THE JOURNAL OF CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

The Journal of Cultural Perspectives

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CULTURAL
PERSPECTIVES

AZEEM EDUCATIONAL CONFERENCE

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Journal's Description

The Journal of Cultural Perspectives - TJCP is a flagship, biannual, peer-reviewed journal of Azeem Educational Conference - AEC **aec.org.pk**, which focuses on interdisciplinary, problem-oriented, contextual research of human culture. The editors welcome historical and empirical inquiries of indigenous knowledge, cultural processes grounded in normative attitudes to understand and improve society. The journal encourages critical research of comparative international practices to facilitate an exchange of knowledge and cultural meanings beyond traditional biases. Cultural Perspectives offers articles that investigate and analyze the impact of culture on different institutions of social order; articles that integrate approaches from the social sciences and humanities; articles on cultural sciences in the twenty-first century; review articles on published work, theoretical innovation, and methods; and special issues that examine urgent questions in the field.

From Time to time the Journal has brought out special issues on different themes. The landmark publications have been received well by both scholars and general readers. The contributors to the Journal of Cultural Perspective include some of the most eminent scholars and thinkers of South Asia. Its audience includes scholars, policy makers, social scientists, journalists, and general readers. Intellectually rigorous yet accessible and practical, the Journal of Cultural Perspective provides an influential outlet for original scholarship in the social sciences, culture, and humanities, as well as a lively forum for commentary from cultural perspectives. Research Articles published in this journal are mandatory including end notes and bibliographies of works cited and have undergone initial editorial screening, anonymous peer review and further editorial review. Readers are encouraged to comment on research articles and essays from recent previous issues, in no more than 500 words and If the comments are published, the author of the original article/essay will be given an opportunity to publish a response.

Aims & Scope

- Cultural Perspectives is committed to the reinterpretation of culture. It publishes original research. Innovative, critical papers are given preference that interrogate old patterns and cultural infrastructures and further new theories. The journal does not publish papers that ignore the broader relevance of their investigation for an international readership.

- The Journal of Cultural Perspective aims to promote and welcomes scholarly research on all branches of Cultural Studies in the widest sense as original contributions of researchers and believe in diversity, tolerance and fruitful scholarly discussions and research.

- The scope of the Journal is deliberately given as wide a berth as possible; various aspects of Cultural Thought and Civilization, Social and Natural Sciences, and Occidental Studies, Comparative Civilizations as well as contemporary issues that interface with culture in the current geopolitical environment are addressed. Specified fields of social Studies, Anthropology, Cultural Studies, Folklore, Linguistics, Literature, Musicology, Performance Studies, Visual Arts, and Sociology are explained.

- The journal of cultural perspectives (TJCP) welcomes faculty members from various universities nationally & internationally, as well as freelance researchers to publish their manuscripts and research works related to social studies, without any racial or religious discrimination.

- TJCP publishes manuscripts and articles after double blind peer review process, which is carried out by leading scholars; Cultural Studies in order to enhance academic research which has close linkages with the society.

Submissions Guideline

1. Please mention your Article Type of the following:

o   Original Research Article

o   Review Article

o   Case Study

o   Book Review

2. Word Count: All submissions should have a minimum word count of 3000 words.

3. Reference Style: Please adhere to the APA (American Psychological Association) reference style for citations and references.

4. Formatting Requirements: Manuscripts should be submitted in Microsoft Word format. Font: Times New Roman, 12-Font size. Double-spaced throughout.

5. Contact Information: Include the full name, affiliation, and contact details of the corresponding author. Provide a brief author biography. Use institutional email address.

6. Abstract: Include a structured abstract of 200 words summarizing the key aspects of the research (for original research articles).

7. Keywords: Include a list of 3-10 keywords that best represent the content of the article.

8. Figures and Tables: Ensure that all figures and tables are clear, labeled, and cited in the text.

9. Acknowledgments: If applicable, include any acknowledgments at the end of the manuscript.

10. Reviewers: Please provide the names, contact numbers, and organizational email IDs of two potential reviewers.

11. Ethical Considerations: Authors must affirm that the research complies with ethical standards and guidelines.

12. Plagiarism Check: Submissions will undergo a plagiarism check. Ensure that the work is original and properly cited.

13. Submission Process: Manuscripts should be submitted electronically through the online submission system.

14. Review Process: The review process will follow a double-blind peer-review system.

15. Acceptance Notification: Authors will be notified of the acceptance status, and feedback will be provided after the review process.

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17. Editorial Office Contact: Email: **tjcp@aec.org.pk**

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Descriptive Study of Chaqchan Mosque Khaplu, Gilgit Baltistan, Pakistan

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to properly describe and document the unique wooden architecture and decorative motifs of Chaqchan mosque Khaplu, the oldest mosque in the region. The architecture of the mosque exhibits the distinctive feature of cultural and religious contexts. The harmonic structure with intricately adorned themes reflects creativity and imagination. The art and architecture of the mosque is a synthesis of the amalgamation of various elements. The richly embellished wooden mosque demonstrates the rich cultural heritage. The built heritage of Gilgit Baltistan has been decorated with floral, geometric, calligraphy, arabesque and religious motifs curved and arranged in pattern. The types and flowers vary and provide a highly aesthetic sense. Beautification and harmonic arrangement in the construction of Islamic architecture have deep meaning, inspiring and influencing people's perception with symbolic language creating harmony amongst followers. In the Islamic architecture, the greatest extent of ornamentation and embellishment probably describe aesthetic value and engaged people with spiritual aesthetic which satisfy one of psychologically need: to be in a beautiful environment. This paper explores the various elements and sheds light on each component of the mosque.

Keywords: Wooden Mosque, Art and Architecture, Built Heritage, Verandah, Khatam-band, Swastika

Introduction

The word Masjid is an Arabic term portraying "place of prostration" and deemed extremely venerated place where religious obligations are fulfilled. Masjid is a place to comfort the soul with divine connection. Therefore, Muslims provide embellishment and beautification of their places of worship. Beauty is considered to be a divine quality and is articulated as such in Islamic art and architecture. Architecture refers to "design and construction" process (khan, 2016). The mosque has a central position in Islam and Islamic community. The first congregational mosque was erected by the Holy prophet adjacent to his house in Madina-Al-Munawara (Gulzar and Majid, 2014). Like other religious buildings, mosque is also lavishly adorned both internally and externally. However, figurative art is prohibited, so usually the mosques are lavishly decorated with floral art. Slowly and gradually, there evolved three important and different methodologies for representation of artistic views, calligraphy, arabesque and geometry (Khan, 2016). Islamic art and architecture represent the great influence of Islamic civilization having its own methodologies and it differs with other civilization. Aesthetical elements as a form of expression, find a dominant place in Islamic building.

In Baltistan, Islam was brought via Kashmir and Central Asia by Islamic preachers. One of these prominent preachers was Mir Syed Ali Hamdani generally known as Shah-Hamdan. He was the pioneering figure to introduce Islam in this mountainous region. Before the arrival of Shah Hamdan, the entire population was Buddhist and strongly followed of the Dhama (Yousuf, 2009). However, it was supplanted by Islam and the indigenous people embraced Islam at the hand of the saint. Wherever, he went to preach Islam, he built mosque and introduced a new style of architecture. Thus, the amalgamation of various architectural designs chequered the vernacular Tibetan architecture and revolutionized the construction traditions. When Islamization was started in this remote region, the ancient traditions were also affected and created new forms and functions (Hasrat, 2007). All cultures were molded according to the teachings of Islam; so that the true spirit of Islamic tradition reflect in there functioning. The designs and construction of the edifice are in the conformity to the principles and values of Islam. Soon after the Islamization, Shah Hamdan commenced constructing mosques in the region to practice religious rituals and more importantly to educate local people about this new religion (Raza, 1994). One of these mosques is located in the Khaplu Valley in District Ghanche, situated on the left banks of Shyuk River, in the laps of Karakoram and Himalaya surrounded by lofty and snow-clad mountains. The mosque is occupying a high flat ground and can be seen from far sight. The mosque deemed very sacred and great significance for its appealing and rich architectural perspective. According to the local narratives, the place standing the current edifice, was a Buddhist monastic complex. When the indigenous people embraced Islam, the preacher did not demolish the Buddhist complex, rather they leveled it and erected the mosque upon the rubbles (Raza, 1994). This mosque consists of double-storey building standing at the right site of Chaqchan road. Approaches are provided by steps in both sites north and south leading to the upper floor of the mosque. As we reached the first floor, a carved doorway was provided that led to the small hall for winter prayer. The main mosque is square in plan and is surrounded by verandahs. In the construction of the edifice, Kashmiri influence is vividly reflecting. One of the typical examples is the octagonal drum consisting of pyramidal spire on the top roof of the mosque which appeared Khanqah-e-Shah Hamdan Sri

Nagar Kashmir. There are several other Mosques in the region which were also associated with him including Braqchan Mosque, Amburak Mosque and their architectural designs are much similar with Chaqchan mosque. The first storey of Chaqchan mosque is said to have been commissioned under the supervision of Shah Hamdan (Dani, 1989). Locally available materials were used in the construction of the mosque that are well-suited with the local ecology and could withstand harsh environmental conditions such as enumerating rubble, dress stone, soil and timber. The windows and walls are decorated with different floral and geometrical motifs. Similar to Chaqchan Mosque, there is another Mosque in Kashmir with the same pattern. Chaqchan mosque is still in better state of preservation as the renovation works were carried out using the original materials and techniques. The mosque serves as the prime model for all designed wooden mosque in Baltistan. It serves as a congregational mosque and a retreat center for mystic, Sufi observing the Chila or Aitikaf -the annual forty-day retreat for Noorbakhshi Sufi order. It is also used to commemorate the sacrifices of Hazrat Imam Hussain (A.S) in the month of Muharram.

Etymology

Chaqchan or Shakhchan is the name of this historic mosque as well as the name of a village in which the mosque is situated. The mosque has its peculiar place, sacredness and identity in the whole region. The indigenous people of Khaplu swear in the name of the mosque. People of the area from past to even these days trust the sacred mosque for speedy justice and decision of their disputes. Both sides go to the mosque to hold the chain hinging at the main entrance of interior hall of the mosque and then swear in order to settle their disputes. The local people are of the view that the mosque gives justification of the decisions either right or wrong, therefore it was named as Shakchan Mosque meaning a "well- balanced justice giver mosque" (Raza, 1994). With the passage of time, the word Shakhchan converted into Chaqchan. Now most of the disputes are being settled in courts.

Local Narrative about the Mosque

Chaqchan mosque is the most impressive among the old mosques existing in the whole region. According to local traditions, this mosque was built on a site of Buddhist temple. The Buddhist monks and pilgrims used to reside at the place where the present mosque is standing. The Buddhist monk was very reputable for spirituality and acrobatic beats. When Syed Ali Hamdani arrived to preach Islam, Raja Muqeem Khan, the local ruler of Khaplu accepted Islam at the hand of Syed Ali Hamdani. As the monks were very famous for their acrobatic beats, they manifested to show miracles to him. Shah Hamdan was conditioned that they would embrace Islam only if the preacher shows some miracle to them. He accepted the condition. An iron-made horse was brought before him, and it was red-hot. Then, he was asked to ride on it. Before riding on it, he recited "Bismillah hir Rehmanir Rahem". (In the name of Allah, the compassionate and merciful) and rode on the horse and rounded the whole Khaplu valley thrice. As Shah Hamdan was successfully landed down, the local ruler along with the masses were highly impressed and accepted Islam at the hand of Shah Hamdan. The local people believe that bronze horse statue is said to be buried in the foundation of the mosque and upon which the foundation of the mosque was led down.

Literature Review

There are a few scholarships pertaining to the traditional art and architecture of Baltistan. Researchers tried to document the history of Chaqchan Mosque and architecture, producing worth-reading materials. Here the current researcher would review most relevant literature in the following:

Ahmad Hassan Dani (1989): In the second chapter, he broached the monuments of Baltistan. The region is famous for its serene beauty and tranquility astir for tourists, encapsulating rich architectural heritage. The earliest Muslim structural remains could go back to the early 14th century. Mir Syed Ali Hamdani, the pioneering preacher escorted by artist and craftsmen from Kashmir, which probably influenced the vernacular architecture. Saints and Preachers from central Asia and Kashmir came to Baltistan from time to time. They permanently settled and erected buildings for religious purposes and tombs which are scattered in the region. The author discussed very briefly religious and secular monuments of Baltistan. He also elaborated Persian inscriptions inscribed on the wall and windows of various structures. The author explored the art and architecture of the Northern Area. After reading this book the current researcher gained a theoretical and conceptual understanding regarding the art and architecture of Baltistan.

Muhammad Raza (1994) He discussed the arrival of Shahmadan in the mountainous region. In the third chapter, the author has broached the cultural and historical remains of Shahamdan. Baltistan was greatly influenced by the Islamization process brought by Central Asian preachers and were assumed immensely significant. These influences embedded in culture, architecture, rituals language. Many monuments associated with Shahamdan are peppering in Baltistan with distinctive features.   The author discussed some mosque that associated with Shahamdan. In this regard, he also mentioned a brief history of Chaqchan Mosque and shed light on its architecture.

Ghulam Hassan Hassanu (2018) In this book the writer discussed the ancient religions of Baltistan. Historians are of the view that aboriginal people of Baltistan practiced Bon religion before Buddhism. Later, Buddhism was introduced from Kashmir and Gandhara. Till the arrival of Islam, Buddhism was the dominant religion in the region, and which was supplanted by Islam. It is said the place of Chaqchan mosque was a Buddhist monastic complex and deemed venerated. However, when the indigenous people embraced Islam, it was converted to mosque. The author has discussed the history and local narrative along with the etymology of the mosque. He somehow described the art and architecture of the Mosque.

Max Kalmburd (2005) the seven chapter of the book deals with the traditional art and architecture of Baltistan, published by Agha Khan Trust for culture. They had contributed to reconstructing the vandalized Mosque, Astana (Tomb) and a fort in the region, combining cultural and economic goals to preserve and maintain operations, whilst bringing about economic development in the region. Furthermore, their efforts towards restoring mosques and rehabilitating settlements; upgrading water and sanitation systems have seen, traditional building techniques, crafts like carpentry and wood carving revived, as well as community-built projects using either old or new techniques recognized by UNESCO for their cultural heritage conservation.

Arif Muhammad (1988) he discussed around the wooden architecture of Baltistan. The region encapsulates a rich built heritage. These heritages are the result of amalgamation of various elements. Intricately decorated ornamentations are incised on ceiling, pillar capitals, cornice, door and windows. He listed numerous wooden mosque and tombs of various Sufi saints found in Baltistan.

Having different influence of various cultures, the Chaqchan Mosque is the most important Mosque in the region. The wooden Mosque is very unique in its construction and the art decoration it reflects. Earlier studies by scholars never focused to thoroughly shed light on each component of the edifice. Thus, remained unexplored the architecture leaving a significant gap in the literature which may be filled through the current research. This study will reveal the symbolical representations appear in the construction of the mosque. In the whole region, Chaqchan mosque is deemed the pioneering mosque and inspiration for constructing new building particularly religious. Therefore, to have a better understanding about the art and architecture of this mosque is extremely significant. The current research will contribute to study further Islamic architecture in the region as the various symbolical representation and designs repeated in the subsequently constructed mosque in the region. Additionally, it will also ease to understand the conceptual framework of Islamic architecture that evolved in the region.

Research Methodology

This research would be conducted primarily based on descriptive research method and field survey. The researcher categorized each component of the mosque and thoroughly described each component of the mosque's architecture. It is based on primary and secondary data. For the primary data collection, the researcher visited the Mosque and deeply observed and reflected sufficiently on the various elements and its art depiction. Furthermore, the researcher took photos and complete measurements of the mosque and noted in the dairy and subsequently analyzed following the descriptive approaches. Along with the primary data, the researcher consulted the archival data including books, journals and articles pertaining to wooden architecture found in the region. Additionally, the plane map was prepared with the help of software application.

Layout of the Mosque

The mosque has only one main gateway towards the eastern site. There are three steps leading to the main gateway. The mosque has richly decorated façade. There is only one entrance to the prayer chamber. At the center of the mosque roof, there is one minaret. The parapet wall concealed with timber and stone with various motifs. The ablution tank is situated in the northwestern side of the mosque. In the western side of the mosque, there is a meeting hall, and the roof of the hall is also used for prayer purpose during Friday congregation and Eid prayers.
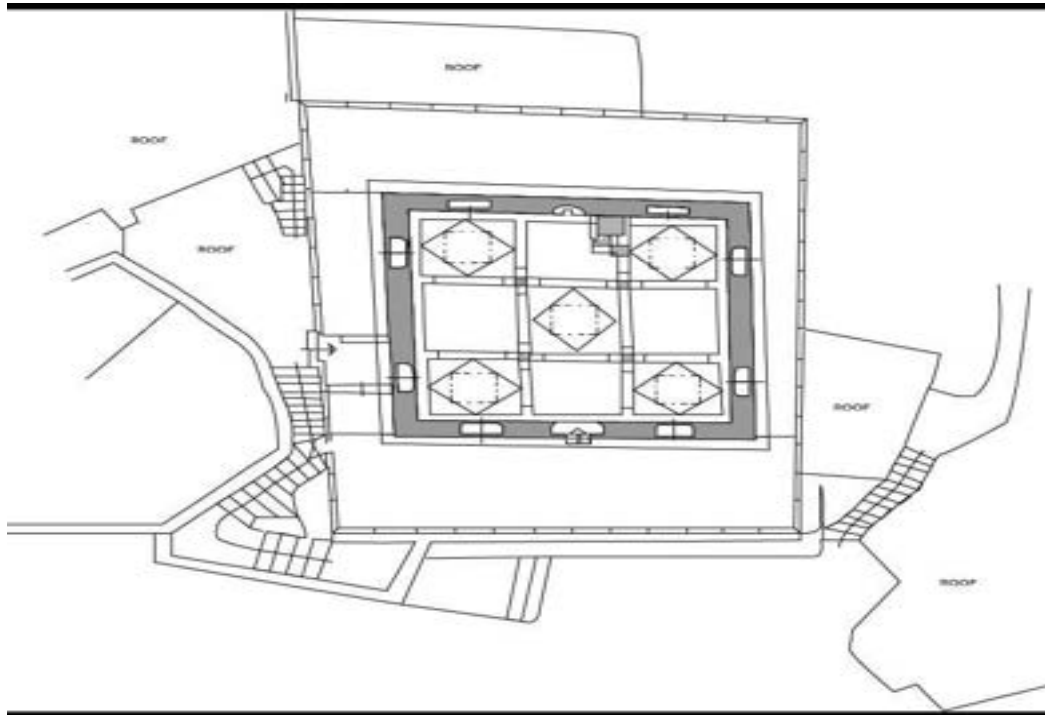
Plane map of Chaqchan Mosque prepared by the researcher

Construction Material and Technique

In Baltistan, the wooden architecture emerged with prominence since the arrival of Islam in this region. In the construction of religious buildings, three components are commonly used i.e, stone, wood and soil. These components are used in simple ways and most appropriate to cope with climatic conditions in this area. Timbers are cut into pieces and interlocked like a box. In Baltistan most structural elements are obtained from the wood of walnut, white tree and mulberry. Walnut is mostly used in the construction of religious buildings and tombs. This timber is considered very appropriate for the Cator beams and cribbage columns as well as pillars. The construction technique in Baltistan is the most sophisticated and unique feature. This is the reflection of their engineering skill without modern technology and knowledge. The style locally called "Thather", is strongly conditioned by the cator and cribbage building technique; Stone and wooden walls are strengthened with vertical layers of parallel beams which lead at some distance above each other. To support the corner, there are vertical cages or boxes composed of pairs of pieces of timber. The timber is generally prepared into a five to ten centimeters square section and kept as long as possible. The horizontal beams are placed inside and outside of the wall. The timbers are tried together through the wall thickness with cross pieces at one to three meters interval. The combination of cator and cribbage is the most sophisticated earthquake resistant construction technique. The space between the beams is filled with mud and stone and the surface was plastered and painting. Thus, the wall became heavy and sturdy. This type of method is also applied in the construction of fort and tomb all over Baltistan. The advantages of constructing with horizontal timbers are modified; this technique makes it easy to build straight side walls and dispense with over designed foundation.

It creates a strong corner joint due to long timber providing bending resistance to out of plane wall moment. (See figure no 1)

Stage of Construction

The present structure of the mosque was completed gradually. The foundation stone was led down by Syed Ali Hamdani himself and the first floor was constructed under his supervision (Raza, 1994). According to the author of Tarikh Jammu, the second floor was constructed by Mir Syed Muhammad Noorbaksh. However, it has proved that Syed Muhammad Noorbakhshia never visited Baltistan. After one and a half century later, another Sufi saint and successor and vicegerent of Shahamdan, named Mir Shams Din Muhammad Iraqi arrived in Baltistan for missionary purpose. Thus, he started to complete the second story of the mosque circa 911 Century CE. Approximately 90 years back, the northern verandah was erected which did not exist before. It was constructed right from the foundation up to the roof in such a way that it really seems to be its original part (Raza, 1994). Nobody can detect this addition without a caution, curious, critical and close look into it. Circa 90 years back, the western verandah was constructed as an extension of the mosque. Construction and preservation works of Chaqchan mosque is reported to have persistently remained continued. According to an unpublished manuscript of Mulve Muhammad Ibrahim, large scale renovation works was carried out in 1923 CE and the northern wall and the roof of the mosque were plastered with a unique, local-made strong mortar so that the wall and the roof could be protected from rain and snow. During 1926, once again renovation work was initiated. At this time well-embroidered decorative planks (Khatam band) were fixed in the ceiling externally. A series of systematic repair works was initiated about 1984-85 and waste scale renovation works were accomplished (Hassnu, 2018). Prior to this work, only the western verandah was in arched shape whereas the remaining verandahs of other sides were simple. At this time, the verandahs on all sides were made in arched shape. The windows of the central hall were repaired and pulpit (member) was also replaced made of walnut timbers. During this time latticework (Jalli wood/mesh work) was also fixed into the eastern verandah (Hassnu, 2018).

Art Depiction

Decoration and the concept of ornaments have always been used by the generation reflecting their implicit and explicit connotation of culture, tradition and religion. These designs and decorations have specific patterns depending on the reginal context. Cultural norms and values are represented through these decorative motifs, giving a glimpse into ideas and practices through centuries. Decoration and embellishment are based their creativity on invoking interior beliefs via abstract shapes. The art of Chaqchan mosque is a result of the amalgamation of various arts. The Islamization process in Baltistan was started by Irani and Kashmiri preachers in the mid15[th] and 16th century CE. The missionaries came here accompanied by hundreds of highly skilled craftsmen and artist. Thus, the indigenous art and architecture were influenced by the foreign elements. The range of motifs includes a variety of stylized floral ornaments and abundant of geometric forms. The floral pattern and motif become clear from the study of cardboard stencil which clearly shows the influence the Kashmiri art. Within the design of the chaqchan mosque, geometric pattern plays a dominant role in comparison to other ornaments. On the large surfaces of the wall and ceiling we find composition of interesting octagons and

circles, cross in deep undercutting, tiny starts, configuration consisting of square and triangle. As Baltistan remained a part of Tibet for a long time. Therefore, the Tibetan influence is also depicting in the art of the mosque. One typical example is the visible of Swastika in the ceiling of the mosque.

Façade of the Mosque

The facade of the mosque invokes the typical vernacular architectures and richly decorated with frieze, arches, floral and louts' flowers. The façade is decorated with green and white color. This Architectural style of the façade is applied in the façade of Jumma mosque situated in Braqchan Valley in the west of Chaqchan mosque. The façade is decorated with frieze, floral motif and geometrical pattern. The chamber hall is surrounded by verandah on the four sides. It has only one main entrance leading to the prayer chamber with carving and bearing an inscription. In the middle of the wall of first floor, there exist four windows facing to east are richly decorated. The wall of white color of the lower part invokes the Buddhist temple which was filled by rubber not destroyed and upon the present mosque is standing. The height of the mosque from the ground level up to spire is 26.21 m. Height from the ground level to the sermon- chair is 1.82 m and the height from the ground level to top of the first floor is measuring 10.97 m. Height from ground level to the second floor is 12.49 m. To reach the upper parts of the mosque, approach is provided by ladders comprising 35 steps in the south from the main gate of the mosque. Approach is provided by three steps of stair to reach the main entrance from the ground level. These steps of stairs are made up of stone slabs. (See figure 2)

Main Entrance of the Mosque

There is only one gate leading to the mosque. It is installed on the eastern side of the mosque and the fortification of the gate is constructed with cut stone. On the top of the main gate, there is a round arch. The frame of the gate is made of wood and consists of two leaves. There are four panels on both leaves of the door. Three hinges are installed on both sides to support the door and allow it to swing. At the top of the door, there is inscribed "Kalmah–e-Tayyeba". The name of the mosque is also written. The name of Mir Syed Muhammad Noorbakhsh, the founder of the Noorbakhshia Sufi order is also inscribed. Below this, written the union name of the mosque, Anjuman Muhmmadia Noorbakshia whose responsibilities are to take care of the mosque and monitor financial matters. (See figure no 3)

Stone Pillar

Not far from the main gate of the mosque, there is a long stone slab supporting the wooden beams of the first floor. The length of the stone slab is 2.74 m and 0.91 m width. This stone slab was brought here by the young and strong men of Khaplu on their backs from away place and was installed here as a supporting pillar of the mosque. (See figure no 4)

Verandah of the Mosque

The prayer chamber is surrounded by verandah on all the four sides. The verandah of the mosque is rectangular in shape. The eastern verandah is measuring 13.71 m 2.43 m long and 2.43 m wide. There are 10 arched wooden pillars on the verandah. The northern verandah is

measuring 13.71 m long and 1.52 m wide and has 13 arched pillars which support the roof. The western verandah is measuring 13.71 m long and 1.52 m wide and has 10 pillars. The southern verandah is 13.71 m long and 1.52 m wide and has 13 arched pillars in it. The height of the four-side verandah is measuring 3.35 m. The ceiling of the verandah is decorated with geometrical and floral motifs. There are depictions of swastika on the ceiling. Swastika (Yung Drong in local language) is the local design – the symbol of fire or sun. It was considered the sacred symbol of Bon religion (Yousuf, 2009). Swastika was known from the Indus valley civilization, and it is widespread in this region from rock carving antiquity to the contemporary folk art. (See figure no 5)

Inscriptions

On the door of the first floor of the mosque inscribes the following verses of the holy book-Qur'an:

<div dir="rtl">

وَإِذْ يَرْفَعُ إِبْرَاهِيمُ الْقَوَاعِدَ مِنَ الْبَيْتِ وَإِسْمَاعِيلُ رَبَّنَا تَقَبَّلْ مِنَّا إِنَّكَ أنتَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

</div>

On the southern window of the same floor, bearing the following verses of the holy Qur'an:

<div dir="rtl">

إِنَّمَا وَلِيُّكُمُ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَهُمْ رَاكِعُونَ

</div>

On the eastern window of the same floor, the following verse of the holy Quran is written:

<div dir="rtl">

لا أله الا الله محمد رسول الله على ولى الله

</div>

On the decorative interior planks fixed in the ceiling of the eastern verandah, the renovation date is inscribed by Mulve Muhammad Ibrahim as follows: (Composed by Muhammad Ibrahim and Inscribed by Muhammad Bashir)

<div dir="rtl">

نصر من الله_____786_____ و فتح قريب

پی تکوین جهان حکم چو شد «کن فیکون»

همچنان ساخته شد به دست محمد علی ولد عبد الرحیم(؟) ختم بان شد

چونکه او هست سرور اقران فن در قرن قریب(؟)

چنانچه پدرش نیز سردار فن بود در شهر

هر گاه رفت ز دنیا در جنت عبد الرحیم(؟)

شد قائم مقام پدر پسرش محمد علی

جزا هما الله فی الحسن جزا

نعیما مکرما حسن المآب

هزار شکر که شکفته شد گل چوب به بوستان آنگون

ای ابراهیم! گفت هاتف: «کانهن الیاقوت و المرجان»

هر گل ختم بان، گل باغ جنان بر رخ رنگین گل خنده زنان

</div>

اگر جنت الفردوست [فردوس] بروی زمین است

همین است و همین است و همین است

{ماشاء الله لا حول و لا قوة الا بالله العلى العظیم}

ای ابراهیم! گفت هاتف: مصرع تاریخ سال

ساخته شد از طرز نو، نورانی ختم بان چون لب حور

1355 هجری مطابق 1994 بکرمی

احقر العباد بقلم محمد ابراهیم غفر الله ذنوبه

احقر الناس محمد بشیر غفر الله ذنوبه

کاتب الحروف(؟)

(See figure no 6)

Minaret of the Mosque

The top of the mosque carries the octagonal drum which consists of a slim pyramidal spire having four small crosswise projecting beams presenting a feature of two roofs like brackets. From the projecting beams, wooden vase-like objects are attached. This structure rise about ten feet from the roof. This finial ensemble is the qubbah, consisting of a small metal umbrella having metal chain hanging below the umbrella at the crosswise projecting beams. The crosswise beams consist of small bells in the middle. At the top of the minaret, holds a small metal finial three- pronged Panjtan. The holding component of the Alam is consists of bronze bowls. The fortified of the spire is cage construction of two subsequent layers of outer walls being stripped of defective stone and mud infill to be restored in the traditional manner. These are the strong indication of Kashmiri influence (Hasrat, 2007). (See figure no 7)

Main Entrance of the Mosque

The prayer chamber has only one carved doorway leading from the eastern verandah into the prayer cell. It is flanked by two windows north and south with grilled design towards the eastern verandah of the mosque. The main entrance of the mosque has two leaves within the frame. From the middle of the frame of the door, there are two metal chains hanging down the two leaves of the doorway. The door frame has highly carved with series of design on the jambs and lintels. The frame has five series of carving including scroll work, lotus flowers, half rectangle and crosses. In the center of the two leaves, there are two starts. At the top of the door is the floral vase above which a line of inscription which illustrate the name of the mosque. (See figure no 8)

Interior Portion of the Mosque

Prayer Chamber

The prayer chamber of the mosque is square in plane illustrating a very unique feature. The length of the hall measuring 8.83 m east to west and 8.83 m width north to south. The height of the hall is measuring 6.40 m. There are four pillars standing in the hall. There is only one doorway leading to the prayer hall and that are equal distances and at both two doors hanging two chains. Two windows facing to east, two are in the north and south. The prayer hall is decorated with various paintings. There is depiction of various motifs on the wall and ceiling of the mosque. The richly carved wood work is usually found on the pillar capitals, cornices, and doors etc. The inner side of the walls of the prayer chamber is varied by horizontal rows of carving. Below the beams, the walls are bearing ornamental frieze. (See figure no 9)

Interior wall of the Chamber

The interior wall of the mosque is made of wood and soil. The thickness of wall of the chamber hall is measuring 1.31 m and it extends up to the exterior and interior end with a height of 2.43 m and touches the roof thereby its width extends to 2.43 m. Long wooden posts, stone slabs and mortars had been used to create these walls. In the construction of the wall, wooden nails had been used to keep them firmly joined. (See figure no 10)

Mihrab of the Mosque

Muslims are required to face towards Kaaba shrine in Makkah during their Salah. Mihrab is a holiest place in any mosque. It is in the middle of the hall and constructed in the western wall. The mihrab is highly decorated with geometrical motif and painting. The mihrab is decorated with three-pointed arch. It is closely projecting with small timbers. It is refined ornamental carving on the surface of the frame. (See figure no 11)

Pillars

Inside the prayer chamber, there are four well carved tapering pillars depicting angular and concave flutes. Height of These pillars measuring 5.66 m and thickness of pillars 0.64 m. These pillars are standing at the four corners of the square solid room below. These pillars are on the square base and have cross bracket capitals above the abacus. The bases have cusped arched panels in high relief. These pillars are supporting the upper portion of the roof meant for central ventilation.

Windows

There are six windows with grilled design. Two windows facing towards the eastern verandah of the mosque flanked by the main entrance of the prayer hall. Two are in the northern and two are facing towards the southern verandah of the mosque. (See figure no 12)

Ceiling of the Mosque

The central roof rests on four interior columns and forty-six columns of the verandah in addition to the walls from all sides. The ceiling of the roof is subdivided into smaller square by pillars and each square is covered by wooden planks arranged in triangles and square. The

ceiling of the prayer chamber is divided into nine segments five of them lantern roof, are decorated with exquisite Khatam band. Each segment decorated with varied designs. The five segments of the ceiling are painted and the outside of the roof is covered with metal sheet. Several superimposed, richly carved corbelled corner from the transition to the ceiling. At the middle segment of the first row of the ceiling hang two chandeliers. The outside roof is built in conical shape that is a peculiar model of Kashmiri construction. Such a roof is highly accommodative for run off of rain water and snow water after melting. The khanqah e Shah Hamdan Srinagar was constructed by Mir Syed Muhammad Hamdani, the son of Syed Ali Hamdani (Raza, 1994). It seems that the framework and superstructures of the aforementioned mosque and that of the Chaqchan mosque are similar and especially their roofs are strikingly similar. (See figure no 13)

Conclusion

The chaqchan mosque, located in the shadow of lofty mountains, is very impressive and locally famous as miracle mosque. This mosque has special important from various perspective. The place of present mosque remained sacred for both Bon religion and Buddhism as well. The present mosque was built on a Buddhist monastic complex. When the indigenous people embraced Islam about 1381/82 Century CE at the hand of Mir Syed Ali Hamdani, a Sufi saint from Hamdan in Iran. He came here accompanied by several craftsmen and artists from Kashmir, Iran and Central Asia and they introduced a new style of architecture with the amalgamation of Tibetan style. Thus, the construction of the mosque is the result of the combination of all these architectures. The art and architecture of the mosque presenting very impressive depiction. Inscription of Arabic and Persians are inscribed on planks, door and windows. There are various kinds of designs of floral, geometric patterns and embroidery-models have been noticed in the mosque. In addition, twelve well decorated Khatam-band of various designs have been noticed. Being the first-ever mosque in the region, it has been an inspiring for the construction of new religious building. Although the mosque is seven hundreds old, but the condition of the mosque is good and with the passage of time, preservation and conservation works were initiated and repaired whenever get any cause due to natural or weather condition. Due to its sacredness and historical importance, every year domestic and foreign tourists preferred to visit the mosque. Form religious tourism perspective, mosque has potential to Due to its historical importance, the government of Pakistan has listed the Chaqchan mosque as a Pakistan Heritage site. The mosque is now used after extensive conservation and preservation works.
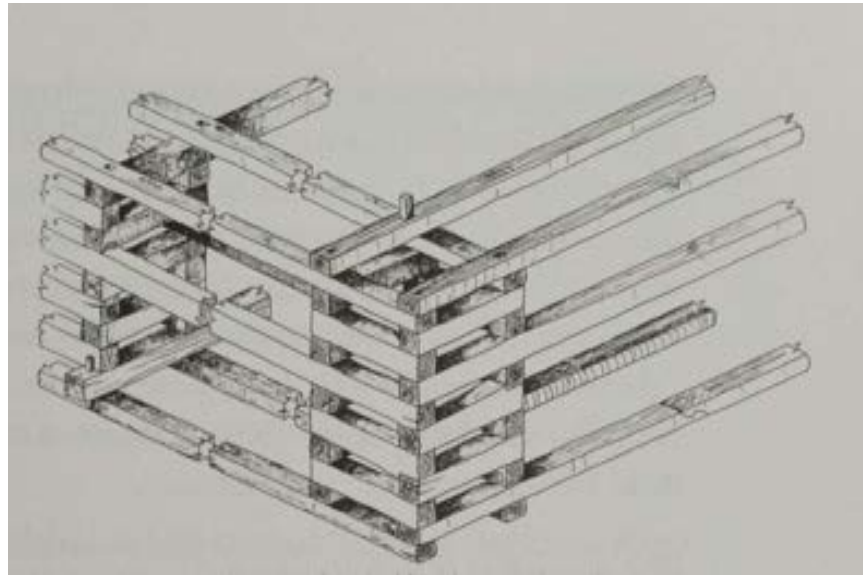
Figure 2. Schematic drawing of the cribbage cage locally called Thather in the corner as well as the horizontal cators.

Figure 2: façade of Chaqchan Mosque

Figure 3: Main gate with inscriptions.

Figure 4: A tall Stone pillar standing near the main gate.

Figure 5: Intricately embellished Veranda of the mosque.

Figure 6-a: Inscriptions on the ceiling of veranda

Figure 6-b: Inscriptions on the door and charity box of the cell winter prayer.

Figure 7: entrance of the prayer chamber.

Figure 8: Inerier hall of Chaqchan mosque standing wooden pillars supporting the ceiling.

Figure 9: interier wall with floral and geomatric designs.

Figure 10: Mihrab of Chaqchan mosque with decoration.

Figure 11: window with two leaves within the richly decorated frame.

Figure 12-a: Khatam band in the ceiling of Chaqchan mosque.

Figure 12-b: Khatam band

Figure 12-c: Ceiling of the mosque richly decorated.

Figure 12-d: Ceiling richly decorated with floral and geometric designs.

Figure 12-e: Ceiling decorated with Swastika, floral and geometric motifs.

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Traditional Prostitution, a Stigma or Necessary Evil in Pakistan?

A Case Study of Shahi Mohallah in Lahore

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Abstract:

This article explores the historical evolution of prostitution in Pakistan, particularly focusing on the post-partition trends of traditional prostitution. Prostitution, one of the earliest professions, has long held a significant role in society, flourishing under social, religious, and political patronage. The study emphasizes the overlooked link between traditional prostitution and performing arts, noting that while prostitution is stigmatized today, it was once widely accepted in South Asia. The profession, especially the red-light areas, historically provided Pakistan with some of its finest artists and singers which contrasts with the current criminalization and state repression of traditional prostitution. Shahi Mohallah, Lahore's historical red-light district, serves as a central case study. The article highlights the marginalization of residents due to state crackdowns, which displaced sex workers to urban outskirts, leading to the rise of forced prostitution. The research seeks to demonstrate that forced prostitution was not a traditional part of Shahi Mohallah's sex work culture, which had long been intertwined with performing arts. Through historical analysis and exploratory research, the article aims to provide a broader understanding of the changing dynamics of traditional prostitution in post-colonial Pakistan, exploring how state policies have transformed the industry.

Key Words: Prostitution, Traditional Prostitution, Stigma, Shahi Mohallah in Lahore, History

of Sex Work in Indian-Subcontinent

Introduction

Prostitution, often referred to as the 'world's oldest profession,' is a global phenomenon that has existed in virtually every society throughout history. It involves the exchange of sexual services for money or goods and can be found in various forms across different cultures and socio-economic settings. Prostitution has deep historical roots in human civilization with references found in the religious scripture, historical records and texts (Nevile 1996). In ancient civilizations like Mesopotamia and Greek Civilization, the institution of prostitution was not only regulated by the state but also integrated into social life. Sex workers enjoyed well reputed social image and considered inevitable part of the elite public entertainment with facing no general contempt from conservative segments of societies in these civilizations.

In ancient times, there was even a concept of religious prostitution, where the individuals engaged in sexual acts, as a part of religious rituals. However, it was rare and no authentic historical source verifies it explicitly. The institution of prostitution in the South Asian region of the world has been a unique phenomenon from the very beginning. Prostitution was not always interpreted solely as a sexual activity and other art forms (such as dancing, poetry and singing) deeply integrated with it making it a novel case study for researchers. Historians have played a very crucial role in marginalization or normalization of this phenomenon. Conservative historians have kept this historical profession out of the moral orbit of the society and considered it inappropriate enough to do thorough research on. Only if they did write, they not only delegitimized but rather criminalized it. However, in contemporary times, the worldwide talk on prostitution is exceedingly polarized, with debates centered on issues like human rights and an open approach to gender equality which advocates for decriminalization of sex work, contend that recognizing it as authentic labor can upgrade the security and rights of sex laborers, lessening shame and misuse.

On the other hand, adversaries regularly see prostitution as inalienably exploitative and advocate for other arrangements aimed at rehabilitating the sex workers into other professions as an incentive for dropping their former so called 'diabolical' profession. But prostitution remains a complex and multifaceted issue with deep historical roots and significant contemporary implications. Addressing the challenges associated with prostitution requires a subtle understanding of its legal, economic, social, and health dimensions, along with a commitment to protecting the rights and well-being of those involved in the sex trade.

Research Methodology

The study is descriptive-analytical and is carried out by digging out the information on the topic from a variety of the books and journal articles as secondary sources. Thorough archival research has been conducted. The qualitative method applied to this research helps to develop an insightful understanding of the pre-existing ideas on this subject. By combining descriptive and analytical elements, the study not only describes the current state of knowledge but also critically examines and interprets the findings to draw meaningful conclusion.

Prostitution Trends in Pakistan

Culturally and historically, Pakistan is very much a part of South Asia. Once geographically a part of British India, after independence in 1947, retained essential features of social and cultural life of India (Gangoli, 2006). Traditional prostitution was quite acceptable and even patronized by successive sovereigns of the Indian soil. Since right after its independence, the process of Islamization of the newly established state started as the demand for a separate was laid on the basis of the religious differences. The anticipated secular spirit of newly established state got sacrificed in the name of justifying projected prime cause for independence.

Prostitution in Pakistan has also bore the brunt of initial phases of Islamization. Prostitution has no legal status in Pakistan. No proper legislation mentioning sex trade in

Pakistan has been done so far. Since sex industry here has no legal status that is why it has been criminalized. However, it is important to understand some of the laws made in Pakistan during the first decade of its inception, dealing indirectly with sex trade in Pakistan. The Pakistan Penal Code was inherited from the British Penal Code of India which was introduced back in the 1860 by Lord Macaulay. It is the mixture of both Islamic and the British laws. Two of its articles (372 and 373) indirectly declare pimping and selling minors for the purpose of sex illegal. And till the 1979, the consensual sexual activity between the two adults was legal in Pakistan (Gangoli, 2006). So, the people associated with sex trade in Pakistan to some extent enjoyed the freedom of carrying out these activities.

Then, Zina ordinance under the canopy of Hadood Ordinance got introduced in 1979. It changed the face of society not only for the female sex workers but also women of all segments became victim of harsh and retrogressive version of Zia's Islamization. The boundary between the adultery and rape was blurred under Zina law. Police started arresting sex workers, particularly of red lights areas, by charging them under adultery crime. The same way many rape cases were presented as adultery cases in the court. Pregnancy of victim was taken as solid legal evidence to justify adultery while most of the pregnancies happened out of forced sex (Gangoli, 2006). Under such peculiarly suffocating circumstances, the sex industry in Pakistan is poorly documented and analyzed, owing to its taboo status given by the state which is further bolstered by fundamentalists. Now in contemporary times, many ordinances of Zia's era have been revoked by the state but still the sex industry is retaining its illegal status.

However, despite its illegal status, the sex market in Pakistan has been increasing. The prostitution profession is in its peak in the sub-continent. India and Pakistan are the most vulnerable states (Hayat, 2013). There are only a handful of identifiable traditional red light areas remaining in the Pakistani cities: most prostitutes began a process of moving out from traditional sites in the 1960s. Today sex workers are dispersed throughout the urban areas in

residential suburbs. They operate now in guest houses and hotels and it is very hard to identify either sex workers or sex work sites. Anecdotal evidence suggests that buying sex is common (Brown, 2001). It is more usual in the urban areas but rural men also buy sex at travelling fairs and when they visit the cities during holidays.

Holy Shrines, bus stands, and railway stations are the most popular spots for these poor rural men to find a pimp for booking a sex worker with less payment of a few hundred (Brown, 2001). More affluent men may have a series of 'second' or 'third' wives: these may be sex workers with whom they would have a semi-permanent sexual relationship in return for financial support. These men and women do not see their relationship in terms of client and sex worker, it is perceived as half marriage by them (Brown, 2001).

Most of the women who are involved in this profession are isolated socially. Especially who live in red light areas practice *purdah* because they do not want to expose their professional identity to every second person in the neighborhood, owing to the stigma attached to their profession (Brown, 2001). In the present times, due to increasing involvement of technology in daily life, many new forms of prostitution have emerged in Pakistani society as well. Although during the early decades, with less interference of technology, specific areas were notorious for such activities, but now since life has been digitized, so criminal status of sex trade in Pakistan is forcing the people of this profession to look for alternatives for their survival in the business. The 'streetwalkers', 'escort girls', or 'call girls', all these new forms are further weakening the broken traditional culture of sexual entertainment. These new forms of sex work are also more dangerous especially for young girls joining it out of economic compulsion. They inherently do not belong to this profession. Such girls are at a high risk of being trafficked into forced prostitution. Most of the young women from poor families are sold into this by their husbands.

Male and gay prostitution is also increasing in Pakistan; however gay prostitution is not a recent phenomenon in the country. Today many areas of large cities in the country have become virtual red-light districts for gay sex (Murray, Roscoe and Allyn, 1997). Gigolo culture is also present where elite aging women hire young boys for sex and pay them for it. But this is so far rare in South Asia and a more popular practice in the west. Because it is a patriarchal society, where even educated women hardly get to think about their sexual urges and consider it even immoral to have them. Patriarchy promotes sexual repression of women in Pakistan. That is why male sex workers majorly have male clientele. Women involved in the practice of prostitution in Pakistan can be divided into three broad categories: women who have been trafficked or lured into the profession, women who have been born into the profession and women who willingly reach a pimp to make extra money (Gangoli, 2006). Pakistan has become a unique case to study since all the present forms of prostitution exist in the same region where the profession enjoys no legal status. Mostly professionals of this community are harassed by local police, mafia groups and face isolation from the society.

Exurbs of metropolitan cities are dominated by escorts, call girls and new brothers established in rented houses in suburbs while city centers are mostly having one historical red light area established centuries ago, grown old, defunct, and neglected by the state now. These red-light areas of Pakistan are the remnants of the glorious past of traditional prostitution or courtesan culture that existed in Indian sub-continent. Since these areas are mostly targeted by the state that is why mushrooming of more dangerous form of prostitution is increasing at exponential rate in all the big cities of Pakistan. It is very important to dive into the history of origin of courtesan culture in India in order to be able to differentiate traditional form from the present day form of prostitution in Pakistan.

Back to the beginning of the Profession in the Indian Subcontinent: (Traditional Prostitution)

The culture of prostitution existed in the India long before the time when people started to record history. One finds the origins of dance and singing in the Hindu religious texts Ramayana and Mahabharata. Hinduism itself as a religion has a space for dancing and singing in its religious rituals. Islam came late to the Indian soil, so long before it, the local religious traditions influenced by Hinduism, Zoroastrianism and Buddhism were established. Although, prostitutes have existed in other parts of the world around the same time but the concept of this institution embedded in religion was exclusive in India. In order to understand the evolution of this profession in India, understanding of the millennia long evolution of sex worker, is inevitably important.

Millennia-Long Evolution of Ancient Indian Sex Worker

In the religious text of the Hinduism, the term *apsara* has been many times mentioned with reverence and admiration. *Apsaras* were defined as divine dancers in Hindus epic literatures that they were sent from heaven to entertain the Hindu gods in temples. Many important names of *apsaras* like Urvashi, Menaka, and Ambika are mentioned in the Hindus religious scripts. Scripts also described their physical attributes and beauty standards of India were influenced by their described physical appearance (Nevile, 1996). Urvashi *apsara* is considered as the first to introduce the concept of divine dance and singing for temple services. All these figures were part of the Hindu mythology and hardly had any contact with reality. Rabindranath Tagore appreciated the beauty of Urvashi in his poetry (Nevile, 1996). He has dedicated this beautiful short poem to her which is given below:

> In the assembly of gods when you dance in ecstasy,
>
> O swaying wave, Urvashi!

The sea surges in the same rhythmic dance;

In the crest of the corn the skirt of the earth shivers;

From the jewelry on your breast stars drop into the sky (Nevile, 1996).

Practically, for the first time, when women got involved into this business, it was through *devdasi* system. These were young virgin girls given by families to temple service as some religious sacrifice. Their purpose was to serve the temple gods and priests. They were beautiful and well trained dancers and singers. In most of the circumstances, they were married to the temple. So far, they did not perform any sexual service in the name of religion. They served gods and goddesses through entertainment at different festivals.

Hindu Temple Architecture: a Depiction of *Devdasi* System (Arise, 2024)

Devdasis were revered by people and held in high regard. Temples were patronized by local kings that is why these girls enjoyed very comfortable lives. Somnath and Jagonnath temples alone accommodated around a thousand *devdasis.* The secular counter-part of these were the *nartikas.* They had no direct association with temple or any religious institute. They were also popularly known as *rajdasi* (raj servant). They not only involved in entertainment of nobles of the day but also in establishing sexual relations with them for money and other goods. There were then *ganikas*, these women were like present day escort girls. They used to be quite famous in the town. Any man escorted by them was considered as a person of great wealth. Although they were not revered as much as *devdasis,* but they enjoyed pretty good reputation and privileges in the society (Nevile, 1996)

The Muslim invasion of India marked the beginning of a new phase of prostitution culture in India. Although dance and music are forbidden in Islam, but Muslim rulers continued to patronize these dancers. Amir Khusrau's writings are important in this regard since he was not hesitant to appreciate the beauty and talent of these Indian dancers. But one drastic change took place, that is, temples seized to be the center of dance activities. Now, these dancers and

singers found their new residence in royal palaces. Many *devdasis* also started practicing the court dance for incentives and privileges.

During Mughal times, Akbar was the great patron of arts. He regarded Indian art and culture in high place. He bestowed the title of *kanchini* upon them which means the gilded one (Nevile, 1996). He also brought Persian dancers to India. With decline of power in Delhi, the whole focus shifted to Lucknow nawabs, particularly the last nawab of Awadh, Wajid Ali Shah generously patronized the courtesans and they started to be called *tawaif*. Ranjit Singh continued the practice of patronizing courtesans in Shahi Mohallah once established by the Mughals. Many nawabs, rajas, and late Mughals also married courtesans which further ascended them to the ladder of social prestige (Nevile, 1996).

Hindus played very important role in accommodating the dancers into the religious orbit of India and Muslim ruler's patronage helped them raise their social and economic position in the society. However, with increasing solidification of the East India Company rule in India, local traditional trends of courtesan system also witnessed a drift into new direction. Englishmen started to regulate the sex work in India for the first time. In this way, the institutionalization of this profession began with the dawn of colonial rule in India.

Many courtesans could not find any patronage from landlords and nobleman of Punjab. So, they started to move to other parts of India in the search of employment. The wealth of Englishmen attracted these courtesans and many of them then settled in the regimental towns of East India Company. Crimean war changed the circumstances for the sex workers in India. Many soldiers who participated in war contracted venereal diseases (García and Meerkerk, 2017). This made authority back in Britain concerned about the health of their soldiers. British Parliament ultimately passed Contagious Diseases Act of 1864 (An attempt to regulate prostitution). This act was implemented in 1869 (Garcia and Meerkerk, 2017). According to

this act, Indian sex workers were subjected to mandatory registration and medical examination. The Contagious Diseases Act marked the designation of Indian sex workers as the colonial subjects of British rule (Chatterjee, 1992). However, this also marked the beginning of the criminalization of this profession.

Those sex workers who failed to register themselves with the British officials or did not appear for regular medical check-ups, were issued arrest warrants and subjected to legal penalties (Garcia and Meerkerk, 2017). In this way, their job got confined to only providing sex services to the English *sahibs*. They were hardly interested in the *mujra* performances and expected them to meet their carnal instincts. At the same time, the modern type of prostitution started to show its early signs. As long as the sex worker continued to provide services to the soldiers, she retained her job, but as she contracted any sexually transmitted disease and was declared unfit by medical board, they disposed her off her job.

This was not the feature of traditional system. In that system as soon as the courtesan got retired, she took up the managerial role in traditional brothels. It is basically the British legacy of treating the prostitutes as sex workers and never as *kalakaars* (artists). Unfortunately, after partition both of the new states of India and Pakistan retained British impression of the prostitution considering it as a criminal activity. Both of the states have taken actions to curb the growing prostitution activities in their respective countries. The case of Pakistan's dealing with sex industry is quite peculiar. This issue along with case study of an important red light area in Pakistan shall be covered in succeeding pages for comprehensive understanding of this sensitive issue.

Dilapidating Condition of Traditional Prostitution in Pakistan

The condition of red-light areas in Pakistan is complex and reflects a range of socio-economic, legal, and cultural issues. These areas, often located in major cities, are characterized by

significant challenges, including exploitation, health risks, and social stigma. Mostly red light areas are a hub of practicing traditional forms of prostitution, but with the passage of time, traditional performances of singing and dancing are losing their significance and are replaced by the brothels in the city suburbs. In Pakistan, state easily confuses human trafficking with the sex industry. While human trafficking is more associated with modern form in which there is no space for artistic skills which are mandatory for traditional dancer to acquire (Habib, 2016). But state continue to target red light areas, particularly of Lahore, which was once a supplier of country's best artists, musicians and singers while letting the other more heinous forms of prostitution to operate unchecked.

Case Study of Famous Red Light Area of Lahore:

(Shahi Mohallah)

Tibbi mein chal ke Jalwa-i-Parwar Digar dekh

Are ye dekhne kí cheez hai ise bar bar dekh

(Come to Tibbi to watch the splendours of the Almighty.

It's the worthiest of sights, view it over and over again) (Sidhwa, 2005).

The red light area of Lahore known by many names as Shahi Mohallah, Hira Mandi, Tibbi Mohallah, has a long history of its existence. It is located in the walled city of Lahore. Once center of courtesans activities, now to almost defunct red light bazaar, is a place of great historical and cultural significance (Sidhwa, 2005). Present day infrastructure of the area is in no way match to its splendor in the past.

Condition of Shahi Mohallah 2024 (Captured by Author).

Few buildings are maintained. They are a testimony to the past glory but they do not retain their status as *kothas* but rather as fancy restaurants (Jalil, 2024). There are some actual *kothas* as well but they are inhabited by poor sex workers who could not get clients from posh areas. The rest of the buildings have turned into small shoe factories, and shops. There are houses in poor condition which can be rented on easy amount since not many renters come to area owing to its notoriety as a red light district. Only labor class rent rooms in the area because they cannot afford living in the other neighborhoods of Lahore. The original district was a collage of 14 bazaars, with Shahi Mohallah and Heera Mandi being the specific names of only two of them, but these names became so popular that the whole area was referred to in this way. Poetically, it is also called the *Bazaar e Husn*, the market of beauty. The other twelve bazaars of the area, are Kucha Shabaz Khan, Main Bazaar, Hyderi Street, Fort Road, Newan Chetram Road, Ucha Chetram Road, Koocha Sabz Peer, Bazaar Sheikhupurian, Bazaar Thana Tibbi, Gadi Mohalla and Tibbi Gali. Musical performances combined with prostitution are practiced in only six of these bazaars at present (Saeed, 2001).

The rest are like any normal bazaar of Lahore. But still people avoid visiting other bazaars of this area after evening. Because they fear that they might be suspected of looking for sex worker or pimping there (Saeed, 2001). Females cannot visit without any male escort because it can be risky for them. Customers might mistake them as prostitutes. Mostly two important communities reside in this area, *kanjars* (dancers) and *mirasis* (musicians). Both are dependent upon each other for their professional survival. *Kanjars* send their minor daughters to the *baithaks* of *mirasis* for their professional training in dance and singing (Gangoli). *Mirasi* community does not let its females to pursue their career in prostitution or even arts. Intermarriage is not traditionally allowed between the two communities. If this happens then it is the situation of embarrassment for both families involved.

In Shahi Molalla, there are categories of sex workers. On top of the pyramid are the ones who are inherent dancers, followed by those who entered business but not born into it but they live in the area. Third category is in the worst condition (Rahat, 2022). These are the part time sex workers, who do not live in area, just come for few hours, rent a room, entertain clients and then leave. These are looked down upon by the other two groups. They are derogatorily called *ghastis*. Tibbi gali is popular spot to find them. That is why tibbi gali is usually raided by police. Besides them, transgender sex workers also reside in the area (Qureshi, 2024).

Brief History of the Shahi Mohallah

History of the Shahi Mohallah dates back to the Mughal times, as discussion on the existence of institution of prostitution prevailed long before the advent of Muslim rule. When Akbar came into power, during sixteenth century, he shifted his capital to Lahore. Area for courtesans was established in the vicinity of the royal fort which was named as Shahi Mohallah (Butt, Latif and Qazi, 2021). Since the courtesans residing in the Mohallah were the source of entertainment for both the royal family and guest (Butt, Latif and Qazi, 2021). Mughal

princesses were sent to their *Kothas* for training in manners and fine etiquettes. The area back then enjoyed full state patronage and good reputation.

During the Ranjit Singh era, Prime Minister Hira Singh Dogra decided to open grain market in the same neighbourhood considering it lucrative spot, located in the city center, for commercial venture. As a result of this development, the business of *kothas* thrived because new financially strong commercial class also came to area and became regular rich clients of courtesans. Drastic change in perception of courtesans came with coming of colonial rule in India. Colonial masters in their dealing of courtesans were different from their former patrons of the area.

British people came with their own Victorian moral standards. And they gradually imposed those conservative principles upon locals as well. Social image of dancers also started to get affected adversely. By the late 1940s, British people were seeing them as solely sex workers disregarding all the other artistic talents they acquired over the centuries (Levine, 2004). Post-partition circumstances proved to be more fatal for the area. Those *kothas* which used to be run by retired *naika,* provided support system to the young dancers were no longer existent and have been replaced by *kothi khana* (new brothels in suburbs), these are mostly run by *dalal a*nd young girls are trafficked into forced prostitution against their will. They are completely disconnected from their families, unlike traditional prostitution, where family plays the major role in professional upbringing of a young girl into this business.

Diametrically Opposite Portrayal of Mohallah in Films and Paintings

The portrayal of Shahi Mohallah in films is based upon the idea of glamourizing and romanticizing the lives of Lahore *tawaifs*. Many commercially hit movies have been produced with sole purpose of poetically romanticize the portrayal of *tawaif*'s love life or tragic lovesick longing for a protagonist Nawab to come and rescue her from this sinful life. This kind of

courtesans' life representation takes viewers away from the ground realities of the place which sex workers of today are facing in Lahore. Hardly, any film or documentary has ever diverted its audience's attention towards the strong affiliation of courtesans with the shrine culture of Lahore rather climax is mostly focused around the *Nath uterwai* ceremony, further sensationalizing their lives. The political contributions of courtesans are normally left as flipped pages in the books of women history of South Asia.

Then *tawaif* term is mostly associated with Muslim women. Many influential Hindu and Sikh courtesans are conveniently omitted in the commercial film productions (Kapuria, 2024). While the portrayal of the today's dancers, better called *kanjaris* in the paintings by the local artists gives the complete opposite image of their life. Iqbal Hussein, a fine yet labelled as a controversial artist from red light district of Lahore, produced a number of paintings with sex workers of Shahi Mohallah as his main subject of interest.

Sex Workers of Shahi Mohallah: Paintings by Iqbal Hussain (Hussain, 2024).

He depicts the poor condition of their livelihood in present times where one notices that there is no relic of those showy glittery expensive dresses, which is normally the main focus of attention in the period films. It is very pertinent for people associated with artistic professions to present ground realities of sex workers facing while residing in the area. Otherwise, people will continue to have preconceived romantic ideals about their lives and real issues about prostitution would remain unaddressed.

Key Issues faced by the Community (Shahi Mohallah)

The community is in dire need of social rescue because they face problems of peculiar nature on daily basis that people from other neighborhoods of Lahore rarely experience. Local residents of the area are constant target of harassment by police. Tibbi police station is notorious for such activities. Police officers compete with each other for getting posted there. Because there are high chances of extorting bribes from residents on basis of forged cases, owing to the fact that certain acts of Zina Ordinances are still in practice (Brown, 2007). Bribery and extortion culture are further fanned by it. This culture has been mentioned in detail in book *Taboo* by Fouzia Saeed.

Second most important but ignored issue that sex workers of the area are facing is health hazards. Many sex workers are suffering from STDs (sexually transmitted diseases) (Bokhari, Nizamani, Jackson, Rehan, Rahman, Muzaffar, and Thaver, 2007). Since they are not aware of STDs, they hardly have any idea about using contraceptives. None of the women NGOs (non-governmental organizations) are actively working in the area, promoting sex education or making efforts to protect them from diseases. Many sex workers are AIDs or HIV patients. But they prefer not to go to hospitals, owing to the stigma attached to their profession. Societal torrential criticism is directly channeled into the direction of sex workers; clients are conveniently ignored. Although, it is the clientele which sustains this business, despite all the

efforts by the government to curb it. But only sex workers community of the area is persistent target of contempt and disgrace, male clients are easily exempted from criticism.

In the traditional system, dancers normally performed *mujra* at *kothas*. It was safe and free from any harassment because they were escorted and performed under the supervision of female manager, normally their mother. But in this modern system, where Kotha system is almost defunct, the system is shifted to new variety show or stage drama culture. Theatrical performances or variety shows are notoriously looked down upon, owing to prevalent conservative values attached to them. Despite the fact, Hira Mandi has provided Pakistani cinema with number of fine artists but as they turn actresses and singers. They are forced to hide their actual identities linked with Mohallah. Many elite *tawaifs* have found new homes in posh suburbs, looking for new patrons (Javed, 2024). The link between the song, dance and sex is loosening in Mohallah. Sex has taken precedence over the other artistic talents (Brown, 2007).

Recently, social debates are conducted around good women and bad women phenomenon and moral perception about them. Social commentators pathetically weigh the social image and moral character of sex worker (bad woman) against the good woman (other women not belonging to this profession) (Iram, Ilyas, Bilal, Parveen, and Chan, 2019). They assert that sex workers ought to be rehabilitated by accommodating them into other professions, without realizing that rehabilitees do not have other skills. Only jobs left for them are being domestic servants or so. They get paid less and at the same, hardly they escape sexual harassment because men continue to associate them with their past profession (Shah, 2004). So, practically speaking, there is no exit from prostitution in conservative societies like Pakistan. This issue has given rise to three categories of groups, along the line of legalization or criminalization of prostitution in Pakistan in general. Conservative segments argue in favor of criminalization of this profession on moral grounds while those who advocate for the

legalization argue that legalization can improve sex workers health, reduce crime, can help in generating tax revenue and give legal protection to prostitutes (Zakir Ullah, 2025). Some feminist and human rights activists put emphasis on the need to redefine sex work as a matter of bodily autonomy and human rights, while others emphasize the coercive and exploitative aspects, especially given the economic vulnerabilities (Ahmed, 2017).

Conclusion

The evolution of prostitution from ancient religious practices to contemporary socio-economic challenges reveals a complex interplay of cultural, legal, and economic factors. Understanding this multifaceted issue requires a deep dive into historical contexts, legal frameworks, and contemporary realities, ensuring the protection and well-being of those involved in the sex work. The historically unbreakable bond which exists between performing arts and traditional prostitution appears to be omitted from a wide range of academic research on prostitution. Researchers have been keenly focused on tracing the causes of escalating sex market in Pakistan, ignoring the fact that this profession has always existed in this region without outrageous reaction from society, so unlike today's persuasive perception of conveniently labelling prostitution a taboo. Prostitution in Pakistan has been criminalized and its more distorted form has emerged which is taking its roots in big cities like a forest fire. Legalization of traditional prostitution in defined areas by state is necessary to curb the malice of covert prostitution mushrooming in all the neighborhoods of Pakistan's big cities. The preservation of historically significant red-light areas like Shahi Mohallah is necessary in order to promote the well-being of its residents who are living here for centuries and continuously fighting the stigma attached to their neighborhood and profession. It is hoped that the trend of doing research on this topic is considered crucial to develop a firm strategy and a more comprehensive perspective on the phenomenon of prostitution.

Glossary

Apsara	Divine Dancer
Dalal	Pimp
Devdasi	God's maid
Ganika	Singer
Kanjar	Traditional dancer cum sex worker
Kotha	Traditional Brothel
Kothi khana	Brothel ran by a male pimp
Naika	Female manager of *Kotha*
Nartaki	Female entertainer
Rajdasi	Kingdom's maid
Tawaif	Courtesan

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Challenging the Past Narrative through Historical Distancing: A Comparative Study of Shahid Nadeem's Dara and Girish Karnad's The Dreams of Tipu Sultan

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Abstract

The study aims to deal with the playwrights' purpose behind adopting and adapting historical subject matter to revisit, define, redefine, deconstruct, challenge, and reconstruct the history, culture, and past narratives. Moreover, the study's objective is to examine playwrights' purpose to address contemporary cultural issues by dealing with historical stories. For instance, Shahid Nadeem's Dara and Karnad's The Dreams of Tipu Sultan challenge the prevalent narratives of the past. Nadeem deconstructs the past portrayal of Dara Shikoh as a villain in Pakistani history. He maintains his argument by unearthing Dara's poetic, philosophical, and humanistic nature, where he tries to attain inter-religious harmony. On the other hand, Karnad exposes the misrepresentation and mishandling of Tipu Sultan's historical image by English historians and novelists in history. The reason behind the distortion was the victorious and rebellious nature of Tipu, who defeated the East India Company in wars and kept on challenging their authority until his death. The playwright reconstructs the past by highlighting Tipu's political, social, and economic skills to make his country great under his sovereign state.

Introduction

The plays that deal with historical events are commonly called historical plays. It's not a new trend for playwrights to deal with historical subject matter. The contemplative point behind this adoption and adaptation is the reason for taking the material from the past. History fascinates writers because of its dynamic and glorious subject matter, which they use to challenge the past narrative and address contemporary issues. The playwrights challenge the leading worldview by "redefining, reconstructing, revisiting, and reshaping historical facts and events. The stances of the same pieces of literature have been presented dialectically, where they endeavor to transform the audience/reader by distancing their identification to meditating and pondering upon the issue" (Hameed & Kayani, 2022, p. 1027). Simultaneously, they revisit the past with a purpose. They strive to reconstruct the past narratives about the misrepresentations of historical personalities and events, the distortion of history, and biased portrayals. In this respect, the theater provides them a place to present their perspectives to challenge the past and contemporary mishandlings.

In this context, the current research explores the historical perspective of the selected Indo-Pak drama. For this purpose, I have taken two plays written by Indian and Pakistani playwrights. Shahid Nadeem, a Pakistani playwright, emerged in the 1980s. He became the resident playwright of Ajoka Theatre, which is "known for its resistance theatre, and stands out in addressing various societal issues" (Farooqi & Asif, 2023, p. 71). During this writing journey, he faced hard times during General Zia ul Haq's authoritarian rule because he challenged the dictatorial regime. He "deals with the themes of oppression, dominance, protest against misuse of power, resilience" (Hameed et al., 2025, p. 294), and produces resistance literature that investigates and raises a voice "against state atrocities, religious oppression and violence, political oppression, or social and economic injustice" (Khan & Khan, 2023, p. 83).

His play *The Third Knock* (Teesri Dastak) also exposes the mindset behind martial law, other than that of *Dara*.

This study includes Nadeem's play *Dara*, discussing the story of Shah Jahan's Crown Prince, Dara Shikoh (1615-1659). He was a Sufi poet and philosopher who believed in inter-religious harmony in the Indian subcontinent. Aurangzeb Alamgir, Dara's brother, got the throne after a war of succession. He finally succeeded and murdered Dara through the Sharia (Religious) Court by accusing him of being blasphemous (Saeed Ullah et al., 2021).

Moreover, Girish Karnad, an Indian playwright born in 1938, gained maturity in the two decades post-independence era of the 1950s and 1960s. He contributed to the development of Indian theater and drama "along with such contemporaries Dharamvir Bharati, Mohan Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sircar, Utpal Dutt, Habib Tanvir, G. P. Deshpande, and Mahesh Elkunchwar" (Karnad, 2005, p. viii). He started writing in his regional Kannada language, but his works are available in international languages, including English.

This study includes Karnad's *The Dream of Tipu Sultan*. In this play, Karnad portrays the bravery and downfall of Tipu Sultan (1751-1799), a tragic figure in Indian history who fought against the East India Company. The play exposes the distortion of history by English historians. Karnad not only deconstructs the past but also reconstructs the narrative through Tipu Sultan's dreams. He has taken four dreams out of 37 mentioned in Tipu's handwritten book *Khwab Nama* (Singh, 2018).

Historical Drama

From ancient times to the present, playwrights have attempted to interpret the present through the lens of the past (Shubhalaxmi, 2020). Historians and historical playwrights investigate the differences between their respective roles. Contrary to historical playwrights, historians are limited to representing history based on circumstantial evidence and witnesses,

whereas historical playwrights have broader latitude in their depictions of history. Historical playwrights have much creative leeway while "writing historical plays, but they should avoid distracting the audience from the subject" (Tyagi, 2014, p. 5959).

Producing or adapting plays based on historical material is not a new concept. A wide range of writers have used it throughout history. For instance, Wole Soyinka wrote *Death and the King's Horseman* from events in 1944 in Nigeria, and Shakespeare took Julius Caesar's story from the history of England to produce his play (Adeoye & Jays, 2010, p. 190). The same is true with *The Life of Galileo* by German dramatist Brecht, which tells the story of the 17th-century astronomer. Likewise, Shahid Nadeem's plays *Bulha* and *Dara* are also based on actual historical figures. He staged *Bulha*, a poet from the 18th century, related to the Sufi school of thought, and *Dara*, who belonged to the Mughal era of the 17th century. The same pattern was followed by the Indian playwright Girish Karnad, whose *Tughlaq* is based on the 14th-century Delhi dynasty, whereas, from the 18th century, he took the story in *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*.

The Purpose Statement

The current study aims to explore how the playwrights purposefully adopted and adapted the historical stories and events to revisit history, challenge the past narratives, and address the issues of contemporary society. Nadeem, in *Dara*, and Karnad, in *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, have deconstructed and reconstructed the historical narratives, respectively.

Research Questions

a. Why do the playwrights challenge the historical narratives by defining, redefining, revisiting, deconstructing, and reconstructing the past in the selected Indo-Pakistani historical plays?

b. What are the causes behind the adaptation of historical themes in the selected Indo-Pak historical plays?

Methodology

The current study is interdisciplinary. Interdisciplinary research deals with two or more disciplines. Researchers opt for this when one discipline fails to fulfill the requirements to answer the research issue or problem. They integrate different research tools from various fields (Rudall, 1998; Szostak, 2007). By discussing interdisciplinarity, Rudall argues, "Integration is a process by which ideas, data and information, methods, tools, concepts, and theories from two or more disciplines are synthesized, connected, or blended" (1998, pp. 3–4). For example, historical research discusses facts, figures, dates, and events, but it needs to include performance critique when dealing with the enactment of plays.

Although the current study mainly deals with literature, it also gets insights from history, philosophy, and cultural studies. It examines Shahid Nadeem's historical play *Dara* from Pakistan; Girish Karnad's *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* from India. These plays represent the most significant literature from the Indo-Pak region dealing with the cultural history. Additionally, the plays are rooted in actual historical figures and events.

The drama also incorporates a significant philosophical standpoint. Playwrights express their ideology and perspectives in their works. For example, Shahid Nadeem confronts the prevailing regimes and societal taboos. In his work, *Dara* deals with the historical accounts surrounding the Aurangzeb-Dara conflict. Girish Karnad challenges Western historians' biased depiction of Tipu Sultan in *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, redefining Tipu's heroic image.

The primary sources are the texts of the selected Indo-Pak plays, while the secondary sources are library books, journal articles, YouTube videos, newspaper articles, written and online interviews, review papers, theses, dissertations, online sources, e-papers, web pages, and print materials. These sources contributed significantly to the formation of this study in exploring the research issues.

Study's Theoretical Stance and Historical Distancing

This study examines the appearance of distance in the context of history, i.e., how it can be analyzed by referencing the past. To determine 'distancing,' it is essential that historical elements be considered. It also shows how capable it is of redefining the past and addressing the concerns of the present. Hameed and Kayani (2022) bring up some intriguing points: "Does the past have the potential to redefine the present, or can the present revisit the past? Moreover, how to realize the phenomena of taking and understanding the material from the past by ignoring the elements of construction and biasedness" (p. 1029). It is also endorsed by Philips (2013), who talks about the historical construction and the dynamics of historiographical elements. According to him, the "distance is both historically given and historiographically constructed in ways that move far beyond the standard association of distance with objectivity and the passage of time" (On Historical Distancing, p. xi). The doubts are observed by Hameed and Kayani (2022) on the very concept of "historical distancing because of the existing elements of the construction of history in history itself" (p. 1029). The strategy of this study is to direct the current argument to analyze past occurrences and narratives to challenge the given narratives.

The point of discussion moves forward with the assumption of whether the past and present are different or similar. They can be different if we look into history's overall developmental process. In this way, understanding the objects and events can be studied "in the constantly flowing stream of history" (Hollander et al., 2011, p. 4). However, a careful 'hindsight understanding' is required to become familiar with the past to know the unknown. This process of becoming familiar otherwise may lead historians astray if they rely on their wisdom about history's strange events and objects. Hollander et al. (2011) have discussed the division of 'distancing' into the 'minimizers' and the 'maximizers.' The 'minimizers' claim that the past and present are not similar but "separated by an (ontological) gap that ought to be

bridged (cognitively)." The problems arise for the 'minimizers' in this way to distinguish the object of study given in the present; however, they need to separate themselves from the very object of study, and they are still required to represent the object in respect of 'historical understanding' (p. 5).

On the contrary, the 'maximizers' have looked at the idea differently. They argue that the 'past and the present cannot be distinguished accurately because the "clear distinctions between past and present do not exist, if only because the present is so much a result of the past that it is hard to say where 'the past' stops and 'the present' begins" (p. 5). In this context, one must create distance from the subject of study for a better understanding of history. The distancing will "allow an idea, a text, or an image to appear as a historical object of study" (Hollander et al., 2011, p. 5).

Robin George Collingwood is another critic and historian from the 'maximizers' school of thought. He says, "All history is the history of thought" (1939, p. 110) and claims that one tries to think historically but cannot think due to one's thoughts. He calls it a re-enactment of someone else's thoughts. The idea of someone he reads from history is, he associates the present study, and what he thinks after reading that thought is a past thought. He says, "It is a past thought living in the present but encapsulated, not free. What is encapsulated thought? It is a thought which, though perfectly alive, removes the thought-form its original question-answer complex" (p. 113).

Similarly, Hollander et al. (2011) call Hans-Georg Gadamer affiliating with the maximizers. Gadamer (2004) presents the idea of the fusion of horizons. He assigns the present and past two separate horizons that need not be bridged. The past supports understanding the present by putting oneself on the horizon of history. He argues that the half-truth will be left if we try to understand or interpret the events through historical distancing. He adds, "If we fail

to transpose ourselves into the historical horizon from which the traditional text speaks, we will misunderstand the significance of what it has to say to us" (p. 302). In his view, temporal distance is no longer essential for understanding; instead, we must place ourselves in another's place. Hence, historians must not drag the past into the present but evolve themselves into the very historical situation. This fusion will transform history and present to gain 'historical objectivity' (Hollander et al., 2011; Phillips, 2013). In this regard, Gadamer says that "understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves" (2004, p. 305).

This study has also taken Gadamer's idea of the Fusion of horizons because it meets the requirements to explore the issue under discussion. The history and historical narrative can only be revisited, revised, and challenged when they are fused to draw comparisons and contrasts. This contrastive situation allows the playwrights to dig out the historical truth. In this way, they can revisit and challenge the historical events and past narratives.

Discussion and Analysis

Challenging the Narrative through Historical Distancing in Shahid Nadeem's *Dara*

Nadeem revisits history to erase some predetermined conceptions about Dara and his execution. Dara is considered a villainous character in the historical narrative of Pakistan (Altaf et al., 2020). One of the goals of adapting the story from the past is that Nadeem "has taken the story to change the people's reaction regarding the established narrative against Dara" (Hameed & Kayani, 2022, p. 1032). Furthermore, the incident of Dara's assassination at the hands of his younger brother, Aurangzeb Alamgir, has significant ramifications for Indo-Pakistani politics. It changed the political scenario from Dara's secular intention to Aurangzeb's religious implementation in the kingdom. Besides, people continue to discuss how Dara was executed by attributing heresy rather than on the battlefield.

One of Nadeem's purposes in revisiting history is to highlight the misuse of religious teachings and practices. The technicalities behind Dara's execution hint at the misuse of religion. Aurangzeb and his advisors use religion for their purposes. Mullah Qavi's suggestion is a clear example of this wrong practice. He says, "The reason for Dara's execution ought to be religious. He should be presented as an enemy of God, not the king" (Nadeem, 2010, p. 20).

By highlighting the wrong religious practices and the judicial murder of Dara, Nadeem also deconstructs the historical narrative. The argument can be built that it was the war of succession between the princes, which was converted and constructed into a religious conflict. Through and after Dara's trial, he was portrayed as a villain of Islam (Altaf et al., 2020). Nadeem presented a counter-narrative through the scholarly and philosophical traits of Dara. He presents Dara as a passionate researcher, philosopher, a harbinger of inter-religious harmony, and full of humanistic qualities. He brings Dara's educational and poetic portrayal to the forefront. Dara was a Sufi poet who wrote books including "*The Sirr-e-Akbari* (The Greatest Mystery), *Majma-ul-Bahrain* (The Mingling of the Two Oceans), *Safina-ul*-Auliya (Biographies of Sufi Saints), *Sakinat-ul*-Auliya (Biographies of Miyan Mir and Mullah Shah Badakhshi), and *Hasanat-ul-Arifin* contains the biographies of saints and his ideas about mysticism. He was also "a patron of fine arts, music, and dancing, a trait frowned upon by his sibling Aurangzeb" (Selfstudyhistory, 2015, p. 1; Sengupta, 2015, p. 572).

Additionally, Nadeem achieves his goal of presenting secularistic traits through the story of Dara. He over-glorifies Dara because he himself possesses a secularistic ideology. He uses Sufism and Dara's inter-religious mindset to portray his socio-political philosophy. The playwright claims, "I am a secular person, and my interest in Sufism is mainly cultural" (Nadeem, 2020, p. 3). In this context, it can be claimed that Nadeem travels from spirituality to Secularism in *Dara*. For this purpose, he uses theater as a useful medium to exercise this representation.

Nadeem craftily unearths the real issue of history. He projects a situation where one must think about past wrongdoings. It is a critical time for the people, especially those with the power and the right to exercise it. It is also a message for all who read or watch the play. The point of reference is that one may follow the mistakes made by the ancestors or deviate from reforming the present and future. Nadeem presents the dialogue of Aurangzeb as relevant to the claim where he hints toward his father's killing of his brothers: "Have you forgotten that my father did not hesitate to kill his brothers and nephews to capture the Delhi throne?" (Nadeem, 2010, p. 17). Nadeem reminds the reader about the two options Aurangzeb possesses: to give himself a false excuse to follow his father's action of killing his brothers, or to act to save humanistic values. Aurangzeb wants to kill Dara only to avoid the possible danger to his crown. Moreover, he makes excuses, "Sister, I can forgive; rather, I have forgiven my enemy Dara Shikoh. But Dara has been declared an apostate and a rebel to Islam and sentenced to death by the Sharia Court. I surely am Emperor of India, but I am a commoner and wield no powers as far as the judiciary is concerned. I dare not speak against their verdict. Sharia's decision is final and binding. Dara is destined to die" (Nadeem, 2010, p. 70). Nadeem challenges both the narratives of Dara's historical portrayal and Bhutto's execution in this play. Nadeem was the ardent lover of Bhutto, and he was in the same jail. Once, he jumped the jail walls to meet Bhutto (Peerzada, 2021). The detail indicates that Nadeem narrates Dara's story to revisit Bhutto's execution and to challenge the narrative of Pakistani history.

In conclusion, *Dara* by Nadeem further compels the reader to comprehend the past through a dialectical view of history. To synthesize the issue, he confronts the reader with both narratives, in favor of Dara and against him. Historical distance also provides the perspective to either lose oneself in the past or analyze history objectively through critical analysis. Nadeem not only constructs his onstage world but also revisits the historical conflict of the Mughal Empire and challenges the historical narratives of the Dara-Aurangzeb controversy. At

the play's end, he comments, "It seems he lost the battle though he had apparently won it"

(Nadeem, 2010, p. 81).

Challenging the Narrative through Historical Distancing in Girish Karnad's *The Dream of Tipu Sultan*

The play *The Dreams of Tipu* Sultan contains the historical portrait of the Sultan of

Mysore, Tipu Sultan. Although the play was commissioned, the playwright deconstructs and

reconstructs the biased portrayal of the Sultan based on the Orientalist historians. It further

connects the past with the present by unmasking the distortion of history on the part of those

historians. The playwright builds the story based on four dreams of Tipu's self-written book

Khawab-Nama, found just after he died in 1799. He shifts the scenes back and forth through

several dramatic techniques, including flashbacks, storytelling, historical narration, suspense,

and exploration of the past.

The dreams are about the expected friendship and trade with China, never reaching

army support from France, and Tipu's wish to defeat the British army with the reunion of Tipu,

Nizam, and Marathas. The story also delves into the chivalric perspective of the Sultan and his

love for his people when he surrenders his two children to the British for peace. Moreover, it

describes the prophetic vision of the Sultan, who foresaw the downfall of the Marathas at the

hands of the British army. Karnad has also portrayed the treacherous and disloyal attitude of

the Sultan's officials who joined the British before the war started.

The play talks about the past, encompassing historical narratives. Karnad's *The Dreams

of Tipu Sultan* contains the elements of reconstruction, re-creation, and an investigation of the

historical narration that enhances the audience's attention when it deals with the historical

conflicts between the historians of East and West. The existence of shifts between the narratives

allows the playwright to present the viewpoints to attain a dialectical understanding. Using

these components to depict the past enhances its appeal and popularity. Hassan et al. argue that

the "dramatists may adhere strictly to historical facts, they are often at liberty to add or deduct or even refract the facts to suit the purpose of their writing" (2019, p. 166).

The playwrights can create their own world, like Karnad's *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, where they can add their input for historical understanding. For example, Karnad has exposed the biased portrayal of Tipu in the hands of Western historians like Colonel William Kirkpatrick, who wrote letters to sketch out Tipu in England. Kate Teltscher argued that Kirkpatrick painted Tipu negatively. In his letters, he highlighted Tipu, "The cruel and relentless enemy; the intolerant bigot or furious fanatic; the oppressive and unjust ruler; the harsh and rigid master; the sanguinary tyrant; the perfidious negotiator; the frivolous and capricious innovator; the mean and minute economist; the padding trader; and the retail shop-keeper" (as cited in Chakraborty, 2013, p. 56). Following Kirkpatrick, Colonel Mark Wilks also criticized the Sultan of Mysore in his work *Historical Sketches of South India* (1817). Tipu was portrayed as a fierce tyrant by the colonial historians. They accused him as the oppressor "who tortured Indians and the British alike." The British used him as an excuse to rule over the sub-continent. They presented themselves as the savior of the Indian people. Tipu was also misrepresented in their novels, including "*The Surgeon's Daughter* by Sir Walter Scott, *Tippoo Sultaun: A Tale of the Mysore Wars* by Captain Meadow Taylor, and *The Tiger of Mysore* by G. A. Henty" (Chakraborty, 2013, p. 55).

Karnad's *The Dream of Tipu Sultan* does not distort the truthfulness of history but unearths the historical underpinnings to make the picture clear for the audience. He reconstructs the narrative painted by Western historians and novelists. Westerners misrepresented Tipu because Tipu and his father, Haider Ali, twice defeated the East India Company. The playwright also exposes the divide-and-rule policy through which the British won the war against Tipu. In the fourth dream, Tipu visualized the Marathas and the Nizams on his side against the East India Company. Fath, his son, asks Tipu, "Let's attack them, Father. Let's not

allow the English to get away this time" (Karnad, 2005, p. 63), but Tipu avoids the situation by saying, "Not today. Today we celebrate. We pray and thank God. With the Marathas and the Nizam on our side, we can chase the English into the sea any day" (Karnad, 2005, pp. 63–64). Contrasting to the dream, the English engaged the Marathas and the Nizams on their side rather than fighting with Tipu individually. In this way, Karnad exposed the British historians by revisiting the historical events and challenged the past narrative through historical distancing.

Karnad provides a counternarrative to Tipu's distorted portrayal. In this narrative, he figures out the reason behind Tipu's historical misrepresentation. In addition, he outlines the wicked nature of Tipu's courtiers who served and supported the British. The purpose behind this is to raise awareness among the masses. Karnad, through the character of Kirmani, further exposes the situation at the end of the play. Kirmani narrates, "Mir Sadiq's conduct of the war was so openly treacherous that his own troops lynched him. The Qilledar, Nadeem Khan, ordered a pay parade for his troops at the moment of the British assault, thus taking them away from the battlefront. Poormaiya slipped with alacrity into the post of Prime Minister under the new regime" (Karnad, 2005, p. 63).

The play provides both narratives of Eastern and Western historians. The character of Collin McKenzie represents a Western historian, and Hussain Ali Kirmani talks about the Eastern viewpoint. The inclusion of both narratives engages the readers with historical distancing that allows them to be objective. The historical objectivity clarifies the historical situation. After encountering the narratives, the readers can comprehend the past situations and depiction of biased historical presentation of Tipu.

Conclusion

The study explored the challenging nature of the selected plays through historical distancing that offers an objective approach. It examined playwrights' purpose in revisiting history and challenging past narratives. They purposefully took the stories based on historical personalities and events. The purpose was to provide a counter-narrative and to challenge that narrative through a dialectical approach. For example, Shahid Nadeem challenged the historical postures of Dara and Aurangzeb in his play *Dara*. Aurangzeb is considered a hero, and Dara is a villain in the historical narration in Pakistan. In particular, Punjab textbooks portrayed Dara as a negative character who rebelled against Islamic teachings. Nadeem brought Dara's poetic, philosophic, and humanistic image to the forefront. The playwright has done it purposefully because Dara possesses a secularistic mindset similar to the playwright's ideology. He took it as a cultural entity. On the other hand, Karnad is more experimental in his play *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*. In this play, he refigured Tipu Sultan as a true hero of the Sub-continent. He exposed the English historians and Novelists who distorted the image of Tipu. They painted the Sultan as a ruthless ruler and traitor. Karnad defined, redefined, rediscovered, deconstructed, and reconstructed, and challenged the historical narrative by revisiting the past. The English historians damaged Tipu's name because he defeated them in the wars. He was the last significant ruler of the Sub-continent who engaged with them for more than three decades.

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Aurat March: Pressure group, Interest group or a Social Movement?

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Abstract

Any struggle for rights or reforms aims to influence decision-makers and political elite to achieve desired objectives. It is driven by specific groups or broad coalitions forming influential interest groups, pressure groups or large-scale movements. Each one of them has unique characteristics impacting outcomes. Given the context, assessing the potential success of recent Pakistani women's struggle like the Aurat March demands careful analysis within a defined framework. While Pakistani women's activism is historically established, the Aurat March's artistic campaigns and wide appeal have notably advanced the fight for equal rights. However, its capacity to achieve lasting reforms in a religiously and patriarchally influenced society hinges on understanding its position within the spectrum of interest groups, pressure groups, and social movements. To classify the Aurat March and predict its future trajectory, this article uses content analysis approach to examine the Aurat March's history, evolution, and core objectives of over time, utilizing both primary data (interviews) and secondary data (newspaper articles, journal articles and books).

Keywords: Aurat March, Social Movements, Patriarchy, Pressure Group, Interest Group, International Women's Day, Gender Inequality

Introduction

The history of nonviolent movements and struggles in Pakistan reveals uneven progress in achieving social, political, and economic rights (Imran Sardar, 2022). Women's struggles for rights and equality, particularly, have historically faced greater obstacles and challenges than men's protesting on various issues. They have historically undertaken various initiatives to protect their rights especially during the military regime of 1980s, when they stood up against the discriminatory policies and laws especially the Hudood Ordinance (Hudood Ordinance of 1979, was sought to establish the 'Islamic' system of justice in Pakistan. It intended to bring Pakistani law into conformity with the Islamic injunctions. New criminal offenses of adultery and fornication were introduced, along with severe punishments such as whipping, amputation, and stoning to death. After significant controversy and criticism, parts of this law were extensively revised in 2006 through the Women's Protection Bill. For Asma, it was an attempt to mix the religion into law). The protests started against the Hudood Ordinances right after its implementation in 1979. Women considered the law extremely discriminatory against women and minorities and could be used as a tool of oppression and injustice for them (Mirza, 2011). Asma Jehangir, was among the ones who fought strongly against Hudood Ordinance which she claimed was a deliberate attempt to bring Sharia Law into the legal system, hence putting more restrictions on women already facing challenges of hardcore patriarchal society. (Ayesha Khan, 2021). Their struggles have resulted in some significant reforms over time, and sensitizing the decision makers that includes the judges (Khan, A., Malkani, 2019) but they still face the formidable challenge of dismantling the deeply entrenched patriarchal structures that have resulted in general acceptance by women of several forms of violence especially domestic against them (Ali, 2012). The situation for women of minorities is more precarious as they face additional challenge of religiously-driven polices and laws (Farhana, 2012).

The Aurat March, with its artistic campaigns and broad appeal, is uniquely impactful and sets a new precedent. However, whether this Aurat March would be able to bring significant reforms in society largely depends on understanding the nature of the March. Given that, this article explores whether the Aurat March can be classified as an interest group, a pressure group, or a movement since each classification has important implications for broader societal change that women at large are looking for.

To classify the Aurat March and predict its future trajectory, this article examines the March's history, evolution, and core objectives of the Aurat March over time, utilizing both primary data (interviews) and secondary data (articles). The article is organized into four sections: the first provides a brief introduction to interest and pressure groups; the second discusses the origins and initial objectives of the Aurat March; the third highlights significant developments in the Aurat March to the present day; and the final section evaluates whether the Aurat March functions as a pressure group or an interest group.

Interest Group, Pressure Group and Social Movement: A Theoretical Construct

Interest and pressure groups can effectively hold individuals and organizations accountable in a democracy. They embody the pluralist idea that diverse groups can mitigate political extremes by representing a broad spectrum of interests. At various times, individuals may find opportunities to collaborate and form these groups to pursue collective goals. Engaging in organized lobbying efforts can facilitate the expression of their views. Additionally, these groups often seek to influence policymaking processes and decisions regarding the allocation of crucial resources (Dalziel, R. 2010).

There is often little distinction between pressure groups and interest groups, as both consist of individuals united by common interests. They aim to leverage their collective strength to influence specific decision-makers and organizations to adopt their viewpoints or demands in

the decision-making process. A pressure group can be an interest group that exerts influence or pressure on the government or decision-makers to achieve its certain goals. However, it is important to note that not all interest groups apply pressure in this way. This means that while all pressure groups are considered interest groups, not all interest groups are classified as pressure groups. One could assert that interest groups operate with a more formal structure and a greater degree of leniency in their strategies, in stark contrast to the assertive and often uncompromising nature of pressure groups.

According to Gerard O 'Donnell, author of 'Mastering Sociology', pressure groups can be of two types; sectional and promotional. Sectional groups aim to protect or promote the interests of their members or a specific group, while promotional groups focus on achieving particular changes or addressing specific issues. Sectional groups are often called 'protective group' ' because they primarily focus on safeguarding the sectional interests of individuals, often their own members (O'Donnell, G. 1985).

A social movement, on the other hand, aims to create social change and typically arises when there is a clear anomaly within the system. This anomaly often relates to issues of injustice, inequality, or the marginalization of certain groups in society. While social movements, like interest groups, are purposeful and organized endeavors that strive for common goals, they also serve as an umbrella under which various interest and pressure groups collaborate to pursue specific social changes.

According to Edward Gemma, a senior lecturer at the University of Manchester, UK, social movements can be understood through four key conceptual distinctions. First, they represent collective, organized efforts focused on driving social change, as opposed to isolated individual actions. Second, these movements have longevity, engaging in sustained conflict over specific issues against powerful adversaries, rather than being fleeting events. Third, members of social

movements come together, cultivating a shared collective identity that unites their efforts. Finally, social movements actively seek change by strategically employing protests to make their voices heard. (Edwards Gemma, 2014).

The origin of Aurat March

The Aurat March is a feminist movement advocating for gender justice, initiated by young activists in Karachi to commemorate International Women's Day as a public protest against misogyny, patriarchal practices, and widespread gender inequality. It was partly inspired by the 2017 Women's March in the US. Later in the year 2018 similar marches started taking place took place in different parts of the country primarily the urban cities notably Islamabad, and Lahore. These marches drew over great attention and had a greater impact with significant media attention as a feminist movement (Khan, A., Jawed, 2021). After the success of the first march, the organizers recognized that their struggle should be a collaborative effort, free from a single leadership or organization. This approach would amplify voices on a variety of issues, highlighting the interconnectedness of their challenges.

Initially, the Aurat served as the unifying force as various women's rights organizations, including NGOs, and human rights groups, started fostering collaboration and building upon each other's advocacy efforts in this newly formed feminist struggle in Pakistan. Following the significant event of 2018, the dedicated organizers of Aurat March established Hum Aurtein (We Women) with the aim of coordinating urban protests and effectively preparing for the subsequent Marches. This initiative was crucial in ensuring that women's voices were heard and amplified in both urban and rural settings. However, the primary focus has been on the urban educated class.

By the year 2019, the event had significantly broadened its reach, expanding to include six additional cities across the region. This expansion resulted in the gathering of the largest

crowds advocating for gender justice seen in a generation, with participation from a diverse group that included both women and a number of supportive men. The collective demands put forth during that year reiterated several crucial issues, which included a call for an end to all forms of violence, a push for economic justice, the promotion of reproductive rights, the quest for environmental justice, the pursuit of political justice, and affirming everyone's right to the city as a shared space.

As the Aurat March moved into 2020, the movement saw the introduction of three important new elements to its list of demands, reflecting an evolving understanding of social justice issues. These additions focused on the recognition and protection of minority rights, including a call for an end to the forced conversions that affected vulnerable communities. Furthermore, there was an emphasis on increasing political participation not only for women but also for transgender and non-binary individuals, highlighting the necessity for inclusive representation in political discussions and decision-making processes. Additionally, there was a strong push for the elimination of stereotypical media reporting, with the aim of ensuring that all narratives surrounding women's experiences and gender issues are portrayed fairly and accurately.

In 2021, the Aurat March made a more pronounced demands in the form of 15-point agenda addressed to provincial and federal government that included shelter centers for women and children, passing of bill proposed by trans community, and demand to end extrajudicial killing in all the provinces, and release of missing persons. This was the time when the Aurat March began to engage with political issues beyond its broader feminist agenda. In 2022, the Aurat March was dedicated to labor rights. As stipulated in the concept note of 2022 march, they claimed that their work was mental, physical, emotional, whether it was in the production and provision of food, taking care of the elderly, raising and socializing children, or taking care of

the environment and nurturing our communities, and for that, their work must be acknowledged and rewarded fairly.

After undergoing transformative agenda-setting phases, the Aurat March in 2023 returned to its original mandate of confronting and eliminating deep-rooted forms of oppression driven by capitalist ideologies, such as economic exploitation, gender-based violence, militarization, war, and environmental degradation, as outlined in their 2023 Charter of Demands (see Annex for detailed overview). In the 2023 Charter of Demands, they raised their voices for the social security and safety of workers, which have often been neglected. They demanded that all workers—across factories, farms, sanitation, and domestic roles—receive a living wage to secure safe housing, quality education, and affordable healthcare. Immediate enforcement of minimum wage laws with penalties for non-compliance is essential. They called for reduced military spending and redirected savings to support families affected by flooding, alongside immediate relief and rehabilitation for flood victims. The State must provide social security and monthly stipends for women and the khawaja sira community, as per Article 38 of the Constitution of Pakistan, 1973. Addressing bonded labor, especially in Sindh and Balochistan, is crucial, with a demand to close private jails and forgive farmer debt due to the 2022 floods.

They sought shelters for women, khawaja siras, trans men, and non-binary individuals in every Sindh district, along with better funding for existing shelters. The federal government must uphold the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018, and take action against violence toward this community. They also demanded an end to forced conversions and child marriages in Sindh, as these violate constitutional rights to religious freedom and dignity.

In 2024, the Aurat March demands varied by division. While Karachi's remained consistent, Lahore called for transparency in announcing the 2024 General Election results to restore trust, advocating a public-led truth and reconciliation process. They also demanded

enforcement of the 5% minimum for women's nomination on general seats (raising to 30% or more), quotas for transgender persons, and increased representation for marginalized communities at all governance levels, ensuring inclusivity across gender, class, ability, caste, and faith. Further demands included equitable resource distribution and representation for all federal units, including Gilgit-Baltistan, and prioritizing strengthened local government institutions for grassroots political empowerment. They urged an end to IMF-mandated austerity, demanding restored funding for essential public services and welfare. The Islamabad chapter demanded an end to forced disappearances, urging the state to address demands by Mahrang Baloch and other Baloch women, and to immediately release all illegally detained prisoners. Additional demands included action against cyber harassment, an end to period poverty, economic justice, universal access to education and healthcare, and political rights (Dawn, 2025). The next year, in 2025, the Aurat March demands remained the same for all the divisions. For instance, the Islamabad division raised the key demands included: strengthening workplace sexual harassment committees, ending violence and discrimination against transgender individuals and ensuring gender self-determination, securing girls' education and abolishing forced conversions, repealing the Punjab Defamation Act 2024 and Section 144, restoring student unions, halting agricultural land misuse, and developing anti-smog policies (The News, 2025).

The demands put forth by the Aurat March were especially prominent and forceful in the year 2021, with a particular emphasis on issues surrounding the transgender bill. Activists were vocally urging both the provincial and federal governments to take these pressing concerns seriously and take concrete steps to address them. This strong call to action highlighted the urgency of the situation and the need for immediate legislative attention. However, by the time we reached 2023, the demands presented during the march appeared to be more generalist, lacking the same level of intensity and clarity. The expectations for a definitive roadmap

outlining the necessary actions and changes seemed less pronounced, leading to a perception that the momentum for these issues had diminished, and the focus was less direct in terms of demanding specific governmental intervention and a clear roadmap for broader societal change, and attitude towards women.

The division-wise demands illustrate how Aurat March can sometimes act as a fragmented force, with women from Punjab, Sindh, and other provinces pursuing their own individual causes. While this localized focus is essential for highlighting the unique challenges faced by women experiencing discrimination, it ultimately undermines the perception of Aurat March as a cohesive movement advocating for women's rights across Pakistan. For the cause to gain strength and visibility, a more unified approach is crucial—one that amplifies local voices while standing together in solidarity.

Following a brief overview, the next section critically analyzes the Aurat March's struggle. It examines ambiguities in its political affiliations, explores its campaign strategy (particularly slogans and placards), and addresses leadership and strategic shortcomings within the broader struggle of women. These factors are crucial for understanding the very nature of the women's struggle under the Aurat March banner.

The Challenge of forging Alliances with Potential Stakeholders

Forming coalitions and alliances with like-minded stakeholders is a decisive strategy that can amplify an interest group's policy leverage. Coalitions can also amplify resources like information, and networks by leveraging member strengths. Combined forces also grant interest groups access to exclusive lobbying channels and policymakers, enhancing their influence and recognition. For instance, a coalition of children's rights groups (NACSO, MCE, NSPCC, ECPAT, and Save the Children) actively participated in discussions surrounding the

2009 European Commission proposal to combat sexual abuse of children, and achieved greater

projection, acknowledgement and policy input (Iskander De Bruycker, 2014).

With regard to Aurat March, the Pakistan People Party (PPP) leadership's support for the

Aurat March helped safeguard against threats from the religious right. Activists from Pashtun

Tahafuz Movement (PTM), Lady Health Workers (LHW), and young feminists who initiated

the Aurat March have formed associations to evolve their issues into movements. Meanwhile,

some feminists linked to the women's movement of the 1980s are focusing on connecting

formal politics with activism, encouraging younger activists to pursue this direction as well.

However, some activists believe that affiliation especially political affiliation poses more

challenges than advantages. For instance, the political affiliations of many LHW hampered

their ability to fulfill their demands. As a result, organizers restrict participants from displaying

party or organizational banners at events, discouraging political figures from attending or

bringing their party members. In a nutshell, there is significant confusion regarding forging

affiliation, with some seeking closer ties to parties for greater influence, while others view such

affiliations as potentially disruptive to their causes.

Aside from political affiliation, the Aurat March organizers lack a system for forming

alliances with similar groups. While many organizations advocating for rights have expressed

sympathy and moral support, there are no formal connections established. Thus, this gap

represents a strategic flaw in Aurat March struggle.

The Challenge of Acceptability of Aurat March's Demands Across the Society

The demands of the Aurat March are generally recognized among the young, urban and

educated class, but the banners displayed during the marches sparked outrage among right-

wing conservatives and ignited intense discussions among women's organizations, political

parties, and middle-class households regarding gender norms. This debate pushed some public

figures to express their support or opposition to women's demands. Certain demands from the Aurat March fueled a heated public and media discourse, leading some supporters to distance themselves from the urban feminist slogans, including a playful one urging man to cook their own meals. A critic from the lady health workers remarked, "Many actions contradicted our religion and society."

Activists from the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement acknowledged the feminist critiques but argued it was impractical to raise such issues while women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan confront more pressing patriarchal challenges, such as property rights, alimony, and domestic violence (Khan, A., Jawed, A., & Qidwai, K, 2021). They felt that focusing on these more conservative and vulnerable contexts made the Aurat March's coalition-building efforts less effective. Pakistani society, including many women, has struggled to accept women openly denouncing patriarchy and demanding a voice. In recent years, critics have accused marchers of being elitist, detached from grassroots communities, and promoting a Western agenda, while others brand them as a foreign-funded threat to Pakistani tradition (Mariam Azeem, 2020). So, these counterproductive societal attitudes significantly undermine the Aurat March, hindering progress and support for its objectives. These negative perceptions not only harm the women struggle but also detract from its important message.

The Challenge of Leadership for Furthering Aurat March's Agenda

Leadership plays a critical role in any movement striving for meaningful societal change. In relation to pressure and interest groups, effective leadership is too, essential, as it not only shapes strategies but also ensures their successful execution. Since inception, Aurat March, led by young, predominantly urban and educated Pakistani women, signifies a generational shift in women's activism, boldly challenging societal taboos. The Aurat March is primarily a collective effort of women standing up against widespread discrimination in Pakistan, as

evidenced by the various divisions of the Aurat March operating throughout the country. However, there is no single iconic leader representing this women's struggle. While the Aurat March does have the support and sympathy of several notable figures in Pakistan, it is essentially not led by any one individual.

This leaderless struggle perhaps has both advantages and disadvantages. On one hand, this lack of a central figure allows women from every corner of Pakistan, regardless of caste or religion, to have equal status in the movement and be considered leaders in their own right. On the other hand, this leaderless approach presents significant challenges, as women often face life threats and have been subjected to various legal cases (Dawn, 2025). In these difficult circumstances, the organizers have to seek political support to address the emerging challenges they encounter, and unfortunately, this support is often not equally available to all women. In sum, this leaderless movement can appear to be a weakness rather than a strength for the Aurat March.

The Challenge of Devising a Formidable Strategy to Implement Agenda

The Aurat March in Pakistan is generally viewed as an annual event where women from all walks of life come together on March 8th every year to voice their concerns about the widespread discrimination faced by women in the country. However, in the period between these annual marches, there are no organized activities that demonstrate a clear roadmap for implementing the demands put forth during the previous march. This lack of activity casts a negative shadow over the entire women's struggle. Consequently, the absence of targeted and timely demands hinders the development of the Aurat March into a more robust women's movement in Pakistan. Currently, it stands as an annual gathering with no clear roadmap as one the of organizers from Karachi admitted that "a march cannot fill up an entire movement;

it's on us to do the work of claiming space beyond that one day and one moment of collective protest." (Hira Azmat, 2022).

Conclusion

The Aurat March is undoubtedly a pivotal moment in the development of feminist resistance in Pakistan, advocating for a contemporary feminist approach that emphasizes equal rights. The momentum it has generated, alongside the backlash and death threats faced by its participants, raises critical questions about the historical construction of sexuality in Pakistan. The Aurat March has opened a dialogue on inclusivity, and gender in Pakistan. However, the scope and intensity of pressure group, interest group, or social movement politics is determined by many factors such as timeframe, targets, and tactics, and more importantly, the leadership. Currently, Aurat March's division-wise demands, while crucial for addressing localized discrimination, can fragment the movement and weaken its overall image as a unified advocate for women's rights across Pakistan. A more cohesive approach, amplifying local voices through national solidarity, is essential for strengthening the cause and increasing its visibility.

Given that, the Aurat March, as it stands today, cannot be termed a pressure group since it is not well-organized and it does not a specific lobbying system to pressurize the decision makers. Moreover, their demands are wide-ranging and not narrowed as usually we see in the pressure group where it pushes for a specific demand. In relation to interest groups which is a kind of pressure group, the Aurat March slightly falls into this classification as it represents women section of the society and advocating for gender justice, but again, as pressure or interest groups demand active collaboration, active involvement to pursue their shared causes, and pronounced and frequent appearance rather than annual shows, the Aurat March cannot be strictly be called an interest group or a sectional group as classified by Donnel since nothing

significant achievements have made with regard to women in entirety, and also there have not been any consistent policy framework that Aurat March have adopted so far.

In discussions about whether to call it a social movement, the Aurat March, here too, does not strictly fit into this classification according to Gemma Edwards definition of social movement. Currently, it is more of a loosely organized effort rather than a well-coordinated struggle characterized by ongoing action rather than one-off events. Additionally, a key aspect of any movement is its collective identity, as members typically share a sense of unity. In this regard, the Aurat March still has to come a long way as it has yet to foster a collective identity that brings together women from both rural and urban areas and from all sects. This unity is essential for representing a cohesive front advocating for social change. Nevertheless, Aurat March has all the essential ingredients of becoming a radical gender-reform social movement in Pakistan. However, its success, as mentioned earlier, depends on its ability to unite various gender-focused groups, build stronger relationships within and forge alliance with potential stakeholders, a clear strategy with targets, and more importantly raising an iconic leadership. Social media provides Aurat March with a valuable platform to amplify its message and broaden support, an advantage previous movements lacked. However, effective utilization, would be crucial in bringing a broader societal change, and greater acceptability of its demands.

Annex

<div align="center">(Manifesto, Auart March, <u>2023</u>).</div>

1. *"We demand that all workers, whether working in factories, farms and homesteads, as sanitation workers, or in homes as domestic workers, be given a living wage, based on access to safe housing, quality education and affordable healthcare for themselves and their families. As a first step, we demand immediate enforcement of minimum wage across all sectors, and for all actors who refuse this to be fined under the law.*

2. *We demand a cut in military expenditure with cuts in non-combative expenditure as a first step, and an end to lavish spending like golf clubs, housing schemes and the like. We also ask for a cut in the extravagant benefits of bureaucrats, and the extraneous expenditure of civilian governments, especially by means of duplicate ministries & divisions at the federal and provincial level. We demand this money to be immediately routed to the people of Pakistan, particularly for rehabilitation of flood hit families.*

3. *We demand immediate relief and rehabilitation for the flood affected victims. Right now, where millions are hungry and shelter less across the provinces, we demand from the State, the provision of social security and protection through monthly stipends for all women and the khawaja sira community in view of their basic needs like food, shelter, basic health costs as per Article 38 of the Constitution of Pakistan, 1973.*

4. *We demand that the government take notice of the continuing practice of bonded labour in Sindh & Balochistan a huge number of when are from scheduled caste minority communities. We demand shutting down all private jails and the abolition of this practice as per constitutional guarantees and provincial laws. We further demand from the government that the accumulated debt owed by farmers be forgiven, especially in light of the 2022 floods.*

5. *We demand the establishment of shelters/safe houses and subsidized shelters for women (cis and trans), khawaja siras, trans men and non-binary persons in each district in Sindh. With this, we also demand increased funding for existing Dar-ul-Amansand shelters, and an increase in thenumber of functional shelters. We further demand improvement in the quality of crisis and shelter services, including the adoption of policies fully consistent with survivors' freedom of movement.*

6. *We demand that the federal government uphold the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018 in its original form, including Chapter II section 3, which protects the right for a person to be recognized as transgender as per their self perceived gender identity. We also demand from the government to take action against the escalating violence, including extreme mob violence, which is used to intimidate and murder members of this marginalized community. 7. We demand an end to forced conversions and child marriages in Sindh. These practices violate the constitutional guarantees that protect religious freedom and dignity of persons, and the Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act 2013"*

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Discourse Analysis of Emoji Use in Digital Communication by the Millennials & Gen Z: A Comparative Endeavor

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Abstract

This research examines the generational differences in emoji usage and the meanings attributed to them between the Millennials and Gen Z, using Speech Act Theory as developed by Austin and Searle in 1979. Traditionally seen as pictorial aids for emotion, emojis have evolved into semiotic tools that perform complex communicative functions. This research aims to probe how emojis function figuratively as speech acts and in what way their meanings differ across generations. The objectives include identifying patterns in emoji interpretation and usage among Millennials and Gen Z, and examining the role of cultural knowledge in shaping these meanings. This research employs Speech Act Theory as its primary methodological framework to analyze how each generation assigns meaning to emojis in digital conversations. The findings reveal that the Millennials often use emojis to clarify, soften, or support the tone of their messages, thus reflecting more straightforward locutionary and illocutionary acts. They use emojis according to their conventional or dictionary meanings. Gen Z, on the other hand, tends to employ them to convey much more complex and often ironic meanings. Such layered meanings are thus created with their shared cultural knowledge and in-group references. The research findings also suggest that emojis have an important performative role

in digital communication. The significance of this study lies in highlighting how emojis serve not only emotional expression but also help to understand communication gaps across age groups and identity formation and generational belonging. They are useful resources for representing emotions and generational belonging, beyond simple decorative pictorial representations, and describes how differences in emoji interpretation can create miscommunication between generations. Overall, this research illustrates the dynamic and negotiated ways meaning merges in digital discourse by the use of emojis across two different generations.

Introduction

The 21st century has seen a massive shift in digital communication through the development of technology and social media. Communication, the art of written or spoken language, was once the mainstay of communication, but these classic methods do not suffice any longer. A different narrative is now brought about by the rapid transformation in social media and instant messaging systems that rely a lot upon signs and textual shorthand expressions and carry meanings in distinct and often very subtle ways.

It has been observed that Millennials (generally born between 1981 and 1996) and Gen Z (typically born between 1997 and 2012) are among the highest users of these platforms. They use them on daily basis to express identity, tone, and emotions in day-to-day interactions. Gen Z which is often characterized by a creative and experimental approach, frequently uses emojis that have hidden meanings and employs them in versatile ways, sometimes using them as substitutes for words or entire phrases. Conversely, the Millennials use a more direct and conventional style and use emojis to convey the basic emotions. This research aims to explore the expressive power of emojis and abbreviations used in digital discourse, with a particular focus on Instagram, among the two generational groups.

This research is structured on the framework of John Searle's Speech Act Theory. According to this theory, actions performed by the speakers through language are called speech acts. The theory focuses on aspects of the speaker's intention that are an illocutionary force within an utterance and the outcome or results that affect the listener are perlocutionary acts. Using Searle's (1976) classification system, the five primary types of illocutionary acts are: assertions (restate a belief), directives (to persuade the listener to do something), expressive (about the speaker's psychological state), commissive (commits the speaker to a future action) and declarative (utterances that bring about a state of affairs). This framework allows going

beyond analyzing the emotional attachments associated with emojis to explore the distinct performative acts they achieve in the discourse of the Millennials and Gen Z.

Significance of the Study

This research significantly presents a vivid example of how the two generations of the Millennials and Gen Z use emojis to perform actions (such as to apologize, to request, and so forth) almost implicitly, thus suggesting dynamic digital pragmatics and communication norms. It further serves to illuminate how changing language and communicational style might be affected by other digital domains.

Research Objectives:

This research has the following objectives:

1. To examine how the Millennials use emojis as expressive speech acts to reflect social attitude and psychological state in digital communication.

2. To analyze how Gen Z uses emojis as expressive and assertive speech acts in digital communication.

3. To compare and contrast the expressive functions of emojis use by the Millennials and Gen Z, and explore generational differences in frequency and speech acts categories as defined by Searle.

Research Questions

This research covers the following research questions:

1. How do the Millennials use emojis as expressive speech acts to reflect social attitude and psychological state in their digital communication?

2. How does Gen Z use emojis as expressive and assertive speech acts in their digital communication?

3. What are the differences in the expressive functions, frequency, and speech act categories of emoji usage by the Millennials and Gen Z, according to Searle's Speech Act Theory?

Literature Review

Non-verbal components such as the use of emojis and abbreviations have increasingly altered the patterns of digital communication today. They have transformed the essence of online communication, allowing users to actually direct emotions, tone, and social identity in visual forms. A considerable number of researchers have examined them in the context of communication with a special focus on age groups.

Zhukova and Herring (2022), in their research entitled "Benign or Toxic? Differences in Emoji Interpretation by Gender, Generation, and Emoji Type," provide valuable insights into generational differences in emoji perception. The researchers state that Gen Z users interpret emojis more creatively and freely, often assigning meanings that are somewhat ironic or layered. On the other hand, emojis for Millennials tend to be read in either a literal or convention-based way. The generational-contextual impact on the meaning and usage of emojis is reflected here, as older users may see emojis like thumbs-up and smiley as neutral or positive, while the younger generation interprets them as passive-aggressive or sarcastic. This substantiates the argument that emoji use is not strictly generational but rather a contextually specific feature of the changing norms of digital communications. Zhukova and Herring's (2022) research supports our interpretation by validating that Gen Z understands emojis more creatively, ironically, and with many more layers of meanings than Millennials' more literal know. This helps to clarify why younger users may view emojis like the "thumbs up" (👍) as passive-aggressive, which directly reinforces current research's findings on its dismissive usage in examples. Their results confirm the generationally influenced and very contextual nature of emoji meaning, thereby strengthening our interpretation of Gen Z's digital

communication standards. While Zhukova and Herring looked at the generational differences that might affect emoji interpretation, this research moves a step beyond that and applies Speech Act Theory to define the communicative act of these emojis.

Adam (2017) in her similar research looked at members of an online learning community and how they used emojis in their social relationships to express feelings of empathy or otherwise negotiate their relationships. It is shown that emojis acquire meanings for distinct communities and are not context-free. Emojis are a kind of condition of sociality, enabling the regulation of group processes that can be similar to those functioning in face-to-face communication, such as facial expressions and gestures. This is particularly salient to platforms like Instagram, which offers short yet highly social interaction. It reinforces the opinion that emoji usage corresponds to deeper communication strategies, not merely emotion. Adam's research compliments this research by illustrating that the meanings of emojis are not inherent symbols that can be used in precisely the same way. Instead, they are socialized with groups, and they can socialize with us in social relations in the same way as gestures in face-to-face communication. In addition, Adam's research was designed to center on the role of emojis in a particular community of practice around relationship negotiation. Although she discusses the broader cultural meaning, her research does not consciously focus on the generational axis that serves as an important determinant for emoji interpretations. In current research, however, the distinct emoji views have been directly identified as an important factor in their distinctive Digital Communication methods.

Implication

This research reveals that emojis and abbreviations are not mere trivial mediums of communicating; in fact, they serve as an avenue of communication richer than any other. They are influenced by age, culture, platform, and social role. The Millennials and Gen Z employ them differently—not in quantity but in intent, tone, and significance. While Millennials may

use emojis to clarify meaning or soften statements, Gen Z often uses them ironically or aesthetically, adding social undertext to their messages.

Research Methodology:

Searle's Speech Act Theory (1976) is the analytical framework on which data analysis has been anchored to analyze the use of emojis in digital discourse. Speech Act Theory considers how we do not merely rely on information through language but also access it in practice. According to Searle, a speech act exhibits three main phenomena, which are:

1. Locutionary act: the literal meaning of the utterance

2. Illocutionary act: the speaker's intention (e.g., requesting, apologizing, asserting)

3. Perlocutionary act: the effect the utterance has on the listener

This framework indeed carries a particular relevance for the study of emojis, which often serve as vernacular supplements to speech acts in digital communication. It can be noticed that even the precursors of emojis, which are emoticons, are influential in changing the illocutionary force of textual utterances in an online environment. The emojis themselves can act as illocutionary force-indicating devices by signaling the speaker's communicative intent in similar ways to those used by the linguistic cues. Different emojis like a laughing face with tears of joy (😂) or fire emoji (🔥) have transcended literal meanings in Instagram discourse. They are illocutionary vehicles for expressing emotions, reactions, evaluations, or social signals. In this research, purposive sampling is employed. Only Instagram chat and public posts were selected as data depending on the relevance of emoji use and concrete indicators of the user's generational identity.

Considering the use of an emoji can be an intentional act of communication, in which the speaker conveys a meaning and attempts to prompt a certain reaction from the recipient. The acknowledgment of emojis as possible vehicles for speech acts broadens the possible applicability of Speech Act Theory and also acknowledges that communication contexts

change in the digital age. In this age, most messages are increasingly expected to encode their meanings through visual symbols. The building of an interdisciplinary approach that draws on theory in linguistics and studies in visual communication is fundamental to understanding how the little emoticons are used to attain communicative goals in online interaction.

Data Collection and Sample Size

This research employs both qualitative and quantitative methods**.** The data was collected from a social media platform, Instagram, specifically focusing on naturally occurring interactions. The emojis that were chosen for the analysis were:

1. Laughing with Tears of Joy 😂
2. Fire Emoji 🔥
3. Thumbs up 👍
4. Nail Polish Application 💅
5. Eyes Emoji 👀

   A total of ten Instagram posts were selected, including posts, comments and private chats, with five posts representing the millennial users and five representing Gen Z users. It was kept into consideration while data collection, that the responses or comments of the users were in the form of the selected emojis. These samples were selected to provide a rich, context-dependent insights into how emojis function in real-time communication. These samples were analyzed for their pragmatic functions, allowing for an in-depth understanding of how emojis function as performative tools in digital communication through the lens of Searle's Speech Act Theory.

Data Analysis

The analysis presented in this section examines and interprets the illocutionary communicative functions intended by the use of emojis in Instagram discourse. Using the framework of Searle's Speech Act Theory, this research scrutinizes how Millennials and Generation Z use these elements digitally to perform different speech acts.

Analysis of the Data received from the Millennials:

This section entails the analysis of the data received from the Millennials, in the form of comments and chats collected from Instagram. These comments and chats illustrate how the Millennials tend to use emojis more literally than metaphorically, favoring their semantic meanings over ironic ones.

The Millennials Instagram Post # 1:

Figure 1

Use of 😅 Emoji

Note. By memefueled. (2024, April 29). *when he says "fix your attitude" me:* [Photograph].

Instagram. From https://www.instagram.com/p/DJBtpBztILE/

Analysis in the light of Speech Act Theory:

This post, humorously exhibits a child making silly faces in defiance after being told to "fix your attitude," with viewers reacting through emojis with **"Face with tears of joy' (😂)**. This emoji visually represents intense laughter. In linguistic terms, it functions as a non – verbal expressive marker. The Millennials often use it in literal sense when they find something extremely funny. In the context of Searle's Speech Act Theory, the laughing emoji with tears of joy (😂) functions as **Expressive** illocutionary speech act, conveying beliefs, assertions or amusement without needing verbal explanation. In the above post, the use of this emoji in the highlighted comments from the Millennial users expresses laughter which is equivalent to saying "this is hilarious" or " I am laughing". These emojis are effective instruments in the contemporary digital speech economy because they satisfy the psychological representation of the user's inner state and are contextually recognized by others as expressing humor or shared delight. As a result, they qualify as successful speech acts.

The Millennials Instagram Post # 2:

Figure 2
Use of 🔥 Emoji

Note. 132firephotography. (2023, March 7). *House on Fire* 🔥 *on 03/07/23,*

@houstonfire_pio responded to a House on Fire in 19's first due at the 4600 BLK of Buck

Street... [Photograph]. Instagram. From https://www.instagram.com/p/CqBid-

FOUdb/?img_index=1

Analysis in the light of Speech Act Theory:

This post, from a Millennial user, shows a house on fire being actively responded to by

firefighters, with no injuries reported. **Fire Emoji (🔥)** literally means "fire"- a combustion

phenomenon that produces heat and light. In the framework of Searle's Speech Act Theory,

the fire emoji (🔥) functions as an assertive illocutionary speech act, as it asserts a statement

about the world. In the above post the fact is that the house is on fire. The emoji and the caption

accompanying a home on fire is a literal, not metaphorical usage, since it directly refers to the

apparent flames destroying the home, is consistent with its original semantic meaning. Instead

of embellishing or exaggerating reality, the Millennials use emojis to accurately portray it in a

concise visual way.

The Millennials Instagram Post # 3:

Figure 3

Use of 👍 *Emoji*

Translation of the Urdu Text:

Chief Minister of Punjab, Usman Buzdar has approved in principle to introduce biometric system for vehicle registration

- Vehicle registration will be done through biometric verification instead of transfer order form.
- Necessary amendments will be made in the Punjab Motor Vehicles Rules, 1969.
- Citizens will be relieved from visiting the offices of Excise Taxation Department.
- Biometric authentication facility will also be available at the show rooms of authorized vehicle dealers.

Note. wajdanmotorsfsd. (2020, November 29). *Good Initiative.* [Photograph]. Instagram.

From https://www.instagram.com/p/CILc2XuBN-2/

Analysis   in   the   light   of   Speech   Act   Theory:

This post, shows Chief Minister's approval to regulate car dealers and ensure proper documentation, labeled as a good initiative, with a Thumbs up (👍) emoji. This emoji literally means "approval" or "agreement." It is universally used as a symbol for "yes," "okay," "Good job," or "I agree." In the context of Searle's Speech Act Theory, the thumbs up emoji (👍) can either be commissive (if it conveys a commitment or promise) or expressive (if it is used for approval or satisfaction), depending on the context. In the above post, the user, who is a Millennial, commented "Good👍." Here the thumbs up emoji functions as Expressive illocutionary speech act as it is conveying message of approval or satisfaction regarding the news of the biometric system for vehicle registration. Hence, the thumbs up emoji used by the Millennial visually conveys the positive attitude by using the word "Good".

The Millennial's Instagram Post # 4:

Figure 4

Use of 💅 Emoji
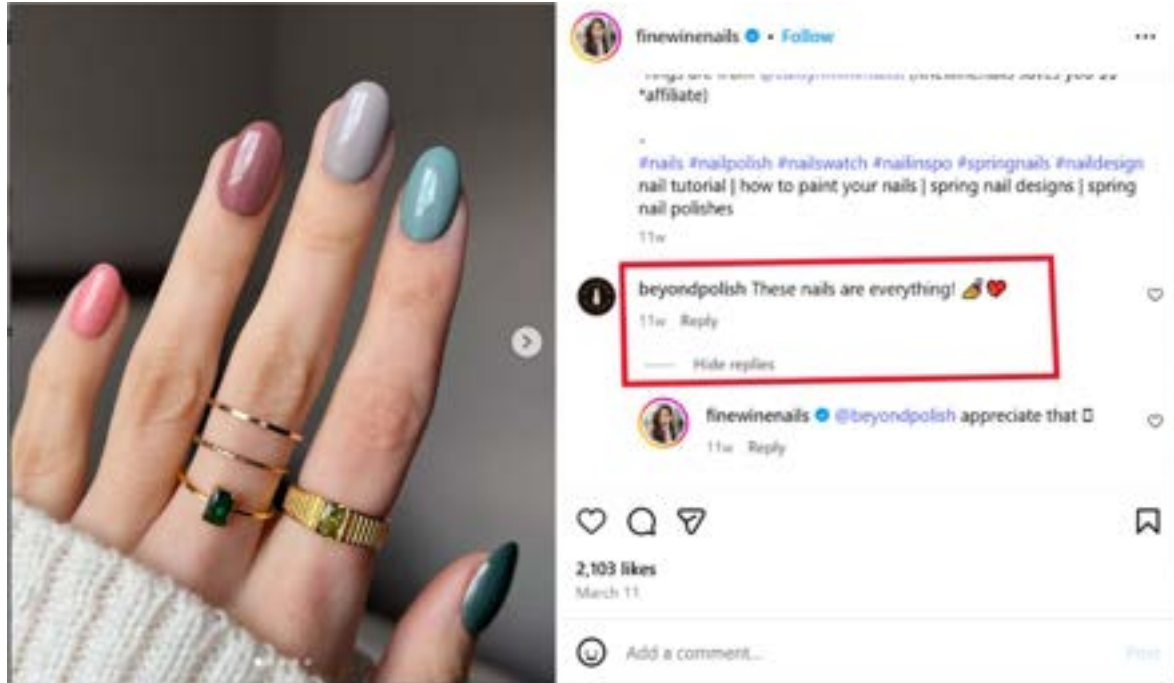
Note. finewinenails. (2025, March 11). *Manicured hand with pastel nail polish and rings* [Instagram post]. Instagram. From https://www.instagram.com/p/DHD8R_WgB7X/

Analysis in the light of Speech Act Theory:

This Instagram post showcasing a hand with nails painted in different pastel nail polish colors, generating an enthusiastic compliment from a Millennial user and a grateful response from the poster. The nail polish application emoji (💅) visually represents "applying nail polish," which symbolizes self-care, grooming, or beauty. In the above post, the comment "These nails are everything 💅 💖" from a user who is likely to be a Millennial, as the emoji is used in its literal meaning to signify a sense of being "polished," "flawless," or "on point." Hence, according to Searle's Speech Act Theory, the nail

polish application emoji (💅) functions as an expressive speech act, as it conveys strong admiration for the nails shown in the post.

The Millennials Instagram Post # 5:

Figure 5

Use of 👀 Emoji in chat

Note. M.Abbasi, Personal Instagram chat, May 28, 2025.

Analysis in the light of Speech Act Theory:

This Instagram post features an image of a human skull and bones, with a headline stating "Camera Footage Shows Dead Bodies Keep Moving for a Year after Death." The comment in the form of **eyes emoji (👀)** represents a pair of eyes looking straight ahead or slightly to the side. In the above Instagram chat between two millennial friends, the repeated use of eyes emoji "👀 👀 👀" in response to the post conveys a sense of astonishment, concern or demands close observation or processing. In the framework of Searle's Speech Act Theory, this eyes emoji (👀) functions as an expressive speech act, as it is used to convey a strong psychological state of shock, disbelief, or intense surprise.

Analysis of the Data received from Gen Z

This section focuses on analyzing the data received from Gen Z participants, in the form of comments and chats collected from Instagram. These comments and chats demonstrate how Gen Z users are communicating with emojis in day-to-day digital interactions and highlight the types of irony and overlapping meanings and social codes that, in some cases, do not follow the common usages of emojis. The analysis shows how the emoji use demonstrates different speech acts, in particular, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts.

Gen Z's Instagram Post # 1:

Figure 6

Use of 😭 Emoji
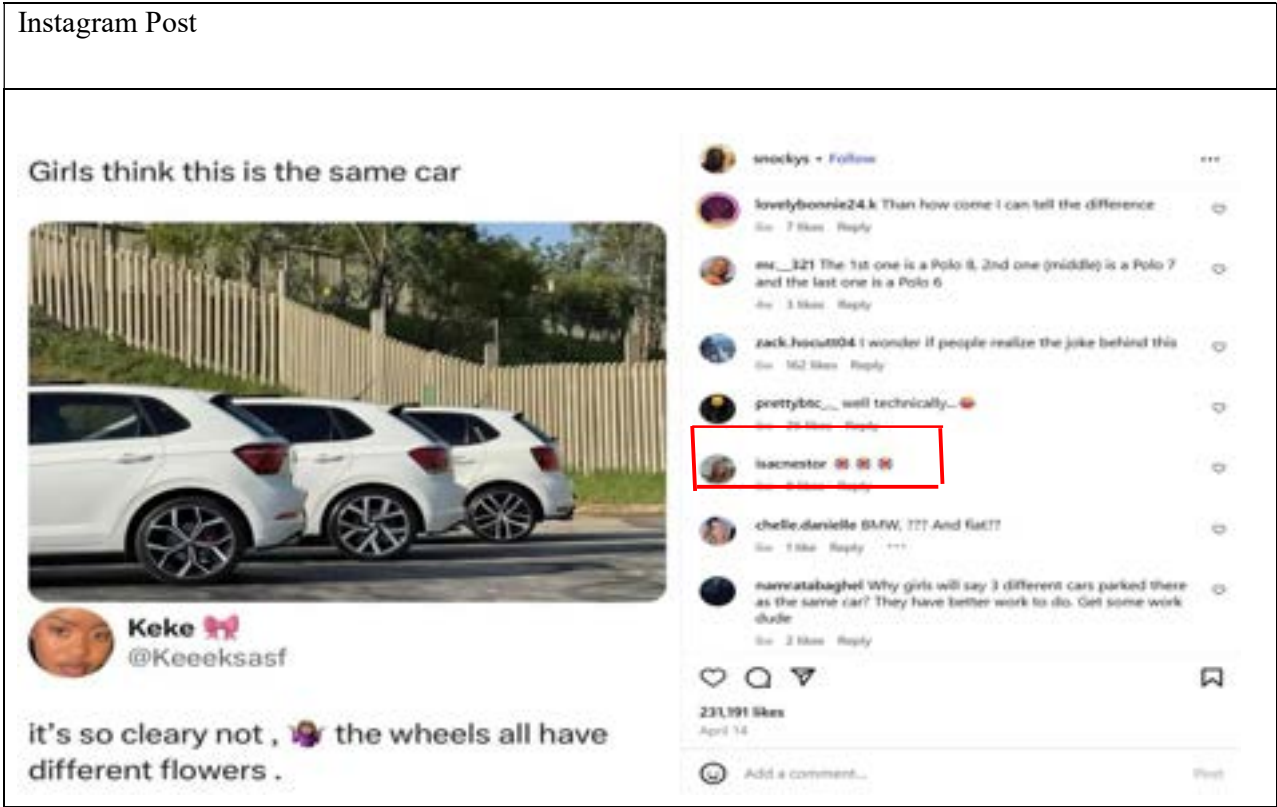
Note. snockys. (2025, April 14). *Girls think this is the same car* (Instagram post). Instagram, from

https://www.instagram.com/p/DIZelwsPMQY/

Analysis in the light of Speech Act Theory

This comment is of a user that belongs to Gen Z, the loudly crying face emoji (😭) emoji used here doesn't mean crying. In the context of conversational thread, it is used to express that the post is hilariously funny or cringe worthy. For Gen Z, the loudly crying face emoji (😭) might function as an assertive expression of humor or disbelief. In the context of Searle's Speech Act Theory, this loudly crying face emoji (😭) functions as **assertive** (or representative), conveying beliefs, assertions, and opinions. Loudly crying face emoji (😭) might function as an assertive expression of humor or disbelief. Though Gen Z might perceive this as outdated, preferring the loudly crying face emoji (😭) for a similar assertive function.

Gen Z's Instagram Post # 2:

Figure 7

Use of 🔥 Emoji
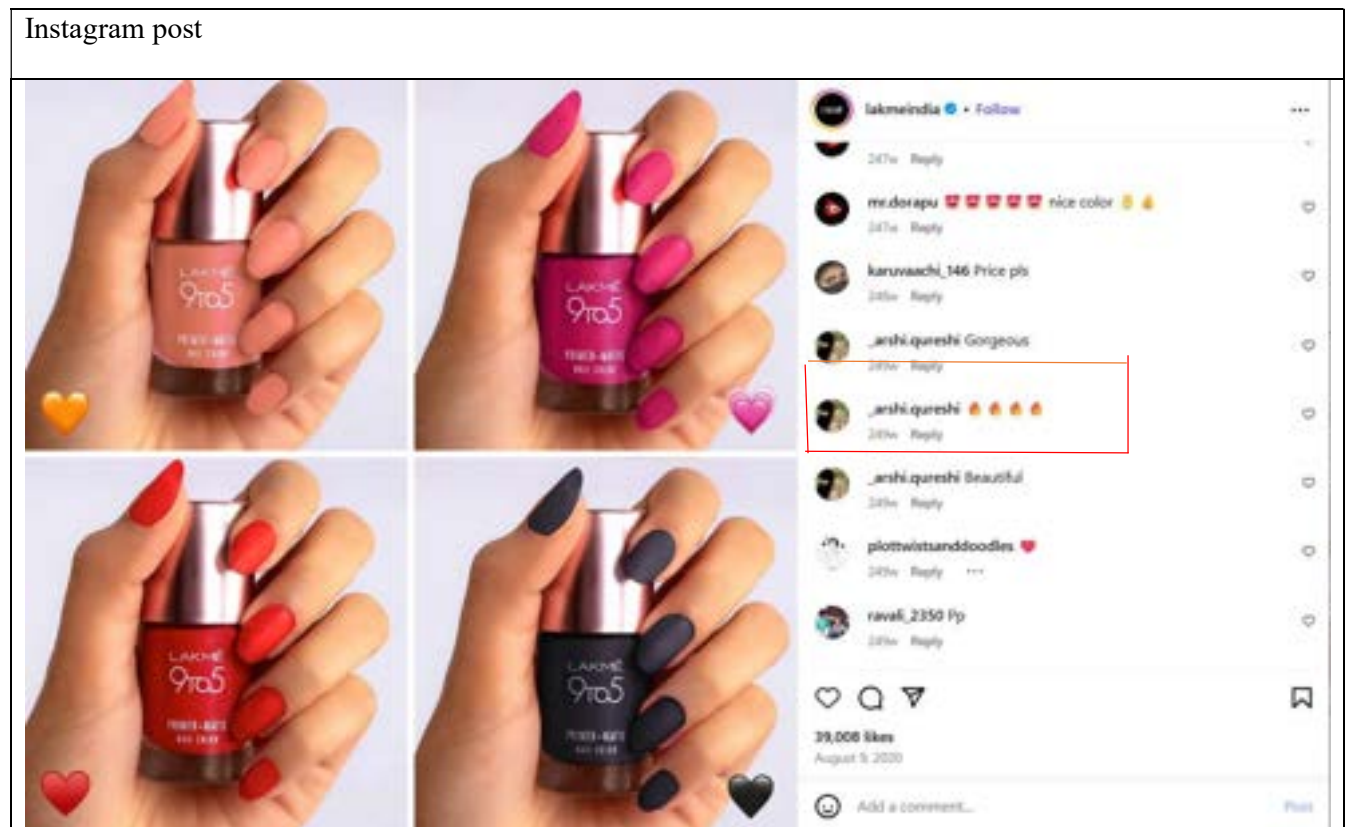
Instagram post

Note. Lakmeindia.   (2020,   August   9).   (Instagram   Post).   Instagram,   From

https://www.instagram.com/lakmeindia/.

Analysis in the light of Speech Act Theory

A post shared on Instagram shows the four bright shades, all painted on a beautiful hand, and complement colors of heart emoji. The caption "🔥GAME TIME🔥" promotes a playful and useful tone of voice, and invites viewers to react. A comment on the post of a user, that belongs to Gen Z, which   has   only   the   fire   emoji   (🔥)   in   it-the   simplest,   most   expressive   yet   minimal   way   of communicating for Gen Z. The fire emoji (🔥) literally represents fire. Based on Speech Act Theory, it categorizes such a comment as an expressive act, as it shows that the user is providing a personal reaction to say appreciation and admiration to the visual aesthetics of the product. The fire emoji used generally among Gen Z to mean "lit", "stylish", or "attractive", indicates that a positive emotional stance is taken. This comment has no verbal content, but fulfills the expressive function-emotionally engaging the post and expressing approval, completing the illocutionary force of praise.

Gen Z's Instagram Post # 3:

Figure 8

Use of 👍 Emoji

Instagram conversation thread
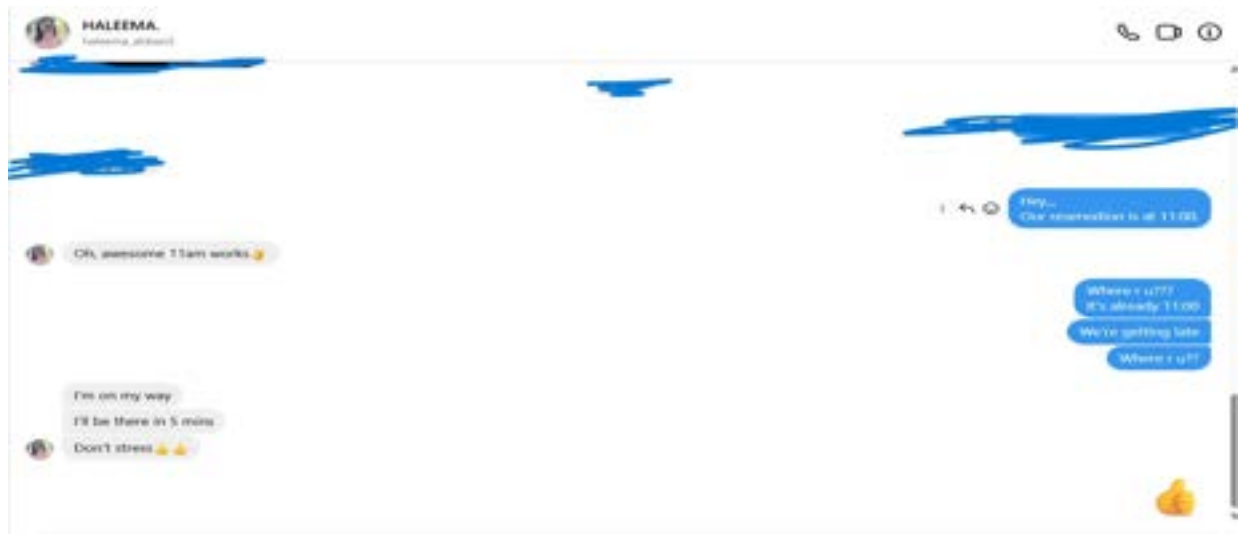
Note. H.abbasi. Personal Instagram chat, May 29, 2025.

Analysis in the light of Speech Act Theory

The provided chat belongs to Gen Z users; one person was worried about the other arriving late to an 11 am. reservation. The latecomer replies, "Don't stress 👍." The thumbs-up emoji (👍) literally means, "I agree," "Sounds good," "I acknowledge your message," etc. But here, for Gen Z, a thumbs-up could be used passive-aggressive or dismissive. In short, that "I don't care about your stress " or "Quit bothering me with this." It basically means "Leave it alone" or "This conversation is annoying." Based on the framework of Searle's Speech Act Theory, "Don't stress 👍" emphasis Saying "Don't stress" and giving a thumbs up, the late-comer is subtly committing not to stress out or at least to reassures the other person that there is no need to stress since they are taking charge of being late. Emphasizing reassurance of the other person that everything will be okay helps them to commit to a good result for their presence.

Gen Z's Instagram Post # 4:

Figure 9

Use of 🧑‍🍳 Emoji

Instagram post
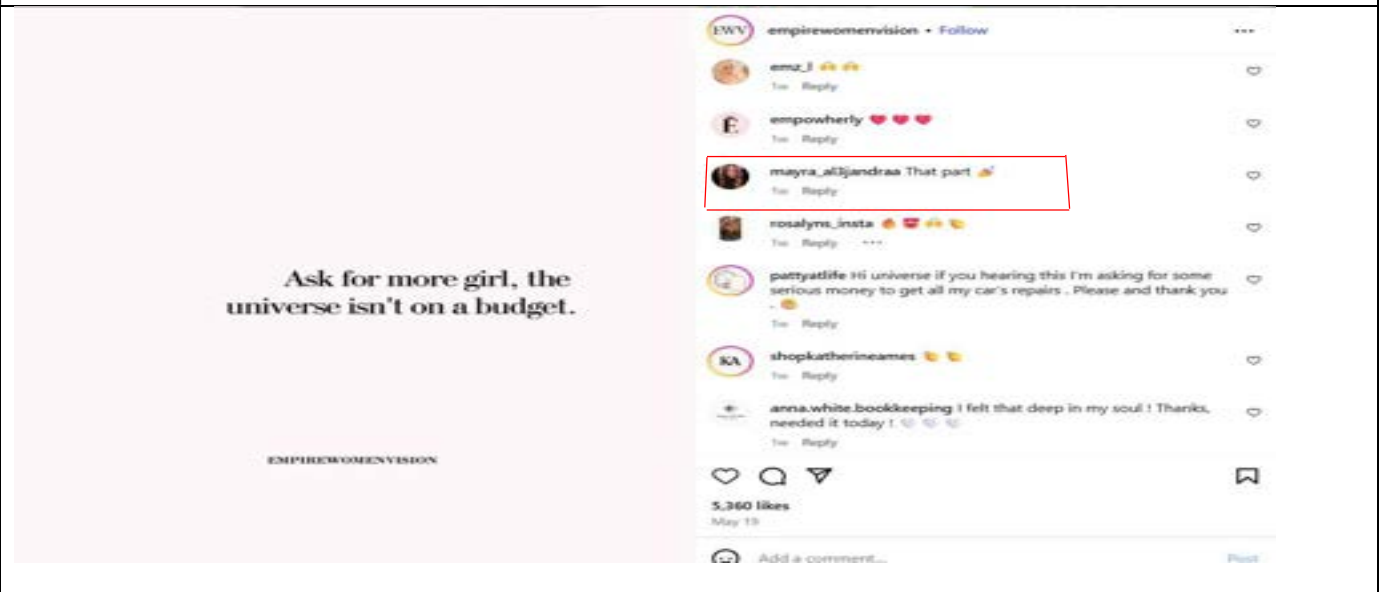
Note. Empire Women Vision. (2025, May 19). *Ask for more girl, the universe isn't on a budget* [Instagram post]. Instagram. From https://www.instagram.com/p/DJ1asorsZKN/

Analysis in the light of Speech Act Theory

The Instagram post "Ask for more, girl, the universe isn't on a budget" is followed by comment by a Gen Z user with the nail polish emoji. The nail paint application emoji (💅) means beauty or self-care. In addition, Gen Z uses it to mean sass, confidence or a dismissive attitude, like "That part 💅," which means strong, confident agreement. In the context of Searle's Speech Act Theory, this is an Expressive act, where the speaker is communicating their internal state or attitude rather than making a prediction.

Gen Z's Instagram Post # 5:

Figure 10

Use of 👀 Emoji

Instagram conversation thread

Note. H.abbasi, Personal Instagram chat, May 29, 2025.

Analysis in the light of Speech Act Theory

The chat shows one person says, "Done with my all syllabus ☺" and the other replies,

"Really 👀??" The eye emoji (👀) literally means to "look or observe". But among Gen Z the

double eye emoji suggests interest and attentiveness (it symbolically means tell me more). In

context of Searle's Speech Act Theory, "Really 👀??" is a Directive act. While it expresses

surprise, the "Really" combined with the scrutinizing eyes is implicitly directing the other

person to confirm, elaborate, or perhaps provide evidence for their claim. It's not just an

expression of feeling but an implicit request for more information or a reaffirmation.

Comparative Analysis of the Millennials and Gen Z' s Usage of Emojis:

This section of the research compares the use of emojis by the Millennials and Gen Z

users, based on Speech Act Theory. It highlights generational differences in tone,

communication style and meaning in digital conversations.

Laughing with Tears of Joy Emoji (😂):

This "Laughing with Tears of Joy Emoji", **(😂)** literally means intense laughter or amusement. In the Millennials usage (Post1 from Millennial's data), the emoji is used in its literal sense to convey user's psychological state of hilarity. For example, when Millennial comments using this emoji, it is equivalent to saying, "this is hilarious" or "I am laughing." Therefore, according to the Millennials use, this emoji functions as Expressive illocutionary speech act.

On the other hand, Gen Z does not use this emoji (😂) in the analyzed comments (Post 1 from Gen Z data) which reflects a generational shift. Gen Z often finds it outdated or overused, instead, they prefer using emojis like a crying face (😭) or a skull (💀) to assert humor in a more ironic or exaggerated tone. Here, the function of laughing emoji shifts from expressive to assertive speech act.

Fire Emoji (🔥):

This fire emoji (🔥) visually represents fire or flame. The use of this emoji represents a generational gap metaphorically and literally. In Millennial's usage (Post 2 from Millennial's data), the fire emoji functions as assertive illocutionary speech act as it directly refers to an actual house on fire which represents reality rather than psychological state.

In contrast, Gen Z uses this emoji metaphorically to express aesthetic approval or admiration, such as a single 🔥 emoji (Post 2 from Gen Z data) in response to a nail paint post without any verbal comment conveys a message that "this is stylish" or "this is lit." Here, in this context the fire emoji functions as expressive speech act as it conveys emotion or personal reaction.

Thumbs up Emoji (👍):

This emoji is another case where interpretation diverges across both generations. Among the Millennials, thumbs up emoji (👍) is used for approval or satisfaction. Hence, in the context of Millennials usage, this emoji functions as an expressive speech act. When a user comments (Post 4 from Millennial's data) "Good 👍", in response to government's initiative about vehicles registration, it reflects genuine approval.

However, Gen Z's usage of thumbs up emoji diverges from the Millennials, they interpret it as a more passive-aggressive reply. When someone replies (Post 3 from Gen Z's data) "Don't stress 👍) in chat, the emoji can be read as passive-aggressive or dismissive which implies that "leave it" or "I don't care." In this case, the emoji functions as commissive speech act.

Nail Paint Application Emoji (💅):

Another generational difference between the Millennials and Gen Z reflects in their interpretation of the nail paint application emoji. This emoji visually represents "applying nail paint on fingers." It literally means "self-care," "grooming," or "beauty." The millennials use this emoji literally to signify beauty or personal grooming. When a user comments on the post showing nail art (Post 4 from Millennial's data) "These nails are everything 💅 💖", conveys admiration or appreciation for the nail art. So, here it functions as an expressive speech act as it supports verbal expression and enhances the tone of the praise.

On the contrary, Gen Z gives this emoji a more attitudinal twist and use it to express sass, confidence, or playful arrogance without any literal reference to nail polish. Comment

like "That part 🙌" (Sample 4 from Gen Z data) signifies strong agreement, often with an undertone of empowerment or indifference. Here too, this emoji performs an expressive speech act.

Eyes Emoji (👀):

Lastly, the eyes emoji (👀) is another example of generational differences prevalent in the Millennials and Gen Z's communication style. Among the Millennials (Post 5 from Millennial's data), repeated use of eyes emojis in response to a sensational headline conveys a feeling of shock, or disbelief. So, in this context, this emoji functions as an expressive speech act reflecting an emotional state triggered by unexpected information.

On the other hand, Gen Z uses this eyes emoji in a more active conversational role. When one friend replies "Really 👀," in response to another friend's text "Done with my all syllabus" the emoji functions as a directive speech act, which not only expresses surprise but implicitly calls on the other person justify or prove their statement. This reflects Gen Z's preference for interactive and layered emoji use.

The following table 1 shows a comparative analysis of the emoji use by the Millennials and Gen Z. It is based on the above analysis in section 4.1 and 4.2, which is analyzed through Speech Act Theory:

Table 1

Comparing emoji usage among Millennials and Gen Z

Emoji	Millennials (Speech act type and usage)	Gen Z (Speech act type and usage)
😂Laughing with Tears of Joy	*Expressive*- Used it literally to express intense laughter and amusement. (Post 1- Millennials)	Do not use this emoji and often consider it as outdated. Gen Z prefers 😭 or 💀 for humor. (Post-1 - Gen Z)
🔥Fire	*Assertive*- Used it literally to represent an actual fire. (Post 2- Millennials)	*Expressive*- used to express admiration, style or aesthetic appeal. (Post 2- Gen Z)
👍Thumbs Up	*Expressive*- Used it for approval or satisfaction e.g., "Good 👍" (Post 3- Millennials)	*Commissive + Expressive*-Used it ironically or dismissively to show as passive- aggressiveness e.g., "Don't Stress 👍." (Post 3-Gen Z)
💅Nail Polish Application	*Expressive*- Used it literally for beauty or grooming. (Post 4- Millennials)	*Expressive*- used to convey sass, confidence, or empowerment. (Post 4- Gen Z)
👀 Eyes	*Expressive*- Used it to show shock or emotional response to surprising content (Post 5- Millennials)	*Directive*- Used to prompt a request or request clarification e.g, "Really 👀." (Post 5- Gen Z)

Note. The data in this table is derived from the authors' personal observations and informal analysis of digital discourse trends among Millennials and Gen Z users.

Conclusion:

To conclude, the research highlights a fascinating shift in how visual symbols are used expressively in this digital age, all through the analytical lens of the theory of the speech act of Searle. Emojis, especially for millennials, are all about sharing thoughts and feelings in a quick and uplifting manner. They convey humor or agreement, sticking closely to their original meanings. For instance, the millennials use the laughing with tears of joy emoji (😂) to simply say, "This is hilarious." This shows that the millennials tend to view emojis as practical tools

rather than just decorative elements, and they can even reflect a person's mental well-being. In another example, thumbs up emoji (👍) marked agreement and was also in the spirit of expressive speech acts. Emojis do aid in communication and the way they are used reflects an increasing desire to be emotionally transparent and direct.

In the ever-evolving interactional style of Gen Z, we see some fascinating changes, like a rise in irony, deeper layers of intention, and a burst of symbolic creativity. Take emojis, for example—the meanings of some have really shifted from what they originally stood for. Just look at 😭, 💀, and 💅. In Sample 4, the 💅 emoji now screams sass and confidence instead of just signifying a fresh manicure, while in Sample 1, 😭 is all about laughter rather than sadness. This shared understanding is strengthened by the trends of the digital world, whereby these visual cues are reformulated into the shorthand of these cultures. The emojis stand for one's attitude, identity, and sometimes dispassionate critique Instead, meaning becomes fluid, and communication becomes altogether dynamic and replete with hidden meanings.

Both the generational groups are enthusiastic emoji users, but Gen Z users tend to incorporate them more frequently and in a wider variety of styles, often taking on ironic or non-literary meanings, influenced by online trends and evolving cultural contexts. On the contrary, the millennials also love to use emojis, but usually stick to the more traditional meanings, mainly to convey emotions. By applying Searle's theory of speech rules, we gain valuable insight into the intentions behind the use of emoji, classifying their roles as affirmative, direct, expressive, and less commissive and declarations. However, the visual, contextual and constantly evolving nature of Emojis highlights some theoretical limitations and suggests that we need to explore deeper and consider additional theoretical frameworks.

The insights obtained from this research are extremely important to understand how we communicate in today's digital environment, especially for different generations. How we

interpret emojis can cause misunderstandings in our workplaces, schools, and even personal interactions. To improve communication and to make it clearer in a fast-moving digital world, we must recognize these generational differences. In addition, it can be revealed that comparisons of how these age groups use emojis in different cultures give rise to some intriguing insights. Also, to better understand its constantly evolving nature, emojis should be investigated in specific online communities and subcultures, especially in Gen Z. Finally, the study of emoji communication provides an interesting perspective on the landscape of human interaction evolving in the digital age, and continuing research in this field is essential to a comprehensive understanding of its complexity and impact.

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