Tewari, 1980, 1992; Thirumalai, 2003, 2004; and Yadava, 1987, 1998) have been made to understand, discuss and/or theorize communication from Hindu perspective. The Sadharanikaran Model of Communication (often

abbreviated as the SMC) primarily draws on the *Natyashastra* of Bharata Muni and the *Vakyapadiya* of Bhartrihari, and illustrates the process of communication from a Hindu viewpoint. It was initially presented in 2003 (Adhikary, 2003, p. 84), and revised versions were presented over the years. An international seminar was recently organized to celebrate the two decades of the SMC (Dahal, Kafle & Poudyal, 2024).

Figure 1

The Sadharanikaran Model of Communication



Sadharanikaran as a concept/theory should not be confused with the Sadharanikaran Model of Communication. The former, which is one of the significant theories in Sanskrit poetics, has its roots in the *Natyashastra* of Bharata Muni and is identified with Bhattanayaka. Bharat Muni describes sadharanikaran as that point in the climax of a drama when the audience becomes one with the actor, who lives an experience through his/her acting on stage and starts simultaneously reliving the same experience. The process has been described as *rasaswadana*. When sadharanikaran happens, sharing or commonness of experience takes place in full form. According to Bhattanayak, the essence of sadharanikaran is to

achieve commonness or oneness among the people. The latter refers to a model of communication (see the figure), which draws on the classical concept/theory of sadharanikaran along with other resources in order to visualize the Hindu perspective on communication.

The SMC is a systematic presentation of a process of attaining mutual understanding, commonness, or oneness among communication parties. It illustrates how the communicating parties interact in a system for the attainment of saharidayata (for further discussion on the model, see Adhikary, 2009, 2014).

Communication as a means for moksha-in-life

Hinduism envisions four goals of life _ purushartha chatustayas (Hiriyanna, 1952, pp. 65-68; 1993). Though the four goals encompass all of the three dimensions — adhibhautika (physical or mundane), adhidaivika (mental) and adhyatmika (spiritual) — in orthodox Hindu life “[t]he spiritual motive dominates” (Radhakrishnan, 2004a, p. 25). According to Aurobindo (1999a), “Brahmajnana, Yoga & Dharma are the three essentialities of Hinduism” (p. 64). Thus, it is evident that moksha (Brahmajnana, salvation, liberation, freedom) is the highest purushartha in Hindu belief. As Swami Ramsukhdas (2005) puts it, “All the worldly pleasures without attaining salvation are useless ... it is the main duty of a man to attain salvation” (p. 66). Such a view is shared by virtually all schools of Hinduism except the philosophy of Charvaka (Balasubramanian, 1990, p. 17; Sinha, 1987, p. 252).

The word moksha in Sanskrit has been derived from the root muk and has many connotations due to the pluralistic tradition of Hinduism (Adhikary, 2007, p. 40; Radhakrishnan, 1996, p. 119). But this does not mean that there is no coherence. To get freedom from the law of karma is a necessary condition for moksha:

It is conceived as freedom from subjection of time. As birth and death are the symbols of time, life eternal or moksha is liberation from births and deaths. It is the fourth state of

consciousness beyond the three worlds, what the Bhagavad-gita calls paramam brahma or brahma-nirvana. It is freedom from subjection to the law of Karma. (Radhakrishnan, 1996, p. 119)

A primary concern here is whether moksha is a theoretical enterprise only. If it was so, from a practical point of view, it would be worthless in its utility in real human life, and hence moksha would not have been termed a purushartha. Incorporating it in the set of purusharthas implies that moksha is both a theoretical as well as a practical enterprise. Moreover, the unity of theory and practice is a common view of orthodox Hindu philosophical traditions (Balasubramanian, 1990, p. 16; Bhattacharyya, 1990, p. 10; Sen, 1990, p. 77), and this view applies to moksha too. Moksha is a theoretical enterprise, it is obvious, but it has to be attained in the domain of practice.

In Hinduism, moksha may be jivan-mukti (i.e., moksha-in-life) or videha-mukti (i.e., moksha after the cessation of the body). “While jivan-mukti is deliverance during life, videha-mukti is deliverance after death, when out of bodily form” (Radhakrishnan, 1996, p. 121). Jivan-mukti and videha-mukti denote the same state but from two different standpoints. “There is only one liberation in the sense of liberation from bondage, though it may be viewed in two perspectives in the context of the continuation or cessation of the body” (Balasubramanian, 1990, p. 21). According to Swami Vidyananda (1996), “The two types of liberation mentioned are distinguished only by the presence or absence of the body and the sense organs; the experience is the same” (p. 34). The result is the same: “In either case, the soul is freed from conditioned state” (Radhakrishnan, 1996, p. 122).

What is necessary for moksha is to transcend time and space irrespective of bodily existence. In fact, moksha is the natural state of atman, which is by its very nature capable of transcending time and space (Abhedananda, 1992, p. 37). It is not that the world ceases to

exist altogether, but all illusions and desires have vanished, thereby making the self mukta — liberated (Dasgupta, 1969, p. 161; Hiriyanna, 2005, pp. 173-174; Vidyananya, 1996, p. 20). In Hindu belief, moksha-in-life is a possibility for everybody (Shastri, 1976, p. 196).

Thus, moksha is the highest attainment of humans; it is not just a theoretical concept, and it can be attained even during life by getting freedom from subjection to the law of karma. It is only in this light studying the issue of attainment of moksha through communication becomes significant in terms of its utility in real human life. First, as moksha is not a theoretical enterprise the issue cannot be dismissed as just wandering of mind. Second, as it is not a post-mortem state this concern has something to do with real human life. In other words, the moksha that is to be attained by means of sanchar is jivanmukti (moksha-in-life). In the words of Aurobindo, “The aim of our Yoga is Jivanmukti in the universe; ... we have to live released in the world, not released out of the world” (1999a, p. 104).

Any endeavor in human life should lead, or at least agree with, the attainment of the purusharthas, and communication cannot be an exception in Hindu belief. Thus, any model of communication, if it is innate in Hinduism, should be able to describe communication as such a process that is capable of guiding even toward moksha (Adhikary, 2008, p. 284). The SMC not only illustrates the process of human communication but also illustrates the process of attaining moksha. According to this model, when taken in the adhyatmika context, communication is the process of moksha attainment (Adhikary, 2009, pp. 81-82).

The process of sadharanikaran is possible between atman and Brahman because Brahman is the rasa (“Rasovaisah” — Taittiriyaopanishad, VII.1; also see Raju, 1993, pp. 601-602) and atman has the capacity to accomplish rasaswadana. As Vatsyayan (1996) observes, “the aesthetic experience is akin to the mystic

experience of Brahman” (p. 146). Hindu scriptures (shastras) use the same word — Purusha — for atman and Brahman — “as if to lay stress upon the oneness of humanity with God” (Aurobindo, 1999a, p. 7). In the state of sadharanikaran, there is perfect communication between atman and Brahman, and they are identified as sahridayas — “Brahman is the Atman and the Atman is the Brahman” (Radhakrishnan, 2004a, p. 146).

As shown in an earlier study (Adhikary, 2007), Hindu thoughts on verbal communication, especially in a spiritual context, resort to the concepts of Shabda Brahman and Shabda Pramana. In both approaches, verbal communication qualifies not only as a process of human communication in a worldly setting but also as a means for attaining moksha-in-life.

The concept of Shabda Brahman is not new for the students and followers of Hinduism. The Pranava (the letter Aum or Om) is a signifier of Brahman, and it is the Shabda Brahman. Considering Pranava as Brahman is in accordance with the view of the Upanishads. In *Vakyapadiya*, Bhartrihari also has identified Brahman with speech. This approach has been envisaged in the SMC in the continuum of para-sakshatkara, wherein the vak (word or speech) is identified with the Brahman. In other words, the word (shabda) in the para level is Brahman, and the moksha-seeker (mumukshu) attains moksha if he/she does sakshatkara of the para vak. Here, atman experiences oneness with the Brahman (“Aham Brahmasmi”). Once the identity is established, the two terms — Brahman and Atman — become interchangeable and it makes no difference whether the Absolute is understood as Brahman or Atman (Krishnamurthy, 1989, p. 83).

In the second approach, Shabda has been treated as Shabda pramana. In this view, Shabda or word is not only considered a source of valid knowledge but also “as the decisive source of our cognition about all those matters that transcend the limits of possible

sensory experience” (Mohanty, 2001, p. 11). Even it is claimed that, “as a pramana, it is the strongest of all. At least in certain privileged domains, it cannot be challenged by any other” (ibid., p. 16).

Considering shabda as pramana does not mean that mere reading of the scriptures is sufficient; rather, understanding them and realizing the highest Truth described there is vital (Abhedananda, 1992, p. 98). It is in the domain of realization the language transcends the world of plurality thereby leading to “the ultimate realization of the universal unity of existence, consciousness and bliss” as a result of sakshatkara “of the great sentences like ‘I am Brahman’, ‘that thou art’ and so on” (Bhattacharyya, 1990, p. 14). Thus, the approach of considering Shabda as Pramana ultimately leads to Shabda as Brahman. And the above-mentioned second approach finally subsumes within the first approach.

Envisioning Communication as a Yoga

From the above discussion, sanchar (communication) as envisioned in Hinduism in general, and as illustrated by the SMC in particular, has been established as a means for attaining moksha-in-life. Then the immediate question arises whether sanchar being as a means for attaining moksha, qualifies as yoga too. In other words, there can be sanchariyoga, just like jnanayoga, karmayoga and bhaktiyoga.

Yoga does not mean the same all the time (Adhikary, 2007, p. 61; Aurobindo, 1999a, p. 18; Misra, 2008, p. 15; Radhakrishnan, 2004b, p. 337). It is to be noted that there is a system of philosophy named Yoga, which is identified with Patanjali. But here the word yoga does not refer to his system. Literally, it means ‘yoking’ and connotes the means or system through which moksha is attained (Adhikary, 2007, p. 63; Radhakrishnan, 2004b, p. 337; Shastri, 1976, p. 202; Vidyananya, 1996, p. 87).

Thus, yoga implies a particular state of the atman:

Yoga is getting to God, relating oneself to the power that

rules the universe, and touching the absolute. It is yoking not merely this or that power of the soul, but all the forces of heart, mind, and will to God. It is the effort of man to unite himself to the deeper principle. We have to change the whole poise of the soul into something absolute and uncompromising and develop the strength to resist power and pleasure. Yoga thus becomes the discipline by which we can train ourselves to bear the shocks of the world with the central being of our soul untouched. It is the method or the instrument, upaya, by which the end can be gained. (Radhakrishnan, 2004a, p. 532)

Aurobindo (1999a) holds a system approach to yoga, where any system of particular characteristics could qualify as yoga:

Yoga, generally, is the power that the soul in one body has of entering into effective relation with other souls, with parts of itself which are behind the waking consciousness, with forces of Nature and objects in Nature, with the Supreme Intelligence, Power & Bliss which governs the world either for the sake of that union in itself or to increase or modify our manifest being, knowledge, faculty, force or delight. Any system that organizes our inner being & our outer frame for these ends may be called a system of Yoga. (p. 19)

In another place, Aurobindo says that the complete practical aim of yoga is “to rise into divine existence, force, light & bliss and recast in that mold all mundane existence” (p. 102). For him, yoga is a means to arrive “at union with the Truth behind things through an inner discipline which leads us from the consciousness of the outward and apparent to the consciousness of the inner and real” (p. 327). He defines yoga as “the science, the process, the effort, and action by which man attempts to pass out of the limits of his ordinary mental consciousness into a greater spiritual consciousness” (p. 327). It is

a “methodized effort towards self-perfection” (1999b, p. 6).

Aurobindo has used the term “in the most general sense possible as a convenient name including all processes or results of processes that lead to the unveiling of a greater and inner knowledge, consciousness, experience” (1999a, p. 329). He firmly declares,

Any psychic discipline by which we can pass partly or wholly into a spiritual state of consciousness, any spontaneous or systematized approach to the inner Reality or the supreme Reality, any state of union or closeness to the Divine, any entry into a consciousness larger, deeper or higher than the normal consciousness common to humankind, fall automatically within the range of the word Yoga. (1999a, p. 329)

Thus, yoga is any means through which one gets connected, identifies with Isvara or Brahman or Paramatman; or attains moksha. For instance, jnana, karma, and bhakti are different paths for moksha, and hence they are established as different yogas. And, there is still scope for developing more yogas because there is no end in the pursuit of moksha.

Sanchar, as envisioned in Hinduism, has already been proved as a means for attaining moksha. After establishing the fact that yoga refers to any system or method for the attainment of moksha and already establishing sanchar such means, there is nothing for not considering sanchar as yoga. Thus, it is evident that the process of communication (sanchar) can be accepted as a kind of yoga provided that process results in the attainment of moksha. Hinduism has set moksha as the highest of the purushartha chatustaya (four goals of human life) and has introduced different paths, that is, different kinds of yoga, for the attainment of moksha. The sancharyoga is an addition in this regard.

Communication as Vidya

It is already discussed, regarding the Sadharanikaran Model

of Communication, that communication can be a means for the attainment of moksha. In other words, communication, as envisioned in Hinduism, qualifies not only as a process of sadharanikaran in a worldly setting but also as a means for attaining moksha-in-life. In addition, it has been established that the process of communication (sanchar) can be accepted as a kind of yoga. This provides sufficient ground for the communication discipline to qualify for being considered as a vidya according to Hinduism.

Approaching communication as a vidya does not imply discarding the avidya aspect. As mentioned above, the Hindu mode of communication deals with all of the adhibhautika (physical or mundane), adhidaivika (mental), and adhyatmika (spiritual) dimensions of life. Whereas the communication discipline is avidya in the physical and mental domains, it becomes a kind of vidya by incorporating the notion of sancharyoga. The co-existence of vidya and avidya aspects in the communication discipline (sancharshastra) does not invite any contradiction or problematic situation; rather, it heightens the significance of the discipline. Because one who knows vidya and avidya together attains immortality through vidya by crossing over death through avidya (“Vidyamchavidyam cha yastadveda ubhayam saha, Avidyaya mrityum tirtva vidyayaamritamashnute” — Ishavasya Upanishad-11).

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Cyberbullying Against Women in the News Coverage of Bangladeshi News Media

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the news regarding cyberbullying against women on the Facebook pages of news media in Bangladesh. Content analysis was used as a method, while media framing was the theory of the study. A total of sixty news stories were selected from the Facebook pages of the *Daily Prothom Alo*, *The Daily Star*, *Jamuna Television*, *Somoy Television*, *Bdnews24.com*, and *NewsBangla24.com* through purposive sampling techniques. The study revealed that most of the news stories (60 percent) were viewed as unfavorable to the victims of cyberbullying. Around 40 percent were treated as straight-jacket news with text-based and video programs. Approximately 25 percent were entertainment and 20 percent were criminal issues with celebrity actresses and police officials as sources of the news stories, respectively. The findings might play a precious role for the policymakers in identifying the victims of cyberbullying, particularly against women, and in making suitable policies for the news media of Bangladesh.

Keywords: Bangladesh, cyberbullying, Facebook page, news, news media, women

Introduction

The growth of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), particularly Internet connectivity, has facilitated instant access to information through mobile devices. However, it has also accelerated the spread of rumors, which can lead to negative mental and physical health outcomes for social media users (Hazlyna, et.al, 2021). Cyberbullying is a significant societal problem affecting almost all social media users, especially women, who are frequently subjected to online harassment (Kabir, 2023).

Cyberbullying is defined as the act of “sending or posting harmful or cruel text or images using digital communication devices, such as the Internet or social media” (Willard, 2004, p. 1). It can occur anonymously or involve groups using technology like smartphones, computers, or tablets (Abaido, 2019). In Bangladesh, this issue disproportionately affects women and girls. According to a report by the Dhaka Metropolitan Police, 80% of women and girls aged between 14 to 22 have experienced cyberbullying, with teenagers making up a significant portion of cybercriminals. Additionally, 49% of school students were also affected by this harassment in Bangladesh (DMP, 2020).

Zaman et al. (2017) noted that approximately 73% of Bangladeshi women have been victims of online harassment, which negatively impacts both their personal and social lives. In similar contexts, Pohan et al. (2023) found that Indonesian news media frequently report on sexual harassment, with female students being the primary victims. Yang’s study (2020) on media reporting of cyberbullying also emphasized that news coverage, like in *The Star*, helps increase public knowledge of preventative measures. Another study by Ringrose and Barajas (2011) explored how digital phenomena, including cyberbullying, impact women’s identities. Muir et al. (2021) revealed that women are particularly vulnerable to online shaming, which can have long-term consequences. Similarly,

Felt (2017) and Mowly and Bahfen (2020) highlighted how media often oversimplifies cyberbullying cases, particularly those involving teen suicides. While existing research on cyberbullying is limited, especially in Bangladeshi news media, this study aims to address that gap by analyzing the news regarding cyberbullying against women on the Facebook pages of news media in Bangladesh.

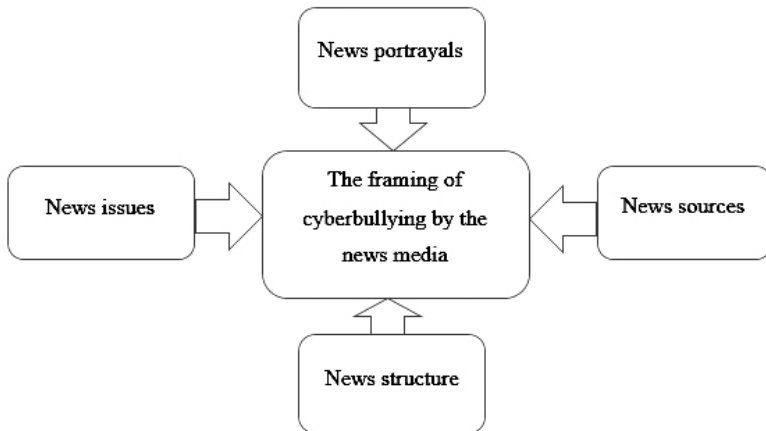
Study Methods

This study was conducted on the Facebook pages of six news media in Bangladesh by following the content analysis method. The news media included two daily newspapers (*Daily Prothom Alo* and *The Daily Star*), two television channels (*Jamuna Television* and *Somoy Television*), and two online news portals (*bdnews24.com* and *NewsBangla24.com*). Television channels and online news portals were selected for their reliability, while newspapers were chosen for their highest circulation, as reported by the *Management Resource and Development Initiative* (MRDI, 2022). The study also used keyword searches such as ‘cyber bullying’, ‘online bullying against women’, ‘cyberbullying against women on Facebook’, ‘women harassment on social media’, and similar phrases to find relevant news stories on these Facebook pages. Ten recent news stories from each media outlet were chosen, resulting in a total of 60 news stories from January 2020 to December 2023, purposively. Descriptive statistics were used to design tables with frequency and percentage using Microsoft Excel.

Media Framing Theory

The theoretical framework bestowed by Media Framing Theory, introduced by Gregory Bateson in 1972, is a meta-communication method (Bateson, 1972, p. 197; Hallahan, 2008) that involves placing news items and story content within a known context (Arowolo, 2017). It involves choosing specific characteristics of a perceived reality and emphasizing them in a communication text, supporting issue diagnosis, logical analysis, ethical assessment, and treatment of specific items (Entman, 1993, p. 52).

Framing is defined as “the process of drawing notice to some elements of truth while concealing others, which can contribute to various reactions” (Griffin, 2003) and “the selection of a limited number of thematically associated characteristics for presentation in the media narrative when a specific object is examined” (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Several news elements frequently transmit frames. They include photo descriptions, an intro, subheadings, and the news (Tankard, 2001). Another four types of frames were: coverage of news stories (size and engagement), issues of news, sources of news, and tone of photos (Wong, 2004). The media framing theory was applied to the framing analysis of the portrayal of news, sources of news, structures of news, issues of news, types of news stories, etc. Figure 1 illustrates the research framework for this study.



Source: Developed by the Researcher, 2024.

Findings and Analysis

Portrayal of News

The portrayal of news regarding cyberbullying against women posted on social media, especially the Facebook pages of

the media above outlets, has been investigated in this study. There are four types of news portrayed on the Facebook pages of each media news link with text, video link with text, news link only, and video link, respectively. Table 1 shows that 25 (41.67 percent) of the news were found up the news with text links. In addition, 16 (26.67 percent) were simply news links, and 11 (18.33 percent) were merely video links. On the other hand, eight (13.33 percent) were text-based news with video links.

Table 1

Portrayal of News

Category	Number	Percentage
Text and News link	25	41.67
News link	16	26.67
Video link	11	18.33
Text and Video link	8	13.33
Total	60	100.00

Source: Data received from Facebook pages -2023

For example, on the Facebook pages of Daily Prothom Alo, a news story with the headline ‘Women are the most victims of cyber bullying’ was posted with text and a news link. The Daily Star posted a headline of a news story, ‘73% of women face cybercrimes: Tarana,’ with text and a news link. Only a news link headlined ‘You are sick, your husband doesn’t know, how does the sir of your other department know? -The Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP)’ was posted on the Facebook page of Jamuna Television. In addition, Somoy News TV posted a news story titled ‘Cyber bullying; Many takes courage when I speak’ on their Facebook page in video format. Moreover, a news story published on the Facebook pages of Bdnews24.com with the heading ‘Apu Biswas at DB office: ate food, filed a complaint’ with only a news link. In addition, a news item posted on the Facebook page of Newsbangla24.com, with the heading of ‘Cyberbullying is increasing alarmingly,’ is a news link with text.

Structure of News

The structure of news regarding cyberbullying against women issues was analyzed in the present study. There are mainly seven structures of news stories found in the published news stories: straight jacket news, opinion, interview, investigative news, interpretative news, program, feature, etc. The following Table 2 presents the structure of news stories posted on the Facebook pages of selected media outlets. The data revealed that 24 (40.00 percent) news articles were identified as straight-jacket news with inverted pyramid structures, 18 (30.00 percent) were opinions about different issues with cyberbullying against women, six (10.00 percent) were investigative news, and four (6.67 percent) were interviewed, respectively. In addition, two (3.33 percent) were interpretative news stories with several pieces of information about cyber bullying, and another three (5.00 percent) different programs and featured news stories were found from the published news.

Table 2

Structure of News

Category	Number	Percentage
Straight Jacket News	24	40.00
Opinion	18	30.00
Investigative News	6	10.00
Interview	4	6.67
Program	3	5.00
Feature	3	5.00
Interpretative News	2	3.33
Total	60.00	100.00

Source: Data received from Facebook pages -2023

According to the findings, straightjacket news mostly presents cyberbullying issues relating to women, celebrities, actors, actresses, students, teachers, police, etc., with different incidents like statements, complaints, legal actions, protests, press conferences,

rights, rape, crime, entertainment, campaigns, etc. On the other hand, investigative news stories cover the broad scenario of events with various analytical descriptions of cyberbullying issues. Moreover, interpretive news, opinion, and featured news describe an issue by providing more information and basic facts and evidence about a particular issue of cyber bullying. The interview and program describe an issue from someone's personal view with possible solutions that women are faced with on virtual media with the explosion of different social media platforms throughout the world.

For example, on the Facebook pages of "The Daily Prothom Alo", a news story titled "Women are the most victims of cyber bullying" was published, which was a special feature story. The Daily Star published a news story titled "Cyberbullying now adds to her trauma," which was an investigative news piece with an explanation of the issues of cyberbullying against women in Bangladesh. In addition, Jamuna Television posted a news story titled 'Sonali was raped before death! The haze is gradually increasing their Facebook page' with straight news. A video story posted on the Facebook page of Somoy News TV, with the heading of 'Countermeasures of Vabna against cyber bullying,' thought about the consequences of cyberbullying against women on social media. A news story published on the Facebook pages of Bdnews24.com with the heading of 'Relationship, marriage, and divorce, not a crime: Mithila' was also an opinion story. In addition, news items posted on the Facebook page of Newsbangla24.com, with the heading 'Facebook is floating under the pressure of protest,' were investigative news about religious issues in society. This story describes the situation of Bangladesh from several perspectives, considering this complaint.

Issues of News

The present study exposed different issues of news relating to cyberbullying against women on the Facebook pages of the

mainstream media in Bangladesh. After analyzing the news stories there are twelve issues including entertainment, crime, legal, social, religious, environment, rape, sports, campaign, education, transgender, and lifestyle has been portrayed in the Bangladeshi news media. Table 3 indicates that 15 (25.00 percent) news articles were found on entertainment issues, 12 (20.00 percent) were criminal issues, 10 (16.7 percent) were legal and social issues, and three (5.00 percent) were religious and education issues, respectively. and two (3.30) news were from sports issues; on the other hand, only one (1.7 percent) news was found from campaign, rape, transgender, and lifestyle, and environment, respectively.

Table 3

Issues of News

Category	Number	Percentage
Entertainment	15	25.00
Crime	12	20.00
Legal	10	16.67
Social	10	16.67
Education	3	5.00
Religious	3	5.00
Sports	2	3.33
Campaign	1	1.67
Lifestyle	1	1.67
Rape	1	1.67
Transgender	1	1.67
Environment	1	1.67
Total	60	100.00

Source: Data received from Facebook pages-2023

The findings confirmed that most of the news about cyberbullying against women has been portrayed as entertainment and criminal issues. Some of the news was also from different legal and religious issues, but only one percent of the news was from

campaign, education, transgender, and lifestyle issues, respectively, from the selected news from the study.

For example, on the Facebook pages of Daily Prothom Alo, a news story with the headline ‘Why did he write <Don’t Love Me Beach> said Parimony’ That was an entertainment-related issue. The Daily Star posted a news story with the heading of ‘Cyberbullying now adds to her trauma’ that was a legal issue. On the Facebook pages of Jamuna Television, a news story with the headline ‘Caste discrimination, body shaming is fading merit and be confident in intellectual practice, not as women’ reflected social-related issues. In addition, Somoy News TV posted a news story titled ‘73 percent of online harassment victims are women’ on their Facebook page that was about criminal issues. Moreover, a news story published on the Facebook pages of Bdnews24.com with the heading of ‘The police informed that a leader of Dhaka District North Chaatra League has been arrested in the case of cow theft’ was a crime-related issue. In addition, a program presented on the Facebook page of Newsbangla24.com, with the heading of ‘Women are more affected by cyber-attacks’ was also a legal issue.

Sources of News

The present study also investigated the different sources of the portrayal of news about cyberbullying against women on social media. Table 4 indicates that there were fourteen sorts of sources found in the selected news 18 (30.00 percent) were celebrity actresses used as a source of the news on cyberbullying issues, nine (15.0 percent) were police, and five (8.3 percent) were lawyers used as sources for consulting different legal issues relating to the cyber world. Furthermore, four news stories (6.7 percent) were cited by students, while three more news stories (5.00 percent) were found by journalists, lawmakers, and unreliable sources of relevant news. Only two (3.30 percent) used actors, teachers, government officials, family, women rights

activists, and victims of cyber as a source of different news, but only one (1.7 percent) used newsroom editors and press releases for the sources of different news.

Table 4

Sources of News

Category	Number	Percentage
Actress	18	30.00
Police	9	15.00
Lawyers	5	8.33
Student	4	6.67
Journalist	3	5.00
Victims	3	5.00
Lawmaker	3	5.00
No Sources	3	5.00
Teacher	2	3.33
Actor	2	3.33
Family	2	3.33
Officer	2	3.33
Women Rights Activists	2	3.33
Press Release	1	1.67
Newsroom Editor	1	1.67
Total	60	100.00

Source: Data received from Facebook pages -2023

According to the findings of the study, most of the news regarding cyberbullying against women used different celebrity actors, actresses, police, lawyers, journalists, students, teachers, women rights activists, and the victims of cyberbullying as a source. Nevertheless, journalists from various newsrooms, parliamentarians, and mainstream media outlets in Bangladesh each discovered a single news item.

Types of News

The Facebook pages of selected media outlets posted a variety of news stories regarding cyberbullying against women in the news media of Bangladesh. Positive news stories and negative news stories were separated from the total amount of news. News items that positively support the victims of cyberbullying were considered positive, while the news that is unfavorable to the victims of cyberbullying was considered negative. The two types of news stories are shown in table 5. There are 24 (40.0 percent) news stories that were treated as positive in favor of the victims of cyberbullying. On the other hand, the remaining 36 (60.0 percent) stories were considered negative, which is uncomplimentary to the victims of cyber harassment on virtual media.

Table 5

Types of News

Category	Number	Percentage
Negative	36	60.00
Positive	24	40.00
Total	60	100.00

Source: Data received from Facebook pages-2023

The findings indicate that most of the news stories posted on the Facebook pages of the Bangladeshi mainstream media were treated negatively, which is harmful to the victims of cyber-harassment. For example, the news report on The Daily Prothom Alo titled ‘Raise your voice, protest against harassment’ was supportive of raising awareness against cyberbullying against women, while ‘Women are more victims of cyberbullying’ was negatively posted on the Facebook of the Daily Prothom Alo. Moreover, the news article in the Daily Star titled “Digital Sexual Harassment in Digital Bangladesh” was a favorable post on cyber toward women on social media. Jamuna Television posted a news story with the heading ‘Nipun acts as a sex worker!’ that was negatively portrayed on their Facebook pages.

On the other hand, Somoy News TV.com published a news story with the heading of ‘Mithila called for an end to cyberbullying’ and was positively called upon to stop cyberbullying against women on social media. Bdnews24.com also positively posted on news titled ‘Cyber Harassment: Chanchal Chowdhury’s Different Protest’ about the cyberbullying against women on social media. News items on the Facebook pages of NewsBangla24.com posted with the heading of ‘Women are more affected by cyber-attacks’ were a positive sentiment toward the issues of cyberbullying against women on social media.

Discussion

Although cyberbullying is a global phenomenon, there is inadequate coverage of news relating to cyberbullying against women in the news media of Bangladesh. The present study examined sixty news stories of cyberbullying against women on the Facebook pages of six media outlets published between 2020 and 2023. Previous studies revealed that Facebook is the most available information source for social media users worldwide (Bene, 2017; Silver & Matthews, 2017). Several studies were found as a source of news, the popularity of Facebook is increasing daily, which means more people are consuming news from Facebook currently (Lampe et al., 2012; Shearer & Gottfried, 2017).

This study also used Media Framing Theory to analyze how cyberbullying is covered in the media, focusing on Western nations and analyzing how it is influenced by media (Balakrishnan, 2017). Previous studies have mostly focused on political communication, with little evidence supporting its application to social issues (Goffman, 1974). The study also found that most news stories are unfavorable to cyberbullying victims, with text-based and video stories being the most popular content. This suggests that social media users are slightly more visually biased, as previously claimed, due to the video’s visual appeal (Lee et al., 2009).

Conclusion

The study reveals that Bangladeshi news media often misrepresents the news regarding cyberbullying against women, focusing more on celebrities, lawyers, and police officials while overlooking the general people. Coverage tends to highlight students, teachers, and showbiz figures. While offering valuable insights, the study is limited by its small sample size, which may not fully capture media portrayals of cyberbullying against women in the context of Bangladesh. It recommends that news media prioritize publishing cyberbullying stories on Facebook to boost user engagement. Further research could explore diverse user reactions to provide a clearer picture of cyberbullying against women in the context of Bangladesh. The news media can help combat cyberbullying by raising awareness and educating the general people of Bangladesh.

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Gamification and Experiential Learning in Education

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Abstract

The term “gamification” refers to the practice of incorporating elements of game design into non-game contexts such as websites, online games, and learning management systems. Gamification’s end purpose is to get people involved so as to motivate them to share, collaborate, and talk to one another. The goal of gamifying material is to increase user participation, particularly when it comes to unpleasant learning, like completing a study on a topic either boring or unpleasant to learn. Game elements used in gamification include the goal of making learning more fun; gamification attempts to model the classroom environment after a first-person video game. The purpose is to improve education by stimulating interest amongst students. More specifically, “learning through reflection on doing” captures the essence of the experiential learning process. While students may be required to reflect on their work as part of a hands-on learning activity, this is not always the case. The suggested study addresses the merits and cons of gamification for experiential learning. This paper endeavors to make some conclusions, bringing into the limelight of education the incorporation of different cross-disciplinary dimensions in education by adding gamifying and understanding its core aspects in the process of teaching and learning. Gamification is added to a new approach to learning through various games using devices. This paper covers learning

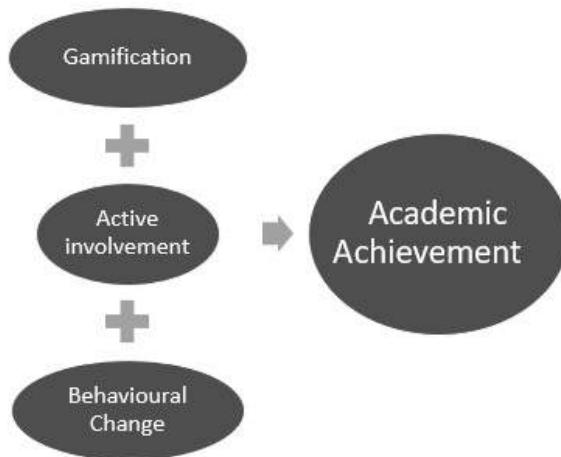
by doing, experiential learning, gamification, and their aids in the education system. The data were collected from the secondary sources (literature, books, Google, etc.). To conclude, it is stated that the rigid curriculum and formal learning are replaced by cross-functional content that can satisfy curiosity, and thus, informal learning can occur. The new tools and approach to making its titles in social communication have brought an era where we have to rethink learning, knowledge sharing, and collaborative learning by understanding the new concept of gamifying and experiential learning.

Key words: learning by doing, gamification, collaborative, experiential learning, knowledge

Introduction

Recently, gamification has attracted the attention of academics and practitioners as a promising tool for promoting behavioral change among the learners. The extensive influence of gamification diagonally in several segments has renovated outdated approaches to engagement in learners, notably in education. The formal, traditional methods are no longer sufficient to remain competitive in the knowledge economy, and organizational cultures, thus corporate learning environments, play a vital role in this transformation process. Fun and optimally challenging learning climates that support students' engagement are vital for academic well-being and student achievement (Chodkiewicz & Boyle, 2017; Patall & Zambrano, 2019), and they underlie well-being in the classroom (Frawley, 2015; Nakata et al., 2022). Developments in science and technology are becoming game modifiers to this approach, shifting policies that allow people to maintain moral and ethical standards and do 'good work' (Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi, and Damon 2001). At the beginning of the 20th century, various theorists such as John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Kurt Lewin considered that education should be active. Their theories, based on

the idea that learning “occurs best when it’s the result of meaningful experiences,” were later put into practice by David Kolb, a professor at Harvard University. He believed that “learning-by-doing” provided better results by allowing students to apply concepts and theories to real situations. With this in mind, he implemented activities such as games, simulations, or roleplays in his classes, obtaining better results in attention and retention. This way, he developed experiential learning theory, or what we know today as learning-by-doing. Consequently, perceptions such as universal instructor capability values, interdisciplinary courses, information economy, and sharp minds (Farr 2014) are evolving, preparing the emergence of new mind interpretations, i.e., a conceptual model for affective development applied to the use of games and simulations.



Gamification + Active Involvement + Behavioral Changes = Academic Achievement

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore gamification and experiential learning in education, typically centered around understanding how these approaches can improve student engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes. The suggested

study addresses the merits and cons of gamification for experiential learning. This paper endeavors to make some conclusions, bringing into the limelight of education the incorporation of different cross-disciplinary dimensions in education by adding gamifying and understanding its core aspects in the process of teaching and learning. Research on these topics seeks to generate insights on optimal integration strategies, measure impacts on various learner demographics, and develop frameworks for sustained educational innovation.

Theoretical Framework on Experiential learning

Experiential learning has been approached by many scholars in relation to the concepts. Kolb (1983) explains experiential learning consists of grasping an experience and then transforming it into an allocation or result. The Association for Experiential Education also defined experiential learning as a methodology in which educators direct students to a specific experience and then guide the students through reflection to 'increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people's capacity to contribute to their communities (Association for Experiential Learning Education, 2012). Khanna (2016) expressed that experiential learning is the form of learning in the digital world based on the experience of learning. Fatma Alkan (2016) states that experiential learning takes the students to attain new experiences, skills, and knowledge in real situations, which have also been verified in laws and principles. Experiential learning is considered as 'learning by doing' as a part of gaining knowledge. Hedge M.S. (2016) Students in experiential learning situations cooperate and learn from one another in a more semi-structured approach that ties real-world problems and situations in facilities to direct students' progress. Lee Andresen et al. (2017) talk about involving ethical standards to accept in applying experiential learning. Coker, J.S. (2017) says in every school experiential learning should mandate the substantial benefits of the students. Caroline M.I.

(2017) states that the utilization of physical facilities on academic performance indicates great influence on the students. Voukelaton G (2019) describes the project teaching method implementation, which is important to recognizing the values of traditional culture and cultural heritage. Highlights the student has gained new ideas and knowledge and learning opportunities that are flexible and manageable. Experiential learning has positive experience through effective implementation in quality methods. Thote P. and Gowre S. (2021) Experience Learning has design in three positive activities: strengthening, enhancing the academic performance, and outcomes.

Current Prerequisite in Education

According to Holland (2014), it is important to integrate emerging technologies in education, as not doing so will lead us “marching towards obsolescence as we fail to adapt to changing educational goals, objectives, and new technologies.” Learning and being an innovative thinker differ in their measurable value to companies and employers in the business world, where continuous improvements are the norm. According to the Partnership for 21st Century Learning and Pearson, critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity are innovative approaches in learning (American Management Association, 2010). Innovative skills, like simulating certain real situations and other interactive elements, are excellent opportunities for employees to develop skills especially valued in the current context, such as creativity, strategic and critical thinking, decision-making, and self-evaluation. Critical thinking is one of the top skills needed in students in higher education (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006). Multifaceted skill: It is the ability to analyze, evaluate, form logical conclusions, and make decisions based on the information given. Using a pedagogical approach, or “active learning,” on teaching critical thinking and collaboration, when individuals are placed into teams, those who possess higher collaborative skills will lead to more successful teams. (Morgeson, Reider, and Champion 2005).

Learning by Doing

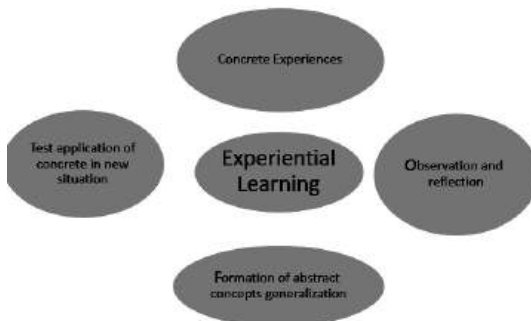
Learning-by-doing is a procedure grounded in investigation and training. It consists of obtaining skills that allow people to resolve real-life circumstances or difficulties. But to learn through experiences, these must be stimulating for the students: this is specifically pertinent in an era where time is not the only barrier to learning but also the attention span. Learning and doing makes learning more interesting and meaningful for the learners because it involves individuals creating and put along; they acquire and sense, strengthening students' volume for accomplishment, encouraging involvement and participation. In addition, positive networking among colleagues occurs through learning experiences, which help strengthen bonds and develop social skills. The inclusion of gamification will drive learners' engagement levels, leading to the sizable demand for the use of know-how, resulting in constantly changing one's lives, cultures, and behaviors, bringing us closer by providing instant connections across the world. Due to the increasing use of digital technology in the workplace, there is a need for it to be incorporated into the education system. Training and exercises are the prime tools in this approach.



The learning-by-doing approach is one of the imperative bases of experiential learning. It helps in accomplishing a profound knowledge. Participation is the basic element in this approach. Any kind of learning here can happen with the active participation of the learners. The participation helps in developing interests among the learners; they get the opportunities to cross-check their views and ideas to sublimate them in the proper direction. Encourage the learners to prompt and think of ways and means to come up with the solutions to the existing problems. All the above three elements sooner or later help in accomplishment.

Experiential Learning

Learning that swipes its culture from conventional to unconventional is experiential learning. In experiential learning, the teaching is largely transmissive, unlike conventional learning, in which the students remain unmotivated and disengaged. In experiential learning, the role of the teacher is to facilitate rather than direct the student's progress (Kolb & Kolb, 2009). Experiential learning is the process of learning by doing. Engaging students in hands-on activities helps to connect theories and knowledge learned in the classroom to real-world situations. Experiential learning provides prospects that occur in a diverse course and non-course-based forms and embrace community service, service-learning, etc. Experiential learning is a philosophy and methodology in which educators firmly participate with scholars in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge and develop skills. The experiential learning approach emphasizes more practical experience in the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes. Students are encouraged to develop a passion for learning and a thirst for knowledge by engaging in authentic experiences that allow them to learn what they need to know. Driving this shift is the recognition by universities that the purpose of 21st-century education has evolved to include the generation of student competence in self-directed learning, citizenship, eco-sustainability, and employability, in addition to traditional knowledge, skills, and attitudes within particular disciplines (Deakin Crick, Goldspink & Foster, 2013).



Gamification and Game-based Learning

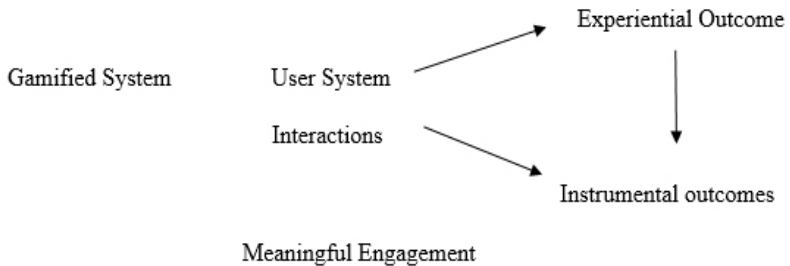
Games are identified as offering the optimum environment for the development of the ethical mind as they offer the opportunity to explore ethical problems and see the consequences and experience the emotional impact of the solutions (Smith, 2008). Vandercruysse et al. (2012) study found that games as a learning method are not a new thing. In an attempt to best capture the spirit of the underlying concepts and practices, the term gamification has been defined in several ways; i) Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, & Nacke (2011), “the use of game design elements in non-game contexts.” ii) Hamari, Koivisto, & Sarsa, (2014), “The phenomenon of creating gameful experiences.” iii) Werbach, (2014) “the process of making activities more game-like.” iv) Seaborn & Fels, (2015), Gamification is a multidisciplinary concept spanning a range of theoretical and empirical knowledge, technological domains, and platforms and is driven by an array of practical motivations. “Abd Rahman, Siti PY-2022, the study found that gaming elements as a training method and learning platforms will boost students’ engagement, motivation, and productivity. Pivec & Kearney (2014), in their study, conduct a model of game-based learning. And they stated that by using online games, and especially digital educational games, learners should be able to conduct factual knowledge, learn on demand, and gain experiences in the virtual world that can later shape their behavioral patterns and directly affect their reflection.

Gamification Outcomes

Since gamification design borrows elements from video games, it may stimulate similar hedonic experiences, evoking game-like player behavior (Kankanhalli et al. 2012). The gamification systems should use this experience to change a person’s behavior toward a desirable outcome. The literature maintains that this double effect of gamification is required to be successful; nevertheless, using different concepts (Burke and Hiltbrand 2011; Hamari et al. 2014b;

Kankanhalli et al. 2012; Nel et al. 1999; Webster and Ahuja 2006).

To provide a taxonomy about gamification terminologies in IS, Liu et al. (2017) classify the effect of gamification elements as experiential outcomes and instrumental outcomes. The experiential outcome is generally associated with user perceptions, such as a feeling, thought, or emotion, while the instrumental outcomes are associated with the utilitarian result of gamification. Liu et al. (2017) also establish a set of principles that describe how gamification can provide meaningful engagement. The authors state that experiential outcomes should fit task context with gamified elements and desired instrumental outcomes. Given the broader definition of gamification outcomes, we use the dual outcome framework (Liu et al. 2017) to classify the main categories of gamification outcomes presented in the figure.



In general, the identification of instrumental outcomes is straightforward given the direct association to the task context, while the identification of experiential outcomes is a more complex task (Liu et al. 2017). Dichev and Dicheva (2017) found that the empirical studies provide a diverse list of constructs, which are more difficult to group into logical categories. This inaccuracy can be partially explained by the failure in defining the conceptual domain of the constructs that may lead to some issues, such as the misunderstanding about what the constructs truly refer to, the overlapping of constructs that already exist in the field, and invalid conclusions about the relationship among constructs (MacKenzie et al. 2011).

Importance of Gamification in Learning

There had been mixed observations about the ability and achievement of learners in different stages. However, there is a consensus that impactful teaching efforts could aid in stimulating innovative approaches in teaching learners. Achievement at any level differs as a result of exposing learners to gamification and experiential learning. The student-oriented method assists social, academic, and emotional development, making learning more fun and exciting (McCombs, 2004), supports student participation, involvement, and attention; sets up a team environment; and stimulates responses, discussions, and practical experiences (Senthamarai, 2018). David and Weinstein Such Gamified Experiential Technologies (GET; David & Weinstein, 2023) engage students through interactive learning in the classroom (Pearson, 2017). Experiential learning platforms such as Monsoon SIM allow students to work collectively to reach the same goal, similar to a company, and to build up a business based on role play, allowing them to learn technical skills while developing the 21st-century skills of the 4 C's (Critical thinking, Collaboration, Communication, and Creativity). In doing so, students are able to work together as a team to solve life-like problems in the business world, thus preparing them for their future working environment.

Gamification motivates, engages, and enhances the learners' experience. It is a speedily increasing phenomenon to provide engaging and persuasive resolutions in the educational context. The educational impact through gamification increases students' engagement and motivation, academic achievement, and social connectivity. The outdated chalk-and-talk method of classroom delivery seems increasingly degrading. In the digital era, forging global connections by clicking a button or using easy voice commands, enabling people to gain quick access to any type of information. Therefore, teachers or instructors should be trained in a variety of techno-savvy methods, not limiting

themselves to gamification. In this way, teachers could implement the right instructions using technology at the right time and in the right place. Gamification denotes the premeditated submission of game design principles, mechanics, and elements into non-game environments. It is often simplified using digital platforms, aiming to solve problems, increase engagement, and motivate students, fostering an interactive experience and enhancing perceived autonomy, competence, and relatedness among operators.

Aids of Gamification in Education

i) Benefits of gamification are known to be physiological (McGonigal, 2011). Scientists have measured the increased release of the chemicals norepinephrine, epinephrine, and dopamine in the brain that not only bring on “good feelings” but also make us more receptive to learning (Gutierrez, 2012). Neuroscientist Gregory Burns sees dopamine not as a reward necessarily, but as a chemical that allows us to learn properly (Rackwitz, 2012).

ii) Brain researchers have proved that learning requires neural connections to be made in the brain to store information in memory, and frequently learning comes from response to an actual event. The brain does not distinguish between actual and simulated events. The proper response is then stored, and when we do experience an actual event, our learned response will come into play.

iii) In a learning game, the outcomes are built around knowledge and skill sets and attitudes (Gutierrez, 2012) and (Kapp, 2012). Gaming allows one to exercise his/her imagination, to fantasize about aspirational roles.

iv) Gamification of education is a strategy for increasing engagement by incorporating game elements into an educational environment (Dichev and Dicheva 2017). The goal is to generate levels of involvement (Fardo 2014). (Knutas et al. 2014; Krause et al. 2015; Dichev and Dicheva 2017; Borges et al. 2013).

v) Gamification of education is a developing approach for

increasing learners' motivation and engagement by incorporating game design elements in educational environments. With the growing popularity of gamification and advancement in gamifying education, the gamification mechanisms, the gamified subjects, the type of gamified learning activities, etc., are important aspects of learning. Gamification is about motivating individuals to participate in a learning event through the addition of game elements, not full-fledged games (Nicholson 2012).

vi) Gamification and experiential education are both fun but not necessarily a learning experience if not placed in the right context by a skilled facilitator. Gamification is the exciting new approach to learning that isn't new. It's corporate learning catching up. Extracting design elements from games and embedding them into learning environments as a means of gamifying instruction has potential for increasing learner motivation and student learning (Van Eck 2007).

vii) Games offer a means of applying and practicing skills by presenting content in a manner that makes sense to the environment (Van Eck 2006). With the application of games, learning becomes meaningful and beneficial to the learner, unlike inert knowledge gained through decontextualized methods like classroom worksheets (Rieber 1996).

viii) Gamification is built on constructivist learning, which establishes the need for experiential learning via social interaction with the environment and peers (York & deHaan, 2018). Gamification helps improve the learning experience in many ways, whether it's through academic, industrial, or business contexts.

Conclusion

As learning moves out of the classroom. Learning is more and more loosely structured, adapting itself in time, space, and tools to the 'here and now' needs of learners. The rigid curriculum and formal learning are replaced by cross-functional content that

can satisfy curiosity, and thus, informal learning can occur. The new tools of social communication have brought an era where we have to rethink learning, knowledge sharing, and collaboration in a fundamentally different way than ever before. As technology becomes an increasingly important part of learning, the modern learning leader is tasked with sourcing and leveraging new learning tools, including gamified learning. The application of game mechanics to motivate and engage students can be arranged anywhere, in any grade and subject, regardless of the availability of digital devices. A study by McKinsey & Company found that hands-on learning is more valued by employees than theoretical learning because it allows them to develop skills and solve problems effectively in their roles.

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Evolution and History of Chordophones in Asia: A Focused Study on Sāraṅgī

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Abstract

This paper explores the evolution and historical significance of chordophones in Asia, with a particular focus on the sāraṅgī and sarindā. Chordophones, defined as instruments that produce sound through vibrating strings, encompass a diverse range of stringed instruments. This study traces the roots of chordophones from ancient hunting bows to their complex modern forms, highlighting the similarities between sāraṅgī and sarinda, using the Hornbostel-Sachs classification system. The sāraṅgī, renowned for its expressive capabilities, is deeply intertwined with the cultural practices of the Gandharva community in Nepal, while the sarindā, significant in the folk traditions of North and Eastern India and Pakistan, offers a contrasting yet complementary perspective on bowed instruments. This paper hence identifies shared characteristics and cultural contexts, emphasizing the intricate connections between these instruments and their roles in shaping regional identities, through comparative analysis. By examining the historical trajectories and contemporary significance of the sāraṅgī, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the rich tradition of chordophones across Asia.

Key words: Asia, chordophones, musical landscape, Nepali music, sāraṅgī

Evolution and History of Chordophones in Asia: A Focus on the Sāraṅgī and Sarindā

According to Hornbostel and Sachs, “a chordophone is any musical instrument that makes sound by way of a vibrating string or strings stretched between two points” (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.). This term broadly encompasses stringed instruments, technically referring to those that are bowed, plucked, or strummed (Lee, 2019). The Hornbostel-Sachs classification system, developed by Erich Moritz von Hornbostel and Curt Sachs, was first published in 1914 in the *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*. This system remains the most widely accepted method for categorizing musical instruments (Lee, 2019).

Characteristics and Types of Chordophones

Most string instruments, including the guitar, lute, violin, mandolin, cello, bass, harp, musical bow, and even the piano, fall under the category of chordophones. When the strings of these instruments are plucked or strummed, they vibrate, and the sound reverberates against their usually hollow bodies. The strings may be plucked (as with the harp), strummed (as in the guitar or lute), bowed (as with the cello, viola, or violin), or thumped (as with the piano). Notably, both the sārāṅgī and the ārbājā, instruments of the Gandharvas, are classified as chordophones. The Nepali sārāṅgī can be plucked, strummed, and bowed, whereas the ārbājā is primarily strummed and plucked.

Historical Roots of String Instruments

Hunting bows are often considered the origins of stringed instruments (Kasliwal, 2001). Numerous pieces of evidence suggest this, including primitive instruments resembling harps depicted in ancient paintings in France (dating back 15,000 years), Egypt (5,000-year-old tombs), and various handmade harps in Africa. Musical bows, thought to be the first chordophones, are illustrated in paintings from the Trois Frères cave, dating as far back as 13,000 to 11,000 BC (Leroi-Gourhan, 1967).

The invention of the complete bow is believed to have occurred around the 3rd century BC (Balfour, 1899). Given the numerous references to the bow in ancient literature and history, it is reasonable to conclude that it is an ancient invention (Lawergren, 1988). The bow's significance lies in its contribution to the development of various musical instruments. According to Saint-George (1922), bowed instruments are of oriental origin. The "ravanastron" or "ravanahatha," a string instrument believed to have originated in India and Sri Lanka, is generally recognized as the oldest stringed instrument. Made from coconut shell, bamboo, goat skin, and natural fiber, this one-stringed instrument has a 22-inch string that can produce a tonal range similar to that of a violin (Saint-George, 1922). The Ramayana mentions the ravanastron, translating to "Ravana's hand" (Saint-George, 1922).

According to Jahnel and Clarke (2000), the ancient inhabitants of the Mediterranean region used tortoise shells and empty gourds as resonators for early musical instruments, with the gourd being particularly favored in Mesopotamia and India, where it was modified to create the tanpur, the Indian version of the lute. The development of plucked instruments is seen across various cultures, including the use of coconut shells and bamboo stems. The precise origins and timeline for these instruments remain uncertain, but by the 4th century BC, Western Asia had transformed simple instruments into more sophisticated designs like harps, lyres, citharas, and lutes.

The lute family evolved into two main categories: shaft lutes and necked lutes, further classified into shell-shaft lutes, box-shaft lutes, shell-necked lutes, and box-necked lutes (Jahnel & Clarke, 2000). Notable instruments include the Egyptian rebāb esh-sha'er (poet's fiddle), the ancient Indian ravanastron, the American banjo, and the Chinese san hsien. Shell-necked lutes include the therobos, mandolins, and tanbur-type instruments, while box-necked lutes encompass Coptic lutes, guitars, citterns, violins, and gambas. By

500 BC, lutes were being constructed in Turkestan, with designs that influenced neighboring cultures, leading to the evolution of instruments like the tanbur, single-string qopuz, double-string dutar, and three-string sitar. The early oud, characterized by four strings and frets, also emerged during this period, alongside various types of lutes such as the Arabian al'ud and narrow rebāb that spread throughout Spain in the 8th and 9th centuries.

Development of Chordophones in Asia

Saint-George (1922) suggests that even the Goudok, a three-stringed bowed instrument played by rural farmers in Russia, is related to the three-stringed rebāb, which is itself a descendant of the ravanastron. The bow is prevalent in the “glorious Orient,” where many ancient instruments are found. For instance, the Arabian two-stringed fiddle, “Kemangeh-a-gouz,” is believed to share roots with the ravanastron. The term ‘Kemangeh’ translates to “place of the bow” in Persian, while ‘gouz’ means ancient, thus signifying an “ancient fiddle.” Similarly, the Chinese fiddle “erhu” resembles the ravanastron in its construction. The bow gained significant popularity in Persia, Turkey, and various regions of Arabia, being used to play instruments such as the kemangeh and the rebāb.

The rebec, a popular musical instrument during the medieval and early Renaissance periods in Europe, is considered an ancestor of modern instruments like the violin and cello, evolving from the Arabic rebāb (Lee, 2019). The three-stringed rebec is mentioned in Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, where it is referred to as a “ribibl” (Chaucer, 2003).

Chinese musical traditions have significantly influenced the development of chordophones, especially through instruments like the erhu (Stock, 1993). This two-stringed fiddle, part of the huqin family, is known for its emotional depth and versatility and is used in street performances and formal concerts. The origins of the erhu are debated; while some scholars suggest it was introduced from

abroad, others assert that it developed independently within China and may be as old as the millennia (Zhang, 2010). The instrument's distinctive sound has been shaped by various musical traditions, including Persian and Uighur (Stock, 1993).

Chinese music has also significantly impacted neighboring countries, such as Korea and Japan, leading to a rich tapestry of musical instruments and styles. In the fifth century, Japan's exchanges with China and Korea introduced Asian music styles, establishing gagaku as refined official music by 701. During the Heian period (794–1182), it flourished as both ceremonial and entertainment music (Seiko, 2013). The shamisen is a three-stringed spike lute believed to have evolved from the Chinese sanxian, while the kokyū complements the shamisen in ensemble settings. The Thai saw sam sai and the Cambodian tro khmer are traditional three-stringed fiddles that highlight the cultural connection between Thailand and Cambodia with their 436 years of shared history as part of the Ayutthaya Kingdom (1351-1767). Both instruments belong to the spike fiddle category, characterized by a handle that passes through the resonator and is played with a bow (Musikarun et al., 2019). Both of these are believed to have roots in the Iranian rebab. The rebab, thought to have developed from the lutes found in Arab and Persian cultures, is a significant bowed instrument in the gamelan orchestras of Java, Indonesia.

Asia presents a remarkable diversity of bowed instruments (Fig. 1), each narrating a unique story of origins and adaptations from instruments like the Komuz from Central Asia, the Ur-heen, Erhu, Uh-Ch'in, Saw-oo, and Sawduang from China, as well as the Saw-tai from Thailand to the sārāṅgī, veena, tanbura, sitar, rabab, and sarandi of the Indian subcontinent. Instruments like the Mongolian tovshuur and the kobyz, or qobyz, a Turkic bowed instrument used by Kazakhs, Karakalpaks, Bashkirs, Tatars, and Kyrgyz, are also prominent. The Silk Road played a key role in

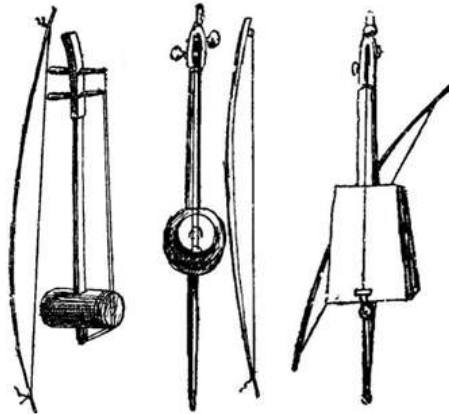
facilitating cultural exchanges between regions, introducing foreign skills and musical instruments that shaped local traditions. Music in these cultures serves not only as a form of entertainment but also as a vital component of religious and societal ceremonies. The dynamic interplay of cultural influences across Asia has fostered a vibrant musical repertoire, underscoring the significance of chordophones in both historical and contemporary contexts.

Structural Characteristics of Bows

The bows of these instruments exhibit notable similarities (Saint-George, 1922). Most ancient bows are relatively simple, made from a short, flexible piece of wood or cane tied with horsehair at one end. This design allows the wood to be bent into an arc shape. While bows used for instruments like the Goudok and Sarinda are short and firm, those for the ravanastron or omerti are typically longer, slimmer, and more supple. The hairing method also varies, with some bows attaching horsehair through a narrow split, while others use leather thongs or strings.

Figure 1

A Ravanahatha, Kemangeh-a-gouz, Rebâb-el-maghanny



(Illustrations: http://www.antiq-ebooks.com/skidooomnbvcxz/The_Bow.pdf)

The Sāraṅgī and Its Variants

The sāraṅgī in India seems to have made a sudden appearance during the rule of Emperor Akhbar (Bor, 1986). According to *Ain-i-Akbari*, ‘the sāraṅgī is smaller than the rabāb, related to it, and played like the ghichak or kamāncā, the Persian spike fiddle.’ There are many seventeenth-century Mughal miniatures that feature the sāraṅgī, most of it also highlighting a holy man along with the fiddler. The Ḍhāḍhī, originally Rājputs, are believed to be the oldest community of musicians who sang karkhās about heroic deeds in battles as well as religious songs. They were known to play the ḍhāḍh as well as the sāraṅgī. They were also known to play religious songs and ballads. Surindo, a close relative of surindā, is often played by professional Sindhi bards like the Māgāniyār, Charan, and Laṅgā of Rajasthan (Baloch, 1966). The sāraṅgī holds a significant place in the musical landscape of South Asia, particularly within the Gandharva community of Nepal. Often referred to as the quintessential accompaniment for Gandharva songs, the Nepali sāraṅgī (Fig. 2) is recognized for its expressive capacity and versatility. This instrument is not merely a musical tool; it is deeply intertwined with the cultural and social practices of the communities that use it. According to the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (n.d.), the sāraṅgī is classified as a bowed chordophone characterized by its waisted body and a wide neck devoid of frets, typically carved from a single piece of wood. The ability to produce both melodic lines and rhythmic accompaniment makes the sāraṅgī particularly valuable in the performance of traditional music.

Historically, the sāraṅgī’s lineage is tied to various forms of string instruments across the Indian subcontinent, depending on their context within the community and their usage. There are numerous folk types with distinct regional features. The context

in which these instruments are employed also varies greatly, from local folk performances to grand classical concerts.

The instrument's construction often mirrors that of other regional bowed instruments, which contributes to a shared cultural identity among musicians. For instance, despite sharing a name, the similarities between the Nepali *sāraṅgī* (Fig. 2) and the Indian *sāraṅgī* are notable, although distinctions arise in physical construction, intended musical context, tonal quality, and playing techniques. The Indian variant incorporates sympathetic strings, enhancing its harmonic richness, and has evolved into a solo classical instrument within Hindustani classical music. In contrast, the Nepali *sāraṅgī* is akin to the folk fiddle of India, predominantly used in folk settings. The musicians play both melodic and rhythmic roles, which reflects the instrument's ability to convey emotional depth while maintaining a strong rhythmic foundation. Physical characteristics common to both the Indian and Nepali *sāraṅgī* include:

- **Construction.** Typically carved from a single piece of wood, ensuring a unified tonal quality.
- **Body Design.** The body is often hollowed out, allowing for resonance and amplification of sound.
- **Neck Design.** Both variants feature a fretless neck, facilitating expressive glissandi and microtonal variations that are integral to South Asian music.
- **String Composition.** While the strings were traditionally made of gut, modern iterations may utilize steel or nylon, affecting timbre and projection.

These commonalities highlight the *sāraṅgī*'s adaptability and its role in maintaining the musical traditions of the regions it inhabits.

Figure 2

Nepali sārāṅgī (Left: sārāṅgī made in Kathmandu; Right: sārāṅgī made in Pathariya, Jhapa, Nepal; Photo: Author)



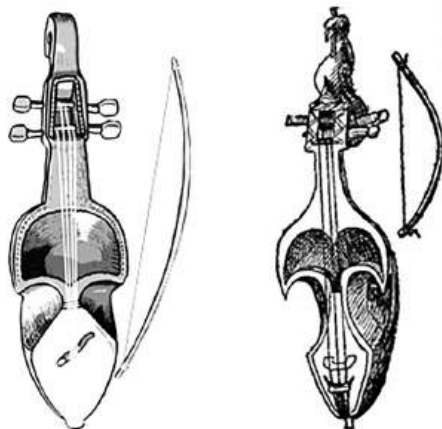
Folk instruments like the sarangat, saranga, saran, sarinda, saroz, and sananta indicate different regional adaptations of the sārāṅgī, each sharing fundamental structural similarities. These instruments are varied in shape and size and are found to have spread in communities across Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, and India. For example, the dhodro banam, a primitive tribal variant played by the Santali tribes in Bihar and Odisha, consists of a hollow body made from guloic wood, believed to be organically linked to the Santals. It features a skin-covered belly, an open chest, a short neck, and a uniquely crafted pegbox, which may be shaped like a human head. This one-stringed instrument symbolizes the most basic form of the bowed lute tradition. In contrast, the Sindhi surando, prominent in Sindh, Pakistan,

and the surinda found in Rajasthan and Punjab, possess a more sophisticated structure. The surando has a beautifully shaped upper chamber that acts as a resonator, amplifying sound and enriching tonal quality. This instrument typically includes three main strings and a set of sympathetic strings, traditionally played by professional bards.

The sarindā serves as another important bowed instrument within the South Asian musical spectrum. The sarinda, also known as saranda, is a traditional stringed folk instrument from North and Eastern India and Pakistan. The sarindā, which is played in a vertical position while seated, is believed to have been introduced to the Sikhs and is significant in the music of various ethnic groups, including the Bauls of Bengal and the Punjabi people. Meanwhile, its other relative, the surando is also an ancient Sindhī folk fiddle played in regions like Sindh and the Fakirani Jats of Kutch, derived from the Persian term “Surayindah,” meaning “producer of tunes.” It is a folk fiddle, crafted from wood and typically featuring eight strings—three bowed, two drones, and sympathetic strings—with a distinct design and decoration. As Bor (1987) outlines, the sarindā typically features a deep head, a short neck, and a heart-shaped belly, which includes both a lower resonance chamber covered with skin and an open upper chamber. While the sarindā shares certain features with the sārāṅgī, particularly in its construction and sound production, distinct differences exist. The sarindā’s design allows for an amplification of sound through its upper pear-shaped resonance chamber, facilitating a different tonal quality.

Figure 3

The Nepali sārāṅgī (a) and the Bengali sarindā (b)



[Source: http://www.hm.h555.net/~irom/musical_instruments/bow_sārāṅgī_n.html (a) http://www.antique-ebooks.com/skidooomnbvcxz/The_Bow.pdf (b)]

The sārāṅgī and its variants share a set of defining structural characteristics that classify them within the same family of instruments. Key features include:

- **Single-block Construction.** All instruments are traditionally carved from a single piece of wood, ensuring unique acoustic properties and durability.
- **Waisted Body.** The waisted design contributes to a distinct sound profile, enhancing projection and resonance.
- **Skin-covered Belly.** The belly is often covered with skin, which serves as a soundboard and contributes to the instrument's tonal qualities.
- **Neck Design.** The neck is generally fretless, allowing for microtonal variations that are crucial in Indian classical music.
- **Hollow Peg Box.** The head of the instrument often features an arched or slit-like opening, housing pegs for string tuning.

Democratic Backsliding in South Asia: Recent Anecdotes

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Abstract

Democracy is a political system of government that allows all groups, regardless of race, gender, class or sexual orientation, to participate in politics. Despite its limitations, most people have high hopes for democracy even today. However, the debate over whether democracy works in the contemporary but very complex global order is getting political space in academia and society. This paper explores the state of democracy in South Asia bringing some more ground reality, i.e. recent political upheavals in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Nepal. While doing so, it extensively reviews the scholarly works of ‘third wave of democracy’ published during and around 1990s and ‘third wave of dictatorship’ published after 2019 and examines whether there is any linkage of scholarly publication and the democratisation process

Keywords: authoritarianism, democratic backsliding, political unrest, Third wave, South Asia

Introduction

South Asia, a subregion of Asia, encompasses the Indo-Gangetic Plain and Peninsular India. This region includes Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan,

and the Maldives. The terms ‘Indian Subcontinent’ and ‘South Asia’ are often used interchangeably, though the latter phrase sometimes refers more specifically to Bangladesh, India and Pakistan.

South Asia is home to one of the world’s earliest civilizations—the Indus Valley Civilization—and is considered the most densely populated area in the world. Despite a history characterized by ethnic, linguistic, and political fragmentation, South Asians share a deep understanding of diverse, cultural and ethical perspectives. Over centuries, this region’s music, dance, ritual customs, modes of worship, and literary traditions have served as unifying elements.

India is often referred to as the world’s oldest¹ and largest democracy by its citizens. According to Jeffrey (1994), during a Commonwealth parliamentary seminar in 1994, a deputy chairman of India’s Upper House remarked that the country’s ancient institutions, the Sabhas and Samities, offered avenues for public participation in democratic processes. This implication debates over whether democracy first emerged in India or Athens. Nevertheless, some argue that the more relevant concern is not where democracy originated, but how it has endured in India since its reestablishment in 1950. Some argue that there is less material debate on where democracy first appeared.

Scholars in the late 1990s debated how resilient democracy spread in South Asia. During that time, democracy was not firmly rooted enough in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, or Nepal, and it was also facing serious challenges and obstacles in Sri Lanka. Through comparative analyses of these South Asian countries that share cultural attributes mostly because of the British rule influence until 1947-1948, scholars like Jeffrey (1994), Adhikari et.al (2010), etc. started examining and looking into the factors that contribute to the survival of democratic systems. By ‘democracy’ Jeffrey meant

1 For details, <https://www.historytoday.com/archive/democracy-south-asia> , accessed on September 20, 2024.

regular, relatively free and fair, multi-candidate, usually multi-party elections. Even though such a system aligns perfectly with the dictionary definition of ‘government by the people’,² it does not quite guarantee prosperity, peace or equality among the masses.

Jeffrey (1994) could examine how colonialism and religious divisions have interacted with indigenous tradition to produce a mixed balance sheet for democracy in and around the Indian subcontinent. However, reports from three decades down the line show statements such as India being among the countries leading the ‘third wave of autocratisation’.³ The V-Dem report dedicates a chapter to India, titled ‘Democracy Broken Down: India’. The chapter says that the ‘world’s largest democracy has turned into an electoral autocracy’. Over the years, India’s autocratisation has followed quite a familiar pattern observed in other nations during the ‘third wave’ noted for its gradual erosion of freedoms, particularly in the sectors of media, academia, and civil society, according to reports. The report emphasises on the sharp rise in government censorship of the media, the suppression of civil society organisations, and the diminishing autonomy of the Election Commission of India. It also points to a high rise in media bias and signs of decline in academic and religious freedoms. Citing the same report, Lührmann et.al (2021) states, ‘democracy has deteriorated since then, with EDI scores declining from 0.71 to 0.54 between the 2014 and 2019 parliamentary elections’.

A stark comparison has been observed between India and South Asian countries. According to V Dem records, India is, in this aspect, now as autocratic as Pakistan and worse than

² For details, <https://www.historytoday.com/archive/democracy-south-asia>, accessed on September 20, 2024

³ A Sweden-based institute has said that India is no longer an ‘electoral democracy’, classifying the country as an ‘electoral autocracy’ instead, noting that much of the decline in democratic freedoms occurred after the BJP and Narendra Modi’s victory in 2014

its neighbours Bangladesh and Nepal. In its democracy report,⁴ India is enlisted under the six ‘Major Autocratisers’ category stating that anti-pluralist parties drive autocratisation in at least six of the top 10 autocratisers—Brazil, Hungary, India, Poland, Serbia, and Turkey. The report further states, ‘The autocratising countries tend to be influential regional and global powers. The group includes major G20 countries such as Brazil, India, Turkey, and the United States of America, as well as countries such as Bangladesh, Tanzania, Thailand, and The Philippines. Except for South Korea, the countries improving on the LDI were typically less populous and not as influential internationally’. The report also emphasises the rising polarisation in autocratising countries like Brazil, India, and Serbia, stating that ‘toxic polarisation and Autocratisation mutually reinforce each other’, highlighting the ‘toxic levels of polarisation that contribute to electoral victories of anti-pluralist leaders and the empowerment of their agendas’ (p.31).

Before that, in March 2020, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) placed India alongside China, Russia, Iran and Saudi Arabia in a list of press freedom’s ‘worst digital predators’. The list compiled by the global media watchdog flags countries where companies and government agencies use ‘digital technology to spy on and harass journalists’. The following month, the US government’s Religious Freedom Monitor recommended that the country’s state department should include India in the list of ‘countries of special concern’, in the company of China, Pakistan, North Korea, Saudi Arabia and Russia. It noted that religious freedom had improved globally but singled out India for seeing a ‘sharp downward turn’. The question arises as to whether democracy has lost its relevance or there is a greater search for democracy because of the stakes it is facing.

⁴ https://v-dem.net/media/publications/dr_2022.pdf, accessed on September 20, 2024.

Given such a background, this paper explores the state of democracy in South Asia, bringing some more ground reality, i.e. recent political upheavals in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and India. While doing so, reviewing scholarly works of ‘third wave of democracy’ published during and around 1990s and ‘third wave of dictatorship’ published after 2019 will be the focus of the paper to understand whether there is any linkage of scholarly publication and democratisation process.

Democratic Erosion: The Dynamics of Global Trends with South Asian Contexts

The first assumption could be whether South Asian society follows contemporary academic discourse and shifts accordingly. It is because while there was a web of democracy, many countries globally, including Nepal, converted to democracy. However, the mood in recent times seems to be trending in the opposite direction: Several books and numerous articles are nowadays raising the issues of the crisis of democracies. The literature draws attention to the phenomenon of ‘democratic erosion’: Democracies that no longer die in one fell swoop, but rather slowly, bit by bit. Instead of succumbing from one day to the next to massive riots or a military coup, democracies nowadays are dismantled piece by piece from within. Through small, outwardly legal moves, democracies are emptied of their representational legitimacies and turn into their opposites. According to Gargarella (2022), from the government ‘of the people, by the people, and for the people’, we find ourselves within a governmental rule ‘of a few, managed by a minority, and for the privileged’. Also, having a benevolent dictator has been always a romantic idea of some of the elites in countries like India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. People refer to leaders like Lee Kaun Yew of Singapore and Mahathir Mohammad of Malaysia, among others, as options to tempo infrastructural development of a country. However, Tavares and Wacziarg (2001) in their empirical study displayed a

negative relationship between democracy and economic growth. They found that as human capital investment rose, it was at the cost of physical capital accumulation which pushed down economic growth. Gerring et al. (2005), on the contrary, debunked this claim by establishing that democracies increase economic growth, especially in the long run through the development of human capital through declining fertility rates, education, affordable healthcare, etc. The government has no choice but to ensure that the policies work for the whole economy or else risk losing its authority. The longevity of human capital also ensures that the growth in democracies prevails for a longer run of time. Masaki & Van de Walle (2014) found that over a long period when democracy became more rooted in Sub-Saharan African nations, they enjoyed higher growth compared to when they were autocracies or monarchies. Acemoglu et al. (2019) also found a positive relationship between growth and democracy. Their panel data consisted of over 175 countries from 1960 to 2010. The long period gave an important perspective on the growth of countries that were initially autocracies before adopting a democratic system. They arrived at the conclusion that when a country transitions to democracy from an autocracy, its GDP increases by almost 20 percent in the long run. Higher taxation and increase in the production of public goods were provided as the main factors behind this behavior of GDP.

If the data is examined, it is clear that the global status of democracy is also weakening day by day as it is in South Asia. The Global State of Democracy Initiative (GSoD), which claims itself as an initiative with evidence-based, balanced analysis and data, states that the quality of democracy for around 173 countries across the world is going through rapid change within the trend of democracy after the global pandemic. Challenges created by climate change are another vital issue to affect the ongoing trend. The bulk of the literature leads us to the hypothesis that countries with weak

mostly Muslims, were killed—are still vivid in people’s memories. Given the situation, a few members of the British Members of Parliament had demanded on January 12, 2021, that human rights provisions be made mandatory in all future trade deals with India, following a debate in the House of Commons on religious persecution experienced by minority groups. It spoke loudly and clearly about the situation of human rights in this country, particularly of those in the minority, the poor, and the helpless (Khangchian, 2021; Khangchain, 2023).

Some unreported incidents could have further defamed Indian democracy if they were given a space by the media. For example, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the country witnessed a massive reverse migration, a crisis marked by several deaths, loss of jobs, starvation, neglect, and hunger-induced crimes. However, even amid such untold human tragedy and hardship, there were also certain labeling of communities such as ‘Corona Jihadists’ and even profiling of people with mongoloid features as ‘Coronavirus’ including those who were at the forefront of combating the unseen enemy (Khangchian, 2021). Thus, no matter how grave situations are, for mankind, there are people and groups with scant regard for the rights of others in the country. We also found that more often than not, people fighting for their rights or the rights of others, particularly the marginalised groups, are labeled as Khalistanis, Maoists, or even described as ‘Terrorists’: Actor and BJP party MP, Kangana Ranaut, faced an FIR, over her Instagram comments such as ‘Khalistan’ remarks on farmers’ protest in Punjab (Hakkim, 2021) and later she was publicly slapped by a CISF constable whose mother was an activist in the protest, and the constable was suspended and shifted to Karnataka unit as a result (The Hindu, 2024).

Pakistan, on the other hand, in its 76-year history, has had 29 prime ministers, none of whom has completed a full five-year term. Interestingly governments have been ousted by military

or unstable economies are more prone to democratic collapse than those with stable economies. Przeworski et al. (1996; 2000) examine economic performance (that is, growth, absence of crises, and low inflation) and the stability of democracy. They conclude that affluence (continued positive economic performance) contributes to democratic stability; Powell (1982) examines the relationship between economic inequality and violence. These are only some of the studies that measure economic performance, not economic development, and its relationship to democratic stability. Lipset (1959), for example, measures indices of democratic development (wealth, industrialisation, urbanisation, and education) and claims that the more economically developed a nation is, the more likely it is to sustain a democratic regime. Lipset's claim has been confirmed by numerous scholars who have carried out multivariate analyses, such as Bollen (1979), Cutright (1963), Cutright & Wiley (1969), Lipset et al. (1993), and Olsen (1968) among others. The discussion among these scholars concerns the type of relationship, rather than the existence of such a relationship. Is the relationship linear or not (Bollen & Jackman, 1985)? Is the main variable economic development or income inequality (Hadenius, 1994; Muller, 1988, 1995)?

Global democracy is getting in the way of a big warning in the last few years, approaching the end of 2022 with multiple issues, a cost-of-living crisis, an economic crisis, and recent wars in places as diverse as Ukraine and Ethiopia. The world is fighting for balance in environments marked by instability and anxiety. Relatively democratic nations that are doing well are also going through difficult modules.

The dullness exists in parallel to democratic erosion elsewhere. The number of backsliding countries (seven) remains at its peak, and the number of countries moving towards authoritarianism is more than double the number moving towards democracy. As

of the end of 2021, nearly one-half of the 173 countries assessed by International IDEA were experiencing declines in at least one sub-attribute of democracy. The erosion in democratic rule is being charged by efforts to undermine credible election results, widespread dejection among youth over political parties, and their out-of-touch leaders, as well as the rise of right-wing that has polarised politics. In Europe, democratic rule in 17 countries has eroded over the last five years, affecting 46 percent of the high-performing democracies. The quality of democracy is declining in half of the democracies around the world while the number of countries with the most severe form of democratic erosion, known as backsliding, is at its peak. The rise of dictatorship has its background too. In 2012 liberal democracies peaked in 42 countries. In 2021, there were only 34 liberal democracies; the lowest number recorded since 1995—over 25 years ago. Only 13 percent of the world’s population live in this least populous regime type. Dictatorships are the rise up from 25 to 30 closed autocracies between 2020 and 2021. This development adds to the picture of a change like autocratisation. Electoral autocracies are the most common regime type and harbor the largest share of the world population—44 percent, or 3.4 billion people.

The Brookings Institute, being based on six high-quality surveys, outlines that public support is good enough for fundamental change in their political system to make it work better and effectively. Around 6 out of every 10 Americans do not believe that the system can be changed; it has not changed despite growing disorder. Polarisation has led to a legislative halt resulting in rising support for unfettered executive action to carry out the people’s will. Democracy means the rule of the people, but Americans do not fully agree on who belongs to the people. Although there are areas of agreement across partisan and ideological lines, some in our nation hold that to be ‘truly’ American. American democracy is under assault from the ground up. The most recent systematic attack on state and

local election machinery is much more dangerous than the chaotic statements of a disorganized former president. A movement that relied on Donald Trump's organisational skills would impose no threat to constitutional institutions. The chances are that this threat will remain over the next few years.

State of Democracy in South Asia

Democracy, often as a political system, meets at least three conditions: First, it features competition among organized groups and individuals over government power regularly and without the use of force; second, it allows for political participation through regular free elections that should not exclude defined social groups; and third, it offers a certain level of civil and political rights that ensures competition and participation (Diamond et al., 1990). Applying this definition to South Asia reveals several problems. The health of democracy has declined significantly in many nations over the past several years,⁵ and it is the case in South Asia too. It is worth here to refer Christian Wagner (1999, p. 908-925) to understand the situation from his article 'Democracy and State in South Asia: Between Fragmentation and Consolidation?', through which the author uses a 'minimalist definition of democracy', as suitable to apply in South Asian context. According to him, even minimalist democracy faces several problems when applied to the South Asian environment. However, despite such problems as poll-related violence and restricted civil liberties, democracy is functioning in the sense that elections serve their first and foremost purpose to change governments through ballots. Such is even more remarkable in societies with high socioeconomic inequalities. For 21 consecutive years, from 1999 to 2021, the Freedom House Index—the most widely used measure of democratic

5 For detail, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2024/02/28/representative-democracy-remains-a-popular-ideal-but-people-around-the-world-are-critical-of-how-its-working/>, accessed on September 20, 2024.

quality worldwide—has reported that South Asia is experiencing democratic backsliding. This is in line with global trends, where, democracies and civil liberties have deteriorated, and India saw the largest decline in the score among the 25 largest democracies in the world while Bangladesh and Pakistan also contributed to the region's democratic backsliding. India's decline (from 75 to 71) is the largest score decline among the 25 largest democracies in the world, and at least three decisions taken by the Indian government in 2019 are mentioned in the FH report as important for the sharp decline of the Indian score. The first is the decision to revoke the special status (and statehood) of Jammu and Kashmir in August 2019. The decision, which was accompanied by a communication shutdown (which is still partially in operation), the arrest (without charge) of Kashmiri political leaders, and a massive deployment of additional troops, also caused the Indian Kashmir score to drop dramatically to the category 'not free'. The second is the publication of the National Registry of Citizens in Assam in August 2019 which left out nearly two million residents from the list of citizens. The third is the enactment of the Citizenship Amendment Act in December 2019 which grants special rights to non-Muslim refugees from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

In 2023, people like Lydia Polgreen (February 2023) started comparing the changing situation with a short time slot and argued that it is difficult to believe that upon her arrival in India, more than a decade ago, Nehru's dream seemed alive—more than a billion people living in relative harmony, cheek by jowl atop a palimpsest of fallen empires. It is a tragedy that India's rise comes as that dream fades and is replaced by a new India that is less free, less tolerant, and more willing to jettison the furniture of democracy to build a temple of national greatness around a single faith. The whole of humanity will

be poorer for it.⁶ Likewise, Lührmann (et al, 2022)⁷ states that the Hindu-nationalist party, BJP became India's governing party in 2014 led by Narendra Modi. Democracy has deteriorated since then, with EDI scores declining from 0.71 to 0.54 between the 2014 and 2019 parliamentary elections. Several policies have diminished freedom of expression and academic freedom, and repression of civil society has increased. BJP's vision of India as a Hindu nation has also led to persistent discrimination against Muslims (Ganguly, 2020; Maerz, Lührmann, et al., 2020; Varshney, 2019; Pyakurel & Gurung, 2023; Pyakurel 2013). This is reflected in BJP's 0.84 score on the API in 2019.

Democratic backsliding is discussed within India itself. Guha (2020) hinted at worrying but unmistakable similarities between the Italy of the 1920s, namely the decade when Benito Mussolini conquered power, and the India of the 2020s. It is said that India in the 2020s resembles less Italy in the 1920s than Germany in the 1930s. Hitler came to power democratically; also, central to Nazi ideology was the contempt and hate for inferior races, starting with the Jews. Observing the Modi government's acts toward peaceful freedom of speech movements, such as the #ByeByeModi campaign, remarks such as 'There is freedom of speech, but we cannot guarantee freedom after speech' (The Wire, 2022) are also being made. Khangchian (2021) refers to cases such as the arrest of father Stan Swamy, a Catholic Priest, on October 8, 2020 by National Investigation Agency (NIA), considering this as against freedom of speech offered by Indian constitution. The farmer's agitation against the new agricultural laws, which began on November 26, 2020, protests the 'corporatisation' of Indian agriculture, and the arrests of anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) protesters charged under the UAPA, along with the February 2020 Delhi riots—where 53 people,

6 For detail, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/08/opinion/india-modi-bbc-democracy.html>. accessed on September 20, 2024.

7 For detail, https://v-dem.net/media/publications/working_paper_116_final.pdf. accessed on September 20, 2024

intervention in the past. A new election held on 8 February 2008 commenced while Pakistan's army had become increasingly visible in politics for at least the previous 20 months. The pre-election scenario was not very different than in Bangladesh as the political opposition had been marginalised, critics and the media muzzled, and space for civil society further shrunk. Opposition parties state that there had been hundreds of detentions—some on charges of violence. Under alleged duress or inducement, some senior PTI party leaders had abandoned the party. Journalists have described intimidation, harassment, and surveillance by the authorities for perceived criticism of the government. Some politicians and journalists had also been charged under Pakistan's vague and overly broad sedition law, based on colonial-era legislation, and dozens had been tried in military courts in violation of international law.

In the case of Nepal, one can hypothesise that federal states are more prone to democratic collapse than unitary ones. The introduction of federalism can lead to centre-periphery struggles that could undermine democracy, as it was in the case of the American Civil War. This hypothesis runs counter to the small amount of literature (Giri et.al 2019; Pyakurel, 2015a; Pyakurel, 2015b; Pyakurel, 2022; Pyakurel & Adhikari 2013; Upreti & Pyakurel 2012a; Upreti & Pyakurel 2012b) that is available on the relationship between this variable and democratic collapse. For example, Lijphart (1984a, 1999) includes federalism as one of the majority-restraining elements that identifies his consensual model of democracy. Federalism is, therefore, conducive to democratic stability, and not damaging (Lijphart, 1990). Diamond (1990), Diamond et al. (1995), Horowitz (1994), and Pyakurel (2016) all focus on the usefulness of federalism in alleviating ethnic and other social conflicts to achieve a more stable democracy in pluralistic societies. Hadenius (1994), however, found no significant quantitative relationship between federalism and the durability of democracy in developing countries

(Adhikari, 2012; Pyakurel 2012). Another hypothesis could be that proportional electoral systems are more prone to democratic collapse than those with less proportionality. The influence of proportionality, however, can produce two offsetting results. On the one hand, high proportionality can expand fragmentation, thereby increasing the fragility of the party system. On the other hand, it can expand representation, thereby containing conflicts and reducing their spillover outside the system. Countries such as the Maldives, Bhutan and Afghanistan are undergoing political changes, with Bhutan being the only exception, potentially facing increasing democratic deficits within the region. The following section take Manipur (one of the north-eastern states of India), Sri Lanka and Bangladesh as the latest updates, and tries to understand the reasons for countries and societies being in such a situation. Is it due to the global scenario followed by South Asia or does it have some ingredients built within? The northeastern state of India is home to a diverse population that includes various ethnic groups such as Meitei, Kuki, Naga, and other smaller tribes. The majority representing the state and Imphal valley are the Meiteis, predominantly Hindus, while the Kukis, primarily Christian, live in the hilly regions surrounding the valley. Over the years these two communities have harboured conflicting interests, especially over land rights, political representation and cultural recognition. The ongoing struggle focuses on the three main ethnic groups–Naga (24 percent), Kuki-Chin (16 percent) and Meitei (53 percent), and this traces back over two centuries (IWGIA, 2023). Presently, the Nagas and Kukis are classified as ‘Scheduled Tribes’ under the Indian Constitution, a recognition acknowledging their socio-economic disadvantages. In contrast, the Meiteis are not designated as Schedule Tribes. Since India’s independence, the Constitution has established principles of affirmative action for Scheduled Tribes, providing them with reserved political representation, government employment, quotas in universities, free

or subsidized education, and access to various government benefits. Several laws have been enacted to enforce such constitutional provisions, including the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989, the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act of 1996, and the Forest Rights Act of 2006 (IWGIA, 2023).

The conflict between Kuki and Meitei communities started on May 3, 2023, following the solidarity march arranged by the All Tribal Student Union Manipur (ATSUM) in various districts of Manipur. The purpose of the march was to protest against a recent order by the Manipur High Court that called for expedited consideration of granting Scheduled Tribe status to the Meitei Community. This order directed the state government to respond to a letter from the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, considering the inclusion of the Meitei community in the Scheduled Tribe list, expeditiously, preferably within a period of four weeks. As a result, it triggered clashes and sparked violence that had been building up over a decade of unresolved tension (IWGIA, 2023). The conflict has resulted in killings and displacements along with looting of around 5,600 weapons and 650,000 rounds of ammunition from state armories. Both the Kuki and Meitei communities have been armed, including weapons sourced from various insurgent groups and from the neighbouring country Myanmar. Despite current efforts to contain the situation, the violence and killings continue (IWGIA, 2023).

The Manipur Conflict is the recent outbreak of ethnic violence in one of India's smaller states, clashing between the majority Meitei and the minority Kuki communities, battling over land and influence. Manipur, a hilly north-eastern Indian state, is situated to the east of Bangladesh and borders Myanmar with an estimated population of 3.3 million. The conflict started in May 2023 resulting in violence, with over 130 deaths and 400 injured. More than 60,000 people have been forced and displaced from their

homes as the army, paramilitary forces and police struggle to quell this violence. This unrest has also led to police armories being looted, having hundreds of churches and more than a dozen temples been ruined, along with villages being destroyed.

If we go through the history of North-east India, it is observed that this region has always been prone to ethnic conflict. There have been reports of abuses including gang rape, public humiliation, severe beatings resulting in deaths, and instances of burning victims alive or dead. Experts from the United Nations have emphasised severe such instances of gender-based violence, particularly targeting females from the Kuki ethnic minority. Similar such concerns have also been raised by the International Bar Association (IBA), which draws attention to a prolonged and brutal attack upon two women in Manipur. An associate professor at the Rutgers School of Social Work, Rupa Khetarpal, pointed out that such sexual violence has historically been weaponized in India during conflicts and political upheavals, that are particularly aimed at shaming, controlling and eradicating specific communities (Ochab, 2023). Nevertheless, in 1995, the Government of Manipur established a Social Policy Advisory Committee as part of its efforts to address the region's complex social issues. This committee was particularly designed to provide strategic guidance and recommendations on various social policies aimed at nurturing more effective governance and addressing the challenges faced by the state. This creation was committed to improving social welfare and to implement policies that could better address the needs of diverse communities within Manipur. By bringing all experts and stakeholders together, the committee set the goal of developing and taking initiatives that would enhance social cohesion, economic development, and the overall well-being of the state. The tribal communities in Manipur have traditionally managed their commons according to customary laws, that highlight equity and have resisted interference from Manipuri kings and

British authorities in the past. Today, however, these customary laws face challenges from the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act of 1960 (Kamei, 2018). This act was a significant piece of legislation that aimed at addressing issues related to land ownership and redistribution in the state. The judiciary has also played a significant role in the implementation of the Land Ceiling Act. Moreover, the government holds the rights to all the trees, brushwood, and other natural products on land designated as forest reserves, except where privately owned. The government also owns all roadside trees planted and maintained by or under its orders. The tribal people are engaged in gathering forest products and trapping wildlife for battering the same with agricultural and village industrial products. Referring to Harvey Feit's work, societies engaged in such activities should be supported with appropriate technologies and networking to specialise in their respective fields. However, it also notes its negative attributes providing a glimpse into the complexities of rural economies and the importance of sustainable development. The problem in Manipur stems from the community land system, where land is collectively owned by the village rather than by individuals. With boundaries being unmarked and villages being relatively large, conflicts have historically taken place among various ethnic groups and communities. This situation has deteriorated as government and corporate sectors have begun seizing land, leaving the villagers without compensation due to their lack of individual land ownership. In West Bengal, for example, the Totos were settled with individual property rights and were encouraged to take up agriculture. However, being traditionally pre-agricultural, they had to share farming practices with local Nepali farmers. Similarly, the people of Manipur, who have long relied on forest resources, are also largely pre-agricultural, further complicating their transition to more conventional land use. This as a result disrupts their traditional ways of life, exposing them to vulnerabilities, as they struggle to

integrate into an economic framework that was not quite designed according to their needs and historical practices in mind.

The Kuki-Meitei conflict in Manipur appears to be a multidimensional issue with roots in the in a complex interplay of ethnic identity, land rights, political power, and cultural economy. Resolving such a problem requires addressing these long-standing grievances through dialogue, inclusive policies, and efforts to promote mutual respect and understanding. A sustainable solution would involve political and administrative reforms and reconciliation efforts that recognise the aspirations and rights of all ethnic groups in the state.

Similarly, mass protests were carried out in March 2022 against the government of Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan government was heavily criticized for the mismanagement of its economy which led to a massive economic crisis including inflation, blackouts, shortages of fuel, domestic gas and other essential. Pattanaik (2023) writes that the pushback against authoritarian governments must originate from within the country, as demonstrated by Sri Lanka's Aragalaya movement. This movement spread a significant message: While elected governments may have a majority mandate, they still cannot evade accountability after the election. Although the change in Sri Lanka has yet to yield significant democratic benefits, it stands as a testament to the power of the people to demand and enforce change. Sri Lanka witnessed massive, largely peaceful protests across its country with thousands of people from all walks of life demanding the resignation of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and his brother Mahinda, the then prime minister who stepped down in May 2022. Thousands of protestors stormed the president's official residence, prompting Rajapaksa to flee to the Maldives and later to Singapore, where he sent in his resignation. His departure marked the end of a two-decade-long family dynasty in Sri Lankan politics. He was succeeded by veteran politician Ranil Wickremesinghe as

president of the country. The return of Rajapakse remains a sensitive issue for the new government, which seeks to avoid further unrest while ensuring his security (Ethirajan, 2022). ‘People came to the streets because of the alleged corruption against his government. We don’t have any personal enmity against him,’ a prominent protest leader told the BBC.

Bangladesh has also witnessed such changes in the past, especially the anti-Ershad movement and the 1971 movement. Ali (2022) writes that Bangladesh has continually experienced prolonged periods of political instability, corruption, and violation of human rights. The country is facing a growing extremist threat, and its increasingly authoritarian government has exacerbated many of the problems that have stifled its potential to become an influential global actor.⁸ The ruling Awami League has managed to remain in power with the support of a broad-based coalition of 14 political parties, known as the Grand Alliance. However, while the Awami League has kept this alliance intact, it continues to engage in evident political repression of its opponents, with ample evidence of ongoing political violence across Bangladesh. The International Crisis Group cited 14,000 incidents of political violence in Bangladesh from 2002 to 2013, which killed more than 2,400 people and injured 126,300. Widespread allegations of vote tampering and other irregularities followed general elections in 2014 and 2018. Analyzing the latest general elections that were held in December 2023, Kurlantzick (2024) terms it a significant election ‘victory’, taking a reported 222 seats out of a total of 298 available which gives the Awami League and its increasingly autocratic leader, Sheikh Hasina, her fourth straight term in office and fifth term overall as prime minister. However, leading democracies, i.e. the United Kingdom and the USA, condemned it as not free and fair. It is said

⁸ For detail, <https://newlinesinstitute.org/political-systems/bangladesh-declining-democracy/> accessed on September 21, 2024

that during Sheikh Hasina's tenure, she increasingly cracked down on opposition parties, civil society, the press, and virtually any other form of opposition. The main opposition party, the BNP, declined to participate in this election with similar allegations. It was Sheikh Hasina who refused the previous practice of allowing a caretaker government to take over during the election period, saying that such governments ensure freer and fairer campaigning and helped prevent the ruling party from dominating the election machinery and process. While the country was conducting general elections, thousands, even tens of thousands of members of the BNP, were in detention, and several of them were killed. That is why, Bangladesh's exiled opposition leader Tarique Rahman and others describe the election as a 'sham' designed to cement Hasina's rule. It was Rahman whose party staged a months-long protest campaign in 2023 demanding the prime minister's resignation that saw at least eleven people killed and thousands of its supporters arrested.⁹ Protests in Bangladesh erupted over long-standing resentment towards a quota system that reserved 56 percent of government jobs, including 30 percent for descendants of 1971 War of Independence fighters, creating barriers for the unemployed youths of the country. Although Prime Minister Hasina abolished the system in 2018, the high court declared this move illegal in June 2024, leading to new protests. Tensions escalated when she labeled students as 'rajakaar', a term used to identify pro-Pakistan collaborators during Bangladesh's War of Independence, leading to violent clashes with the Bangladesh Chhatra League and police. With over 266 people, mostly students, killed, the unrest intensified, resulting in a massive uprising and Hasina's eventual resignation as she fled the country (Sajjad, 2024).

These tragic incidents underscore the fragility of democratic

9 For detail, <https://www.cfr.org/article/bangladeshs-sham-election-and-regression-democracy-south-and-southeast-asia>, accessed on September 21, 2024.

institutions in these regions, emphasizing on how political dissent and grievances can lead to disastrous consequences. These circumstances reflect a bigger pattern observed in South Asia, where disregarding the advice of proponents of democracy often has catastrophic results. It is very important here to link these three latest incidents with the alerts that came up through various above-mentioned literature regarding strength and weakness of democracy in South Asia. A lesson for all nation-states, especially countries in South Asia, is that one must address concerns raised by democracy defenders on time. Results, otherwise, could more painful that may lead further chaos as in Sri Lanka in 2022 and Bangladesh in 2024.

Anti-politics, weak parties, normalization of lying, digital manipulation, foreign interference, and nationalism weaken the power of democracy. People seek a say in decisions that affect their lives and demand systems that work for everyone. Protests that express human rights and democratic values should be respected and addressed by their respective governments. Participation helps authorities understand public outrage and make informed decisions. Continued demands for human rights, equality, and action on climate change highlight the need for a new social contract and protection of freedom of expression to combat disinformation and polarisation.

Conclusion

The current South Asian state of democracy represents a complex and nuanced image, marked by both substantial declines and persistent challenges. The erosion of democracy through its backslides, weakened political parties, and growing authoritarian tendencies underscores a need for reevaluation of democratic practices and frameworks. This decline is not uniform but varies depending on the metrics used according to the specific contexts of different South Asian countries. While India is experiencing a decline in democratic practices, this trend is not necessarily permanent. Although hybrid regimes can be stable, elections continue to

provide genuine opportunities to the common mass of people for accountability, provided that ballots are confidential and elections are monitored fairly. A question may come here whether democracy itself is a problem?

Referring the U.S. political system, Thomas Carothers came up with an essay to highlight at least five significant design flaws of democracy itself¹⁰. Largely most of the Carothers's arguments are not very far away from South Asian realities too. Democracy requires active citizen engagements, responsible presses, universal education and political awareness, but interest group within political parties create an atmosphere to show that they are only stakeholders of democracy in many occasions. As a result, both citizen and press become reluctant to engage in political education and awareness. That is who, pessimism on democracy as a system is being further strengthened. Realizing these limitations of democracy, Pew Research Center survey in 2023 revealed diverse suggestions for improving democracy, with several common themes emerging from respondents. Improving political leadership, government reform, expecting more from citizens, and improving the economy are four major suggestions of the center (Silver et al, 2024).

Finally, restoring democracy is not just about going back to the way things were but it entails giving a modern makeover to better suit the demands 'of the people, for the people, by the people'. Reviving a democracy can bring stability and hope, ensuring that governance remains responsive and just for all. As rightly pointed out by Mahatma Gandhi, the spirit of democracy is not a mechanical thing to be adjusted by abolition of forms. It requires change of heart. In South Asia, 'democracy' as modern political system is very limited framework as the people of South Asia practiced more advanced system for centuries which goes beyond today's laws and

10 For details, <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2019/01/is-democracy-the-problem?lang=en>, accessed on September 21, 2024.

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structures of the government. As advanced model of democracy that ‘comprehensive democracy’ in today’s formulation, is deeply rooted in the values, beliefs and attitudes of the people, elected leaders need to follow it rather than being confined to a new and narrow definition of ‘democracy’.

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Teaching with Visual Narratives: A Practical Usage of English Language

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Abstract

An increasing curiosity in communication through visual narratives has been observed in recent years in multidisciplinary research. This paper is based on my own experience in the classroom about how English grammar is taught with the help of visual narratives. This teaching method can be considered an exclusive way of teaching grammar in context through the strategic fusion of language and literature rather than treating them as two separate entities of the English language. The linguistic sequential nature of comic strips or visual narratives displays an excellent source of teaching materials that would allow teachers and students to find novel approaches to language in an intriguing and creative way. With the help of a descriptive research method, this paper shows how to practice the formation of different word classes with the different tense forms and usage of modals through certain selected visual narratives.

Keywords: visual narratives, comics, ESL/EFL, teaching

Introduction

An increasing curiosity in communication through visual narratives has been observed in recent years in multidisciplinary research. This paper is based on how English grammar can be taught with the help of visual narratives or picture stories. The study contributes to the field of teaching English by its creative and

innovative approach to language education. Teaching with the help of visual narratives provides us with a multimodal and entertaining way of teaching grammar that appeals to a diverse range of learning styles while also fostering deeper knowledge of the lexicon of grammatical ideas. This method does not only improve traditional practices of learning but also addresses the need for a more dynamic and culturally relevant teaching strategy in language education. This teaching method can also be considered an exclusive way of teaching grammar in context through the strategic fusion of language and literature rather than treating them as two separate entities of the English language. Furthermore, the effectiveness of visual narratives in teaching grammar, especially to ESL/EFL learners adds to the growing corpus of research on the confluence of visual literacy and language learning that should even broaden the discussion of various techniques for improving language acquisition and proficiency.

Art is an expression used by human imaginations and creative abilities; it demands visual perceptions; thereby, a unique comprehension takes place in each individual human brain. According to Locke (1690), the only things we perceive immediately are ideas. His understanding of knowledge of the external world within its broader epistemology and theoretical philosophy requires probing beyond his epistemology and the depths of its accounts of perception, representation, and contents of thoughts. Therefore, it seems that the real difference between humans and other animals is on the collective level. We rule the world because we can cooperate flexibly in large numbers, unlike other animals. This is again because human beings are the only organisms that live in a state of dual reality—a reality of ideas and conceptions along with the objective reality, like other animals (Harari, 2015). Human beings possess this dual reality because of the cognitive revolution (c. 70,000 BCE, when Sapiens evolved imagination). As a result of this, humans can form stories or ideas with the help of the social contexts present

around them, and eventually they give birth to creation. Art is a medium that has been our companion since time immemorial, and it plays an especially important role in human lives; it is a way of expressing human feelings. McCloud (1993) in his 'Understanding Comics' states that comics is a part of our historical tradition. It gives an in-depth look at the overall formal aspect of comics. He further discusses that the fundamental vocabularies and theoretical ideas constitute comics as a form of art and a medium to convey ideas and thoughts. He also talks about comics being an ancient way of conveying messages through cave paintings although it has a very modern outlook in the present time. Visual narratives or comics are a well-known and popular art form. Unfortunately, people are introduced to this art form in the cheap magazines of childhood or the funny pages of a newspaper. But nowadays, comics play a major part in documenting the rise of the world's civilization. Comics is a sequential art form that was coined by Will Eisner (1940). Modern research shows that ancient Egyptians documented in sequential wall paintings of the collection and taxing of crops. 'Beaux Tapestry' created in France in the 11th century CE, is a huge, embroidered wall hanging depicting the history of the Norman conquest of England (McCloud, 1993).

'In addition to apply to the subfields of linguistics, visual language has the ability of being analyzed using nearly all types of linguistic schools: generative, cognitive, applied, computational, etc.' (Cohn, 2012). With the recent revolution of artificial intelligence (AI), it is to be kept in mind that teaching methods should also evolve to keep up the pace: This paper is based on my own experience in the classroom about how English grammar is taught with the help of visual narratives. Comics or visual narratives use both simple and complex vocabularies and grammatical structures that give a more vivid perception to the learners. Visual narratives are a popular medium perfectly suited to tell stories and as a result of it, they are

a very good source of teaching English to EFL/ESL students. Like an album of pictures that depicts all the moments in a trip, comic strips capture all the essence in a narrative. Speech balloons are dynamically drawn, and the algorithm is fairly simple but good enough (Alves et al., 2008). Comics is generally associated with American superheroes. It first originated in America with 'The Yellow Kid' which was first published in 1897 (Diep, 2019).

Visual narratives that feature heroic themes in particular appeal to a lot of young and adult readers. These visual narratives or comics frequently have superheroes or courageous individuals who go on thrilling adventures, engage in heroic battles with bad guys, and also overcome obstacles using their unique abilities. According to Cohn (2012), 'Truly, there seems to be an intuitive link between comics and language in the minds of the creators- a belief shared by several researchers of language who, with growing frequency, are discussing properties of comics in a linguistic light.' There is a natural relationship between comics and language. This link is underscored by numerous conversations about how comics can convey complicated ideas using both visuals and texts. Therefore, comics and other visual narratives do what exactly any other language would do- convey messages. But these visual narratives convey messages in such a way that we cannot do in our physical states (more in an exaggerated manner): If someone were angry, probably her head would be on fire; again, if someone were in love, his eyes would literally reveal it all by turning them into heart icons! It is also possible to expect a positive impact according to my own teaching experience that including grammatical information in a comic strip may help learners of the English language in several ways: the teacher could discuss the application of the grammatical rules using the favorable characters; the students will feel at ease and can enjoy the flow of explanation. Therefore, this teaching method can be considered an exclusive way of teaching grammar in context through the strategic

fusion of language and literature rather than treating them as two separate entities of the English language: Readers frequently read the story through to the conclusion, and because it requires participation in the activity, using comic strips to teach grammar may help students practice speaking in public (Derrick, 2008).

This study mainly focuses on the teacher's perspective, providing insights into the creative use of visual narratives in teaching English grammar with the help of 'Calvin and Hobbes.' However, it also takes into account the students' perspectives, which has a good impact on their learning experiences. Students who engage with visual narratives not only find grammar lectures more entertaining and accessible, but they also demonstrate better knowledge and memory of grammatical principles. This teaching approach combines language and literature in such a way that it provides students with a relevant and entertaining method to study, improve their general language skills, and instill a greater respect for both visual and textual storytelling.

Literature Review: The Structural and Functional Aspects of Visual Narratives

Linguistics has witnessed a considerable number of theories and each one has its distinct orientations, trends and subjects of study. Yet, Halliday's (1961) and Chomsky's (1957) traditions have been initiated by a large number of followers. Chomsky's (1957) transformational generative linguistics (TGL) and Halliday's (1961) systemic functional linguistics (SFL) have been deemed as two of the most influential and pivotal traditions in the linguistic academic field. Though both systems are distinct in many respects making the same impacts; there are a number of differences between these two systems:

For example, systemic functional grammar (SFG) studies the language through meaning (i.e., its function). While transformational generative grammar (TGG) is a fully influential and developed version of linguistics through form. Halliday (1961) theorized that

linguistics should describe actual sentences with many functions and without a deep structure. In addition, he was concerned with the function of the sentences, or in other words, the writer's purpose in writing the sentence (Almurashi, 2016).

On the other hand, Chomsky (1957) maintained that linguistics should go beyond merely describing syntactic structures, and his purpose is to elucidate why language is structured in the way that it is. To summarize, Chomsky (1957) characterized form independently of function and meaning, while Halliday (1961) had good reasons to believe that functional meaning can help shape form (Bavali & Sadighi, 2008).

In the case of visual narratives, both structural and functional aspects are needed. Without structure, we would not be able to comprehend the panels present in the visual narratives, be it comics, graphic novels, manhwa, manhua, manga or recent times' webtoons: these diverse forms of visual narratives present in various cultures combine art and text generally in sequential manners to convey stories, ideas and emotions. The comprehension of sequential images draws upon a narrative structure which is organized into constituents, analogous to grammatical structure in language (Cohn, 2014). If the panels are not in order or in a sequential manner, the function would get lost:

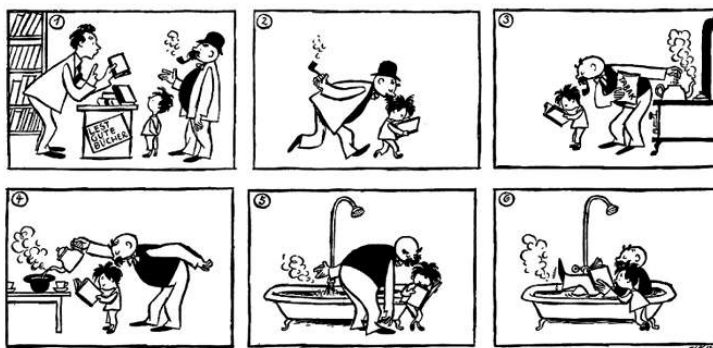


Figure 1. Picture Story 'The Captivating Book' by Erich Ohser-eoplauen

Here, the structure of comics (establisher, initial, peak and release) as established by Cohn (2014) conveys the function and gives the readers the whole story:

- 1) The comics starts with an establisher where the father is buying the book with his son;
- 2) In its initial stage, the father runs behind the son with his pipe reading the book with him;
- 3) In the third panel, which is the prolonged initial stage, the father keeps on reading with his son while making tea;
- 4) It reaches its peak when the father starts pouring the tea unmindfully into his hat instead of the cup while he still reads the book thus invoking our laughter;
- 5) The peak prolongs as the father enters the washroom dropping the 'hat of tea' in the bathtub while he is still reading a book along with his son;
- 6) The father finally gets into the bathtub instead of his son and takes the book himself in his hand while his son accompanies him in reading, considering a release to the tension and thereby coming to a conclusion.

We can take Chomsky's (1957) very famous sentence, 'Colourless green ideas sleep furiously,' as an example of a sentence, here, whose grammar or structure is correct but whose meaning does not make any sense. It is the same when it comes to visual narratives: if pictures are placed randomly without following an order, then the whole picture story will be irrelevant to us, leading to the loss of all the functional aspects it could have had. Even though, from the surface level, it may look like it has a structure due to the presence of different panels divided by gutters and other visual narrative vocabularies, it will still require proper sequential ordering of pictures to have the flow of the story.

Hence, in visual narratives, both TGL and SFL are essential to establish a story out of the structure. Here, we want to point out

that one of the most unique human behaviours is creating stories in the mind, and therefore visual narratives or comics can be very effective in any language-related classroom.

Descriptive Research Design

This study employed qualitative descriptive research. A descriptive research design is a method or technique for gathering and evaluating data in order to describe the characteristics of a population or phenomenon. Though it is typically referred to as a form of quantitative research, yet, qualitative research can also be used for descriptive reasons (McCombes, 2023). In this method, the factors being researched are not influenced because researchers see participants in their natural context from a distance. Therefore, the teaching method described here has helped me elicit the behaviours of my students through the lessons in the English language with the help of visual narratives. This study has drawn relevant data from ‘Calvin and Hobbes’; it primarily focuses on the narrative for teaching English to ESL/EFL learners. Since it is qualitative in nature, it relies mainly on observation and analyses of an ESL/EFL classroom from the teacher’s point of view. Although the observations were solely mine, my co-authors contributed significantly to various aspects of this research. Together, we have analysed the teaching method with a focus on achieving the key objective.

Objective

This paper demonstrates through a few carefully chosen visual narratives from Watterson’s (1988) ‘Calvin and Hobbes’ how to practice the production of the different word classes, the various tense forms, and the usage of modals. With the help of both structural and functional aspects of visual narratives which have already been discussed in Section 2, this teaching method can be viewed as a unique technique of the 21st century to teach grammar in context by strategically combining both English language and literature.

Data Analysis

For this study, a few selected visual narratives from the popular comics, ‘Calvin and Hobbes’ were used as stimuli. The focus is on qualitative research by simply describing the data and its usage in the classroom through the bimodal form of visual narratives such as texts and images with the help of a descriptive method. This study also includes a brief section on understanding the students’ perspective, which emphasizes the importance of visual narratives on their experience. Engaging with the amusing and relatable scenes in ‘Calvin and Hobbes’ helps learners enjoy and remember the process of studying grammatical ideas. This method was applied to high school students aged 16 to 18.

Word Classes

In reading and writing, it is crucial to make it apparent to the students who or what is most essential in a sentence. Using visual narratives, for various word classes allows students to create visual representations and helps them remember the vocabulary for further writing:

Noun



Figure 2.

Hobbes (Proper Noun, Panel 1), Mom (Proper Noun, Panel 2), Hat (Common Noun, Panel 3),
One (Numeral Noun, Panel 3), Dad (Proper Noun, Panel 3)



Figure 3.

People (Panel 1), Mouths (Panel 1), Pacific Ocean (Panel 2), Explosion (Panel 3), Monster (Panel 3), Way (Panel 4), Coast (Panel 4), Japan (Panel 4)

Pronoun



Figure 4.

You (Panel 2), Me (Panel 2), My (Panel 2), Him (Panel 2), I (Panel 3), Him (Panel 4), Him (Panel 4), I (Panel 4)

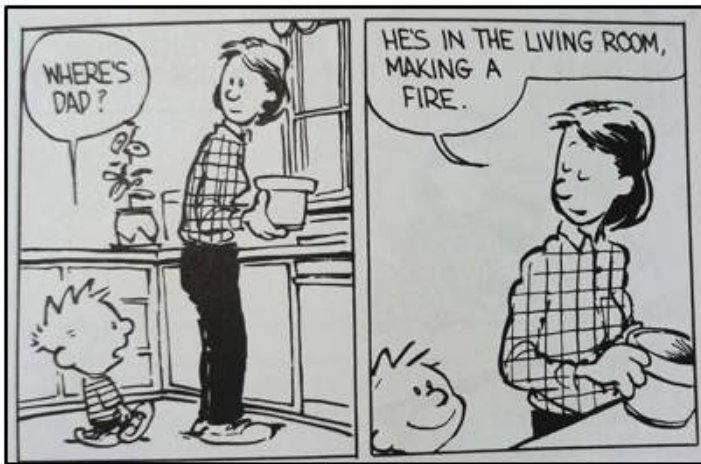


Figure 5.

He (Panel 2)

Verb



Figure 6.

Can (Panel 1), Drive (Panel 1), Can (Panel 2), Steer (Panel 2), Promise (Panel 2) Would (Panel 2), Can (Panel 3), Work (Panel 3), Steer (Panel 3), Let (Panel 4), Do (Panel 4)

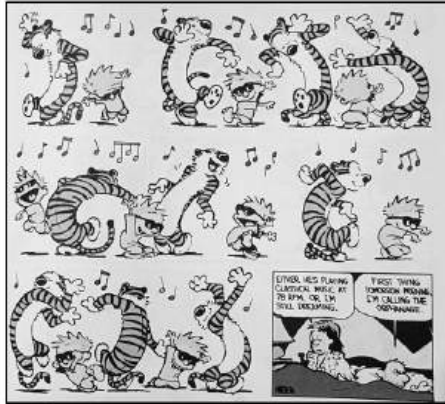


Figure 7.

Is ('s, Last Panel), Playing (Last Panel), Am ('m, Last Panel), Dreaming (Last Panel), Am ('m, Last Panel), Calling (Last Panel)

Adjective



Figure 8.

Crummy (Panel 2), Dead (Panel 2), Insensitive (Panel 3)



Figure 9.

Nauseous (Textbox), Dripping (Narrative 2), Certain (Narrative 2), Final (Narrative 2), Short (Narrative 2), Precious (Narrative 2)



Figure 10.

Alive (Narrative 1), Ominous (Narrative 2), Black (Narrative 2), Moonlit (Narrative 2)

Adverb



Figure 11.

First (Panel 1), Profusely (Panel 2), When (Panel 4), Altogether (Panel 4), Medically (Panel 5)



Figure 12.
Just

Preposition



Conjunction





Figure 17.
And (Panel 1, 2, 3, 4)

Interjection



Figure 18.
Every panel has an interjection.



Figure 19.
Gosh!

Tense Forms

Using comics in an ESL classroom is an effective and innovative method to teach verb tenses and help students relate language to real-life events:



Figure 20.

Mixed tenses: Present (Panel 1), Present statement referring to Past (Panel 2), Future (Panel 3), Future-Subjunctive/ modal 'can' (Panel 4), Present- Conditional- Future tense/ Present verb (Panel 5), Present (Panel 6), Visual showing Present state (Panel 7), Present (Panel 8)



Figure 21.

Mixed tenses: Present (Panel 1), Past and Present (Panel 2)

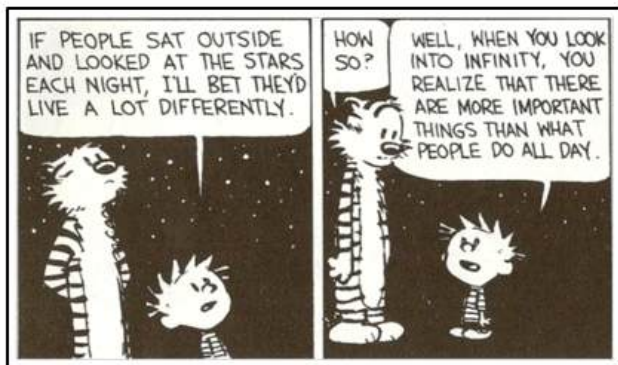


Figure 22.

Mixed tenses: Future tense/ Past verb (Panel 1), Present- Supposition (Panel 2)

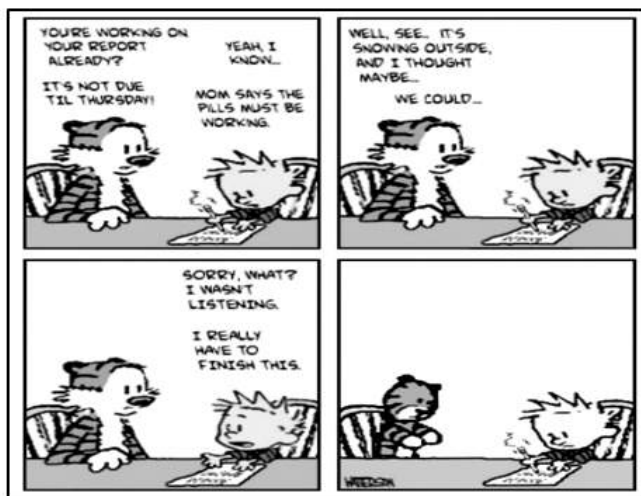


Figure 23.

Mixed tenses: Statement in Present tense with a Future note/ Present verb/ Future tense- modal 'must' (Panel 1), Present/ Past/ Subjunctive (Panel 2), Present/ Past/ Subjunctive (Panel 3), Visual showing Present state

Usage of Modals

Teaching modals through visual narratives enables students to comprehend how language is utilised in context and can make learning more enjoyable and relatable for students.



Figure 24.
Will < 'll (Panel 1), Can (2, Panel 2), Can (Panel 3), Would, Will (Panel 4)



Figure 25.
Could (Panel 1), Would (2, Panel 2), Can (Panel 3)



Figure 26.
Should (Panel 1), Can (Panel 2)

Possible Exercises

As teachers, we are supposed to introduce the comic strips and ask the students to identify the different word classes, tense forms, or modals. We can ask them to identify them categorically or

sometimes even omit certain grammatical words and ask them to fill in the blanks with their own vocabulary. It would definitely bring out a fun way of analyzing how adjectives describe the characters and settings (also with the vivid descriptions of the images), how verbs propel the action forward, or how interjections convey emotions. Instead of the word, ‘ominous’ in Figure 10, students may come up with words like ‘spooky’ or ‘eerie.’ To test their understanding, the class could also be asked to incorporate certain words and craft their own stories, which can certainly enhance their creative writing skills. One panel can also have several other word classes: for instance, in Figure 13, the last panel can come up with a sentence, ‘the father is crawling slowly under the bed’ - this sentence can teach so much with the picture as it contains a noun, a verb, an adverb and a preposition. Again, in Figure 7, we can teach them verbs with just visuals as for the verb, ‘dancing’. This way we can also mix and match the comic strips and ask them to write in various forms. We can incorporate these visuals to make them interestingly understand grammar in context, rather than just teaching them about unrealistic aspects of tense. It is to be noted that the art of storytelling lies in the imaginations of human beings and when it is practiced with visuals, they create magic, and students eventually explore more on the topics.

The scopes described above are merely a few outlines of how an orientation of an ESL/EFL classroom with the help of visual narratives might proceed. Therefore, the following can include some possible questions based on visual narratives that could be asked in an ESL/EFL classroom (though not limited to):

- Can you classify the nouns as people, places, things, or ideas?
- How do the different word classes in the comics help to make the story?
- Fill in the blanks with appropriate word classes/ tenses or modals. (By omitting the nouns/verbs/adjectives/etc.)

- Create your own comics/story by incorporating the given word classes.
- How are the pronouns used to replace the nouns in the given visual narratives?
- Describe the actions or events that represent the verbs.
- How do the different word classes contribute to the story in the visual narrative?
- How do the interjections convey emotions?
- Make predictions about what is going to happen and what the characters will say or think. (By omitting the speech bubbles with texts already there.)
- Create dialogue (Ask the students to rework and recast the dialogue in different tenses.)
- Role-play (Ask the students to enact a role-play using the correct forms of different tenses.)
- Write out a story using direct and indirect speech with reference to the visual narratives.
- Examine why the character is using that particular modal verb.
- Rewrite and recast the speech bubbles with different modal verbs. (By omitting the already given ones.)

These questions would certainly help the students to understand the language better. Since visual narratives possess both structural and functional aspects, as already mentioned in section 2 with the help of Figure 1, it becomes easier for students in customized learning like this, as visual storytelling makes up a potentially versatile and adaptable educational tool. This tool fosters the creative thinking ability of students as the human lexicon can link with the external world using the visuals: mental imageries and visual perceptions suggest that the same occipital regions remain active perceiving objects and are similarly active while mentally ‘simulating’ visual images of objects (Lewis & Poeppel, 2014). Also, with my own experience, I have found out that students in

the classroom discuss these questions, and the discussion leads to collaboration, critical thinking, and the ability to share and consider different perspectives.

Students' Perspective

This method was applied to high school students aged 16 to 18 (in a few private schools in Kathmandu), who found it highly successful and engaging. Students reported that engaging with such amusing and almost relatable circumstances in 'Calvin and Hobbes' made learning grammar more interesting and memorable. Students were able to improve their comprehension, memory, and retention of grammar and its rules by categorizing distinct word classes, tense forms, and modals in the comic strips.

Furthermore, activities such as filling in the blanks with their own vocabulary, analyzing how adjectives define people and places, and creating their own stories using certain words enhanced creativity and deeper knowledge. They discovered that verbs propel actions and interjections convey emotions, visually helping them understand these ideas more efficiently.

These interactive and engaging activities, which included role-playing, altering dialogue, and predicting future events in the visual narrative of 'Calvin and Hobbes,' facilitated teamwork and critical thinking. Several students reported that this method not only enhanced their grammatical understanding but also made them wish they had been exposed to such an approach earlier in their education. They also reported that learning grammar through visual narratives would have greatly improved their grammatical foundations at a younger age, making their current comprehension of the English language more robust and complex.

Discussion

Using visual narratives to teach grammar can improve the learning experience and promote a positive attitude toward language learning. The presence of both structural and functional

aspects in visual narratives, as already mentioned in section 2, makes grammar easy to grasp: they provide a visual context for language to assist the students through the sequential storytelling manner that helps them understand the intended messages and grammatical structures. The facial expressions of the characters in the visuals also add to it; to identify the nature of the different grammatical categories, whether it is an adverb or an interjection, we get the actual essence of the words through the facial expressions or other gestures or signals by the characters. Comprehension of both structural and functional elements of visual language reveals information on how visual language is framed, how it works in communication or other social interactions, and how it influences factors like cognition, culture, and social identity:

The embedded structural and functional aspects in visual narratives help the students in metacognition, which can be considered an essential concept in pedagogy, especially in a language learning classroom. This could be applied effectively with the help of visual narratives to deal with the science (language) and art (literature) of the English language. As observed in my classrooms, it helps the students' abilities to think about their own thinking. Moreover, it is a process to reflect on their learning processes and to monitor and regulate their own comprehension of the English language through comics with the help of both visuals and texts. By developing their metacognitive abilities, students can understand better how they learn and identify their strengths and shortcomings. Additionally, students particularly appreciated how facial expressions and gestures in the images helped them identify the nature of different grammatical categories. This strategy improved their metacognitive capacities, allowing them to reflect on their own learning processes and more closely check their understanding of the English language as ESL learners.

Conclusion

From my own experience of teaching English in the classroom, I have observed that incorporating visual narratives in English grammar teaching is a very effective, dynamic and engaging strategy that not only works as entertainment for learners but also improves their knowledge of grammatical principles. Visual narratives provide a sequential and visual context with the linguistic norms of structural and functional aspects present in them, making learning more pleasant and memorable. The use of visual narratives to teach grammar provides valuable insights from both the teacher's and the students' viewpoints, respectively, based on key linguistic theories from Halliday (1961) and Chomsky (1957). Facilitators can efficiently bridge the gap between theory and application by employing this teaching method, allowing ESL/EFL learners to comprehend grammar in a practical and meaningful way. Language and literature are two entities of the English language, both in general terms and in pedagogy, but they can be effectively brought together employing visuality. The method can be viewed as an exclusive way of teaching grammar in context through the strategic merger of the two. Therefore, this unique perspective could be brought to any ESL/EFL classroom to make the students understand visual literacy by explaining to them the grammatical components and how different images convey meanings sequentially and contribute to a complete and comprehensive narrative, thereby making the English language more approachable to learn with both the inputs of language and literature. This method also promotes engagement, nurtures linguistic creativity, and eventually provides learners with the language skills that they need to communicate or apply in real-life circumstances. Altogether, visual narratives can act as both a mirror and a window for teaching English grammar, especially to ESL/EFL students. It can therefore serve as a dynamic medium to teach various other grammatical rules and how they vary in different contexts.

Visual narratives, according to the teacher (here, myself), are consistent with both systemic functional linguistics (SFL) and transformational generative linguistics (TGL). As Halliday's (1961) SFL emphasizes the significance of meaning and function in language, teachers can use the functional features of visual narratives to contextualize grammatical principles, making them more accessible and meaningful to students. On the other, Chomsky (1957) emphasized the importance of TGL's approach in visual narratives, which ensures that the sequencing and organization of panels transmit a coherent story. By combining structural and functional components, teachers may provide a more thorough and interesting learning experience. This method not only adheres to linguistic theories, but it also improves students' knowledge and use of grammar and its rules in a real-life setting.

On the other, students (in Kathmandu), particularly those aged 16-18, reported that employing visual narratives considerably improves their learning experience and creates a positive attitude towards language learning. Engaging with sequential storytelling in 'Calvin and Hobbes' allowed them to comprehend difficult grammatical patterns with ease.

Therefore, visual narratives offer quite an engaging platform for learning grammar that includes various visual representations, context-based learning, multimodal learning experiences, exposure to cultural and linguistic diversity, and different opportunities for engagement, creativity and innovations. Visual narratives can graphically depict grammatical principles in action, giving real examples of how grammar works in sentences and dialogues, thereby making grammatical rules more accessible and clearer to students. In conclusion, the incorporation of comics into English grammar instruction successfully blends the structural precision of TGL with the functional relevance of SFL. This approach can benefit both teachers and students by making grammar training more effective,

entertaining, and relevant to real-world language scenarios.

If this method were implemented for ESL/EFL learners of various ages, then the effectiveness of this approach could be more thoroughly assessed. In the future, we hope to see this method used with other non-English speaking English learners, with more innovative and modern approaches, thereby increasing its impact and validating its benefits across varied ESL/EFL learner demographics.

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