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A Study of Sociolinguistic Appraisals in Shashi Tharoor's *Riot: A Novel*

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Abstract

This research article studies the sociolinguistic appraisals of Tharoor's *Riot: A Novel,* where the researchers do an in-depth analysis of the language used by Tharoor in this novel from a sociolinguistics perspective. This research paper examines sociolinguistic elements such as linguistic variation, code-switching, dialects, and other language features used by Tharoor's characters. The paper aims to examine how Tharoor's characters use sociolinguistic elements in their conversations to facilitate a better understanding of the linguistic features in Tharoor's *Riot: A Novel*. The novel explores the socio-political circumstances of post-colonial India; hence, alongside these sociolinguistic elements, the paper addresses the socio-political context of the 1990s in India. These sociolinguistic dimensions explore the complexities of how characters are bound with language, power, traditions, and social and administrative norms in Tharoor's *Riot: A Novel*. Arts and literature reflect the reality of society through characters and dialogues using various literary devices. The study uses sociolinguistic elements to examine how social customs and prejudices influence ideas and identity. The researcher attempts to find out the beautification of sociolinguistic aspects used by the author to increase reading interest in the novel, which assists other writers in using sociolinguistic characteristics to hold the reader's attention in literature. Though *Riot: A Novel* is a fictional novel based on a quasi-real incident, it invites linguistic attention due to regional characters and circumstances. This research uses the library research method to achieve the objectives of the study. Moreover, this paper is interlinked with the interdisciplinary approach of sociology, literature, linguistics, political aspects, and cultural studies.

Keywords: Sociolinguistics study, Dialect, Multilingualism, Code-mixing, Code-switching.

Introduction

The present research article studies the sociolinguistics elements of Tharoor's *Riot: A Novel,* where the researchers do an in-depth analysis of the language used by Tharoor in this

novel. Shashi Tharoor's *Riot: A Novel* or *A Love Story* is a profound work based on the circumstances of post-colonial India, where communal acts of violence are a common phenomenon and their repercussions on the lives of individuals, communities, and the nation. The novel's setting emanates the reality of Indian society in the 1989s societal circumstances of the fictional town of Zalilgarh. Hence, the researcher attempts to explore sociolinguistic elements such as dialects, regional language and language variation, multilingualism, code-mixing and switching, society and language, and representation of character names. This paper attempts to study the sociolinguistic aspects of the novel, especially focusing on how language is used to construct social identities and reflect cultural conflicts. This paper's aim is to study how Tharoor's characters use sociolinguistic aspects in their conversation to facilitate a better understanding of the linguistic features in Tharoor's *Riot: A Novel*. The study uses sociolinguistic elements to examine how social customs and prejudices influence ideas and identity.

Methodology

The researchers employ a qualitative approach to research the present study. The present analysis uses a library research method, which reviews all existing related published articles to study sociolinguistic dimensions in Tharoor's *Riot: A Novel*. The researchers use Tharoor's *Riot: A Novel* as a primary source for this article, and other related articles as secondary sources, published on several websites, in journals, and in books. In addition, this paper is interlinked with the interdisciplinary approach of sociology, literature, linguistics, political aspects, and cultural studies.

Research Gap:

There are several research papers published on the selected novel; however, these research papers do not delve into the sociolinguistic appraisals of the selected novel. Most of the studies conducted and investigated the theme of the novel; therefore, there is a need to research sociolinguistic elements, aspects, and appraisals of the selected novel.

Language, Linguistics, Society, and Sociolinguistics study

Language

Language is a system of communication. David Crystal and Robert Henry Robins define language as "a system of conventional spoken, manual (signed), or written symbols by

means of which human beings, as members of a social group", (*britannica.com*). Henry Sweet, an English phonetician and language scholar, stated: "Language is the expression of ideas by means of speech-sounds combined into words. Words are combined into sentences, this combination answering to that of ideas into thoughts" (*britannica.com).* These definitions indicate languages used to convey meaning, whether in written, spoken, or symbolic forms, as well as the mixing of one language with others.

Language is one of the central elements of literature that conveys meaning. As defined, Language plays a crucial role in Tharoor's *Riot: A Novel.* The story of the novel is based on the factual incident of the Khargone riot; however, in this riot, no foreigner was killed. Tharoor uses a fictional village, themes, characters, and numerous literary devices to depict the story of the riot. Tharoor's characters use metaphor and symbolism in their conversations to convey their ideas and thoughts, such as the American idealist killed in an Indian communal riot, who becomes a victim of Indian socio-political circumstances. Tharoor uses political rhetoric language as how politicians use rhetoric language to inflame passions, manipulate public opinion, and perpetuate violence, such as "the Hindu whose blood doesn't boil has water in his veins" (*Riot: A Novel 128).*

Linguistics

Linguistics is a branch of the scientific study of language. It focuses on the systematic investigation of a particular language. It is not bound with only sound, grammar, and meaning but also circumscribes how languages are used and acquired by children and adults (*arts-sciences.buffalo.edu*). Tharoor's characters' dialogue may impact society either positively or negatively.

Society

The Cambridge Dictionary defines society as "a large group of people who live together in an organised way, making decisions about how to do things and sharing the work that needs to be done. All the people in a country, or in several similar countries, can be referred to as a society" (*dictionary.cambridge.org*). In the present research paper, several characters represent certain ideologies, and the researchers consider that these characters embody such-and-such ways of this belief system in the novel.

The novel describes the socio-political-cultural circumstances of the 1989s, in which most men wear safari suits, shirts are too cut, and pants have too much bottom (*Riot: A Novel* 18), and political and cultural dialogues. Tharoor glances at the Indian society problems in the novel, such as dowry, population explosion, illiteracy, health issues, and communal tensions.

Tharoor acknowledges that some of the episodes of the novel are based on a riot in Khargone, Madhya Pradesh; however, no foreigner was killed in this riot. In addition, Tharoor's gratitude to his friend Harsh Mander, IAS, who later published the untitled *Unheard Voices: Stories of Forgotten People*. Tharoor uses his basic facts regarding the management of the riots, whereas the personal relationships, character elements, and beliefs are fictional. The research of Professor Mohammed Sarwar on Ghazi Miyan is based on Tharoor's friend, Professor Shahid Amin of Delhi University. The efforts and struggles of Coca-Cola, which is represented through the character Rudyard Hart in India, are undertaken by Kisan Mehta (*Riot*: *A Novel* 271). Tharoor's acknowledgement suggests to consider that some of the characters of the novel and incidents are factual and amalgamated with fictional illustrations.

Sociolinguistics study

Sociolinguistics is a word that amalgamates two terms: 'socio' or 'pertaining to society' and 'linguistics' or 'pertaining to language' (Nisa 2). Sociolinguistics is a branch of linguistics that deals with the study of language in relation to society, in particular, the relationship between language and society (Nisa 2). Language and society are interconnected and interrelated with each other, and one cannot exist without the other. Sociolinguistics glances at the nature of language and society. Sociolinguistics consists of both theoretical and empirical.

The present research study attempts to investigate the social aspects of language in *Riot: A Novel*. Along with this, the research paper studies how Tharoor uses variables of languages according to the characters, different social groups, communities, and settings. In the present research paper context, sociolinguistics can help readers to understand how authors and their characters apply language appropriately in different social, cultural, political, and conversational contexts.

Representation of Character Names and Perspectives

Tharoor uses typical Indian names to display Indianness among Indian characters and uses typical foreign names to show foreign characteristics among foreign characters such as Indian names are; Lakshman, the District Collector and Magistrate, Gurinder Singh, the Superintendent of Police, Ram Charan Gupta, the Hindu religious fundamentalist, Mohammed Sarwar, Professor and historian, and foreign characters are; Priscilla Hart, a doctoral fellow, Rudyard, her father, Katharine, her mother, and Randy Diggs, a journalist. These names indicate their Indianness and foreignness in names and behaviour.

Tharoor's novel *Riot: A Novel* can be considered an epistolary novel, as the term 'epistolary novel' refers to works of fiction written in the form of letters or other documents. The novel starts with the various headlines of the newspaper, *The New York Journal.* Tharoor uses various perspectives to write and narrate the story, such as Priscilla Hart's perspective through her scrapbook, Katherine's perspective through her diary, Randy's perspective through his notebook, and the letters from Priscilla to Cindy Valeriani. Tharoor uses the interview transcript and the translated words to gather information from the Indian characters.

Dialect, Loan Words, Regional Language, and Language Variation in the *Riot: A Novel*

Dialect is a sub-categorisation of a language; it differs linguistically in its grammar, lexis, and phonology (Neil Bowen 1). A Merriam-Webster English Dictionary defines dialect as "a regional variety of language distinguished by features of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation from other regional varieties and constituting together with them a single language" (*merriam-webster.com*). Hence, dialects are a kind of regional variety of language that several authors use to lend authenticity to literary and non-literary works.

Tharoor has mentioned different characters such as a collector, a doctoral researcher, a professor, a CEO of a private firm, a superintendent of police, a journalist, and a health worker, and they use language according to their knowledge, ability and understanding. Tharoor uses language variations according to characters' positions, roles, and regional backgrounds.

Kotli (46): Tharoor often uses the word ' Kotli ' in the novel. This word is mostly used in rural India to refer to isolated places. Tharoor's character Lakshan provides information about Kotli;

> "No one quite knows where the term comes from. A 'kot' is a stronghold, a castle; a 'kothi' is a mansion. This wonderful old heap we are about to visit is something in between. People have been calling it the Kotli for generations. It's been ruin for somewhat longer than anything else that's standing in Zalilgarh area…(46) "What happened was that the Kotli sat here undisturbed for generations, like so many ruins elsewhere in India," Lakshman explained. "The land from here to the river belonged to the old Nawab and then to the government, so nobody could build here, and nobody wanted to, either. It's quite an isolated place, far away from the town, near nothing. Plus there was a rumor that it was haunted (47)."
>
> "Haunted?"
>
> "The story goes that the owner of the Kotli was murdered in his bed by his wife and her lover. But he never let them enjoy the fruits of their villainy. He haunted the house, wailing and shrieking and gnashing his teeth, until he had driven them away in terror. No one would live there after that, so it just fell into disuse (47)".

As the name suggests, Kotli, a haunted place, is where most illegal activity has taken place. In this place, where the copulation between Lakshman, a married man, and Priscilla, an unmarried girl, is witnessed, the Muslim community uses the place to keep weapons, and Priscilla is a victim of the communal violence in this place.

Sila Poojan and Janmabhoomi (52): Tharoor uses Ram Sila Poojan frequently in the novel. The novel provides a 1980s-90s social background of India. The Hindutva leaders launch a Ram Sila Poojan program on September 15, 1989 (52). It is considered that Lord Ram, the hero of the epic Ramayana, was born in Ayodhya during the Treta-Yuga, a period in the Hindu calendar. It is believed that it is the Ram Janmbhoomi, the birthplace of Ram, but the Muslim invader, Babar, who came from Central Asia, knocked it down and built a big mosque. The Ram Sila Poojan launches on the mentioned date to begin construction of the Ram Temple at the same site.

Dafali (66): Professor Mohammed Sarwar explains about Dafali singers to Lakshman that several Hindu singers sing the popularised ballad of Gazi Miyan. Dafali is a Muslim community found all over India, and the Government of India categorised them in the Other

Backwards Class (*ncbc.nic.in*). Dafali is also an instrument used to provide rhythm while singing songs. Tharoor's character, Professor Mohammed Sarwar, uses this word as an instrument to indicate Dafali singers, who use it while singing various songs and ballads.

Basti (67): Tharoor's several characters use the 'Basti' word in their conversation, as it is an English word. Basti is a noun that refers to slum areas where poor people live in overcrowded areas in India (*collinsdictionary.com*). The word 'Basti' comes from the Urdu word settlement (*dictionary.com*). Professor Mohammed Sarwar uses this word to elaborate on how a Muslim begins their day. Lakshaman and Gurinder Singh used this word before and after the outbreaks of communal violence between Hindus and Muslims.

Appa (104): Tharoor's characters, Lakshman, his wife, Geetha, and his daughter, Rekha, are the typical South Indian characters. They use the 'appa' word to call father. Geetha uses the 'appa' word to call her father, and Rekha uses the 'appa' word to call her father, Lakshman. In the Indian context, 'appa' is used to show respect for older, honourable men, especially those recognised. Tharoor himself is from Kerala, a state in South India, and he is familiar with this word.

Karma (260): Tharoor often uses the word 'karma' in the novel**.** The word 'karma' is used primarily in Indian spirituality, such as Hinduism, Ajivika, Jainism, and Buddhism. These spiritual philosophies believe that an individual's karma is determined by their actions, thoughts, and words. In the belief institutions, it is considered that death is not the end of life; there will be new lives after death (Johannes Bronkhorst 3). In simple words, karma means 'action' or 'deed' (*HAF* 1). In Hindu philosophy, every action (karma) has a reaction. If an individual's action, especially righteousness, is positive or selfless, it may receive rewards or appreciation, and if an individual's action is negative, such as stealing or lying, it may receive punishment (*HAF* 1). This indicates that karma is an individual's actions, either positive or negative, and that an individual may experience its effects immediately or later in their present life, or possibly in their second life.

Tharoor's Indian characters, as well as foreign characters, talk about karma. Katherine Hart, Priscilla's mother, discusses that Priscilla's death may be destiny or fate or karma, "maybe it was God's will, and all one can do is to accept it. She died where she would have wanted to have lived" (*Riot: A Novel* 260). Along with these words, Tharoor uses other words as well, such as Mohallas (128), Puja (264), Hindustan (56), Sardarji (74), Sahib (155), and

Tandav (227). These typical Hindi words may increase once interest in reading the novel and to understand nuances of Indian social circumstances.

Multilingualism, Code Mixing, and Code-Switching

India is a multilingual society, where code-switching is a common phenomenon among a plethora of Indian languages as well as all over the world. According to Li, "anyone who can communicate in more than one language, be it active (through speaking and writing) or passive (through listening and reading" (4). According to the European Commission, "the ability of societies, institutions, groups and individuals to engage, on a regular basis, with more than one language in their day-to-day lives" (6). These definitions of multilingualism indicate that if the author or speaker uses more than one language during a conversation, it becomes part of the sociolinguistic aspects. Tharoor's several characters use this sociolinguistic aspect in the novel.

Code-switching refers to the practice of alternating between two or more languages or dialects within a conversation. Nunan and Carter define code-switching as "a phenomenon of switching from one language to another language in the same discourse" (275). Poplack mentions three types of code-switching, namely, extrasentential, intersentential, and intrasentential (584). Code-switching is a conversational process that involves the insertion of words, phrases, and sentences from one language into another, in this context, Hindi into English.

According to Braj Kachru, "the term 'code-mixing' refers to the use of one or more languages consistent transfer of linguistic units from one language into another, and by such a language Mixture developing a new restricted -- or not so restricted -- code of linguistic interaction" (4).

Tharoor often uses such kinds of language in *Riot: A Novel.* Tharoor uses Hindi in the conversations of various Indian characters to display their original characteristics, which adds authenticity to the narrative as well as highlights social identities and power relations.

Tharoor's character Ram Charan Gupta explains to Mr Randy Diggs that the Muslims divided India into two parts: Pakistan and India. Pakistan, a Muslim-majority country, was created in the name of Islam and India, a Hindu-majority country, existed in the name of secularism. Ram Charan Gupta discusses that when India parted, Muslims were ten per cent;

however, by the time of writing the novel, they were fifteen per cent, and they made a slogan "Ladke liye Pakistan, haske lenge Hindustan: "We fought to take Pakistan, we will laugh as we take Hindustan" (*Riot: A Novel* 56).

Ram Charan Gupta explains regarding the law and order after attacking two Muslim men by two Hindu boys, Amit Kumar and Arup Singh, while standing and working in the procession of Ram Shila Poojan. When he asks about the perpetrators, Gurinder Singh, a superintendent of police, says we will find the perpetrators. In the rage, Gupta utters the words "perpetrators abscond kiye hai" (*Riot: A Novel* 60).

Tharoor's character Professor Mohammed Sarwar talks about the 1980s communal disturbances, and he claims "the Hindutva brigade is busy trying to invent a new past of the nation, fabricating historical wrongs they want to right, dredging up evidence of Muslim malfeasance and misappropriation of national glory. They are making us into a large-scale Pakistan; they are vindicating the two-nation theory" (*Riot: A Novel* 67). He quotes Mohammed Iqbal, who wrote, "Sare jahan se acha Hindustan Hamara" --- "Better than all the world is our India" who reviled his advocacy of Pakistan, but he thought a Muslim homeland within a confederal India (*Riot: A Novel* 67). He again reminds Mohammed Iqbal couplet "Tumhari tahzeeb khud apne khanjar se khud Khushi karegi/ Jo shukh-i- nazuk pe ashiyan hoga, napaidar hoga in English "Ours is a civilisation that will commit suicide out of its own complexity: he who builds a nest on frail branches is doomed to destruction" (*Riot: A Novel* 67).

Tharoor's character Gurinder Singh, the superintendent of police, explains to Randy Diggs that the slogan was made for Muslims which rage among them, such slogans are "Musalman ke do hi sthaan/ Pakistan ya Kabristan" … "There are only two places for a Muslim, Pakistan or cemetery" (*Riot: A Novel* 128), "Jo kahta hai Ali Ali/ Usaki ma ko choddo gali gali"… "He who calls out to Ali, fuck his mother in every alley" (*Riot: A Novel* 128), "Jis Hindu ka khoon na khaule/khoon nahi hai pani hai … "The Hindu whose blood doesn't boil has water in his veins"(*Riot: A Novel* 128), Jo Janmbhoomi ke kaam na aaye / wo bekar jawaani hai… "He who does not work for the Janmbhoomi is a useless youth" (*Riot: A Novel* 128). Tharoor uses such slogans to describe the real social circumstances of Indian society.

Sarwar explains to Lakshman that two people were killed in Sarwar's area's street. The police searched the accused in Muslim areas as an incident occurred in the Muslim area, but he objected to their searching method; they took the TV and radio, poked holes in the mattresses, smashed some furniture, and subsequently he remembers Iqbals quote "Na samjhogey to mit jaogey aye Hindustan walon/ Tumhari dastaan tak bhi na raheygi dastanon mein" … "If you don't understand, O you Indians, you will be destroyed. Your story will not remain in the world's treasury of stories" (*Riot: A Novel* 258).

Here, Tharoor uses multilingualism, code-mixing, and code-switching to increase the interest of the reader and to display the authenticity of the circumstances of Indian society. The above-mentioned words and sentences give an original feeling while reading the novel. The communal tension between Hindus and Muslims and their related dialogues in their respective languages, such as Hindi and Urdu, immerse readers in the context of communal rivalry.

Conclusions

The present research contributes to sociolinguistic appraisals in Shashi Tharoor's *Riot: A Novel*, where the researcher highlights language, linguistics, and society; sociolinguistic study; the representation of character names, dialect, loanwords, regional language, and language variation; and multilingualism, code-mixing, and code-switching. In this specific scenario, the researcher explores linguistic concerns closely related to language, linguistics, and society, in which code-switching and code-mixing are common phenomena. In addition, the present study comprehends the significance of sociolinguistics in the conversations in the novel to the implicit characters' characteristics and adequate features. Tharoor's *Riot: A Novel* depicts the 1989s typical Indian story with some realistic features such as social, cultural, and political circumstances, customs, values, and practices, which make the novel highly effective.

Ultimately, Tharoor's Riot: A Novel shows the religious detachments and communal tensions among two major religions and someone who is an outsider becomes victimised by this tension involving typical other Indian languages in the conversations.

Suggestions for Further Research:

The present research highlights the sociolinguistic aspects in Shashi Tharoor's *Riot: A Novel;* however, these highlights are limited, and one would like to research sociolinguistic appraisals in the selected novel, adding various contemporary elements of sociolinguistics to further research.

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