

## CHAPTER-5

### A study of pejoration in Hindi

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#### ABSTRACT

This study is a descriptive analysis of semantic pejoration in Hindi that seeks to examine how selected lexical items shift diachronically from the status of a neutral or descriptive meaning to a negative one. While pejoration as a category has been widely discussed in the literature of semantic change, systematic analysis in Hindi remains limited. The study adopts a qualitative descriptive methodology by analyzing a curated dataset of lexical items from the Hindi lexicon that exhibit pejoration. These are then analyzed diachronically across historical and contemporary dictionaries, literary texts, and contemporary media discourse in order to look for their original meaning(s) alongside their contemporary pejorative sense(s) so as to identify and trace the trajectory of the semantic shift. The central findings indicate that pejoration in Hindi is not limited exclusively to caste-based and gender-based terms and that it follows identifiable and recurrent mechanisms; such as affective intensification, semantic narrowing, taboo association, and status contamination. These linguistic processes interact with socio-psychological factors; such as moral evaluation, group-based categorization, and repeated negative contextualization, altogether contributing to the stabilization of derogatory meanings across domains. The results indicate that pejoration in Hindi operates as a structured and socially motivated process rather than as random lexical degradation. This reflects how systematic semantic change is embedded within broader social hierarchies and cultural values that are encoded over time.

**KEYWORDS:** Pejoration, Hindi, Lexico-Semantics, Sociolinguistics, Pragmatics

#### 1 A Study of Pejoration in Hindi

It has long been established and extensively studied that Language is not static, but is rather a dynamic system, where meanings continuously shift over time and across socio-cultural contexts. Studies on semantic change (over the course of several decades) have indeed proved that semantic shifts illuminate broader cultural and cognitive processes instead of mere random fluctuation (Bloomfield, 1933 ; Bréal, 1897/1899; Traugott, 2002; Ullmann, 1962/1964). In these works, pejoration has been looked at as a decline in evaluative meaning, in which a lexical item shifts from its neutral or positive connotations to negative ones. In the literature, early approaches, such as Bréal's (1897/1899), ascribed this shift of meaning to psychologically and socially motivated causes. Later pragmatic and discourse-oriented approaches, such as that of Traugott and Dasher (2002), shifted the focus to contextual inference, subjectification, and the role of social evaluation.

In the context of the Indian linguistic backdrop, we may look at the socio-cultural subtleties of semantic change through this aphorism: “Yadā ekaḥ śabdaḥ bahūn bhāvān vahati, tadā janapadasya mānasam api parivartate” which roughly translates to “When a single word carries many meanings, the mindset of people or a region also changes.” This highlights how the language we use and the way we think as a society constantly shape each other. Hindi as a language is deeply embedded within caste-based hierarchies, occupational identities and gender norms, and therefore, semantic shifts cannot be seen as neutral. The lexical items associated with social categories are observed to shift from descriptive labels to evaluative markers that reinforce stigma, hierarchy, or exclusion.

In one sense, it can be said that through processes of repeated usage, words that used to refer to community affiliations, professions, kinship roles, or behavioural characteristics, have since obtained negative evaluative meanings. The process itself is only not lexical, but deeply embedded in the socio-cultural configurations in which it took place, highlighting processes of stratification, identity formation and moral regulation. Applying such broader conceptual frameworks of semantic change to the study of Hindi provides an opportunity to explore how past developments of meaning relate to current patterns of language use.

Though the theoretical literature on semantic change is richer, the systematic diachronic contributions on pejoration in Hindi are scarce. The scholarship till this point has generally focused on computational or applied treatments of derogatory language. In Hindi for instance, there have been explorations in hostility detection in the language, such as determining abusive or offensive phrases in online communications using machine learning techniques (Kamal et al., 2021). More recently, work on bias in large language models has shown how socially loaded Hindi terms can reinforce caste and gender stereotypes in AI systems (Khandelwal et al., 2024). Though these works have been useful to draw attention to the contemporary prominence of studying pejorative language, they treat pejorative language as a static lexical category rather than as a dynamic semantic process.

Apart from computational approaches, there have also been ethnographic studies on the reinforcement of social hierarchies of ritualized or humorous insult exchanges in everyday practice. Remlinger (1991) for example, demonstrates how North Indian wedding songs, through stylized teasing and verbal aggression, make gender expectations appear natural. However, what these works have not explored is, how certain words changed in meaning with the course of time or how psychological processes could explain the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of these such shifts.

There is a lack of comprehensive research that brings together a diachronic analysis of the changes in word meaning, patterns of use in context, and the social and psychological forces shaping the Hindi lexicon. Pejoration, in particular, has not been examined in a systematic way across domains such as caste, occupation, kinship, morality, and social identity using historical dictionaries, literary texts, and present-day usage data. This gap points to the need for an approach that can place pejoration in Hindi within both historical semantics and sociolinguistic theory.

## 2 Aims and Objectives

The present study addresses this gap by examining pejoration in Hindi as a structured, diachronic, and socially-motivated process of semantic change rather than as random lexical deterioration. It aims to trace how selected Hindi lexical items shift from neutral or descriptive meanings to derogatory ones across historical records and present-day usage. The analysis groups pejorative terms across domains such as caste, occupation, and social identity, and looks

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at how recurring patterns of use in specific contexts help stabilize negative meanings. Furthermore, it takes into account the role of interacting socio-psychological mechanisms such as disgust, essentialism, and social identity processes in contributing to the entrenchment of these meanings over time.

### 3 Research Questions

The study aims to address the following research questions:

- What kinds of semantic shifts have the selected Hindi lexical items undergone?
- What lexico-semantic mechanisms underlie these shifts?
- How does contextual discourse contribute to the stabilization and normalization of pejorative meanings in contemporary usage?
- What psychological and sociolinguistic factors interact in this process?
- Is pejoration in Hindi category-specific, or does it represent a broader diachronic pattern of semantic change?

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows: Section 3 outlines the theoretical framework and reviews relevant literature; Section 4 describes the data sources and methodology; Section 5 presents the analysis and results; Section 6 discusses the findings in relation to socio-psychological and diachronic models of semantic change; and Section 7

concludes by summarizing the study's contributions and implications for future research.

### 4 Literature Review

The discussion of pejoration as a process of semantic change can be traced back to Michel Bréal (1897), whose contributions to the field of Semantics included examining language change through a psychological and social lens driven by human intent. In his early account of semantic change, Bréal treats pejoration as arising from efforts to soften or avoid socially sensitive meanings. However, these euphemistic substitutions, he argued, are only temporarily effective, since speakers and listeners gradually link the substitute back to the original meaning (Borkowska & Klepanski, 2007). Further, Bréal identified euphemism (or pseudo-euphemism) as a primary "motive force" behind pejoration, or the deterioration of meaning. He argued that when a neutral or polite expression is used to mask a taboo or disfavored concept, repeated association can weaken its softening effect, leading to a stronger negative meaning. This results in a "permanent depreciation" of the word's value, as seen in the terms like *undertaker*, *silly*, and *imbecile*, which transitioned from neutral or even positive origins to their current pejorative states (Visconti, 2004). However, by treating pejoration as a process driven by human intent, his work overlooks elements later emphasized by usage-based approaches. These include pragmatic inference, frequency effects, and the impact of recurring discourse practices on changing

evaluative meanings over time (e.g., Traugott & Dasher, 2002).

*"The commonest kind of semantic change is the gradual deterioration of meaning, whereby a word which once had a neutral or even favorable sense acquires an unfavorable one"*

(Bloomfield, 1933, p. 425).

Bloomfield (1933) places pejoration within semantic degeneration, observing that "the gradual deterioration of meaning" transforms neutral or positive terms into negative ones (p. 425). His approach organizes pejoration as part of a typological structure of semantic change, arguing that a change in meaning is a change in use. While earlier scholars had looked at semantic change in terms of logical connections between successive meanings, Bloomfield took these

into account and organized these distinctions- such as narrowing, widening, metaphor, metonymy, elevation, and degeneration, within a systematic descriptive framework. Pejoration appears under “degeneration” (p. 427), explained through examples such as: Old English *cnafa* ‘boy, servant’ → \*knave’. Bloomfield’s approach helps explain why occupational or kinship terms in Hindi take on negative meanings due to habitual negative use. Yet, his account pays limited attention to the role of discourse and speaker intention, which are important in multilingual settings where Hindi is spoken.

*“Pejoration is usually due to the influence of emotional factors such as contempt, disapproval, or disgust, which gradually overshadow the original meaning of the word”* (Ullmann, 1962, p. 238).

Ullman (1964) argued, following Bréal, against earlier views that saw pejorative developments as simply results of a supposed “pessimistic streak” in human nature. He proposed treating them as part of a broader category: the consequences of semantic change. Within this, he identified ‘Pejorative and Ameliorative Developments’ as changes in evaluative senses. His work looks at several factors: euphemism, associative transfer, social prejudice, weakening, and contextual revaluation that explain how words can gain negative or positive connotations. His focus on evaluative meaning is particularly important for pejoration in Hindi, where social judgments related to caste, sexuality, and morality often affect how words evolve and take on negative meanings over time.

*“Semantic change is not random but is constrained by regular processes of pragmatic inference arising in discourse”* (Traugott & Dasher, 2002, p. 5). *“Meanings become increasingly subjective and evaluative as they are repeatedly inferred in particular discourse contexts”* (Traugott & Dasher, 2002, p. 31).

Traugott and Dasher (2002) build on earlier work by showing that semantic change tends to follow recurrent, usage-based patterns shaped by pragmatic inference and discourse context. They suggest that pragmatic factors drive semantic change. Meaning shifts happen through interaction: speakers use implicatures and expect listeners to understand contextually enriched meanings. Through repeated use, these inferences become established. A key contribution of their framework is its focus on the relationship between semantics and pragmatics, as well as the role of discourse negotiation in solidifying new meanings. This framework is particularly relevant for the current study of pejoration in Hindi. It helps explain how context-specific

evaluative inferences become established through repeated usage and eventually stabilize as fixed derogatory meanings.

Taken together, these scholars provide a framework that shapes the present analysis of pejoration in Hindi, treating it as a patterned and socially-embedded process rather than as an isolated or accidental shift in meaning.

## 5 Methodology

### 5.1 Research Design

The present study adopts a qualitative lexico-semantic approach to examine pejoration in Hindi as a structured process of semantic change. The objective is to systematically trace the lexico-semantic trajectory of each lexical item rather than hypothesis testing. The selected lexical item is treated as an independent unit of analysis, which allows comparison within and across categories. The research design integrates three steps: (a) diachronic tracing of lexical meaning using reliable lexicographic sources; (b) checking the usage of negative or pejorative meanings

in documented discourse; and (c) mapping of interacting socio-psychological mechanisms associated with semantic degradation.

This approach is motivated from established methods in historical semantics and usage-based change (Bloomfield, 1933; Traugott & Dasher, 2002).

The socio-psychological and sociolinguistic theories in this study are not treated as tools for prediction, but as interpretive frameworks. They help establish systematic connections between shifts in lexical meaning and underlying psychological processes, such as the Disgust and Moral Contamination Theory (Rozin et al., 1999) was applied to terms linked with impurity and taboo; psychological Essentialism (Gelman, 2003) to lexical items where social roles are construed as innate identities; and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) to caste and group-based derogation. Pragmatic Reanalysis (Traugott, 1989) and Affective intensification (Ullmann, 1962) were used to trace discourse-driven semantic shifts. Sexual Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), Moralization Theory (Haidt, 2001), Dehumanization and Animalization (Haslam, 2006), and Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) guided the categorization of gendered and metaphorical insults. Patterns of repeated usage served as evidence of semantic fossilization and the entrenchment of stigma. The frameworks were applied inductively, based on recurring patterns in the data.

The temporal scope spans historical lexicographic documentation (19th–early 20th century sources and Indo-Aryan etymological reconstructions) to contemporary usage documented up to 2025.

## **6 Data Sources**

### **6.1 *Historical Lexicographic Sources***

The diachronic meanings were extracted from reliable and well-known lexicographic sources like R.S. McGregor, Oxford Hindi–English Dictionary (1993), R.L. Turner, Comparative Dictionary of the Indo-Aryan Languages (1966), John T. Platts, Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi, and English (1884), Steingass, Persian–English Dictionary (for Persian-derived lexical items) (1892), Syamasundara Dasa, Hindi sabdasagara (1965–1975) and Colonial census records and district gazetteers (where relevant for instance surveys using caste labels as occupation labels).

The explicitly documented glosses were considered. Inferred meanings were not introduced. Where multiple glosses were available, all historically attested meanings were noted and compared. After that, only the one consistent and relevant to the current context was kept.

### **6.2 *Contemporary Usage Sources***

The pejorative usage in contextual discourse was verified using publicly available and documented sources, including: Bollywood films (post-1950 commercial cinema), Literary texts (e.g., Munshi Premchand and other prominent Hindi literature authors), Parliamentary and legal discourse like The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 Supreme Court judgments, News archives and publicly reported media controversies related to social media platforms. Any instance of usage was considered pejorative only if the term carried a meaning of insult, contempt, stigma, moral condemnation, or dehumanization in context.

Isolated figurative uses without evaluative force were not included. Sampling Strategy

The dataset comprises 30 Hindi lexical items distributed across six semantic domains.

Since the meaning varies from original to pejorative with respect to the context. Only IPA is used to refer to the lexical items with both meanings attached in the appendix section.

1. Caste/Occupational Terms (e.g., /ʃəma:t/, /bʱəŋgi:/, /me:ɦtər/, /d̪o:m/, /kəndʒər/ )
2. Gender/Sexuality Terms (e.g., /rəŋdi:/, /ba:i/, /t̪əva:jəf/, /ɦɪdʒra:/, /ʃʱək:a:/, /mi:tʰa:/)
3. Animal Metaphors (e.g., /kʊt̪a:/, /sʊər/, /sã̃p/, /gəɖʱa:/, /bʱe:t/, /ʃəməga:t/ )
4. Rural/Class Identity Terms (e.g., /gəva:t/, /d̪e:ɦa:t̪i:/, /t̪əpo:ri:/, /ʃʱəpri:/)
5. Moral–Evaluative Terms (e.g., /a:va:ra:/, /ɦəra:mi:/, /kəmi:na:/, /pa:gəl/, /bəɖma:f/, /d̪o:gla:/, /ʃʱa:la:k/)
6. Kinship Terms (e.g., /bʱa:bʱi:/, /ʃʱa:ɦi:/)

The original data set was targeted to be 100, however, only these lexical items were selected through a purposive and criterion-based sampling. To be included, the lexical items needed to be historically documented with neutral or descriptive meanings. They also needed evidence of negative usage in contemporary context, along with a change in meaning over at least two time periods. The items that lacked reliable historical documentation or consistent evaluative usage were not included. Upon achieving an illustrative example of a lexical item in each semantic category, the sampling was discontinued.

### 6.3 Units of Analysis

The primary unit of analysis is the individual lexical item. Each item is looked at for its meaning over time, how it is used in different situations (pragmatic usage), and its current evaluative force. The secondary units include discourse contexts in which these lexical items occur, such as narratives, humor, insult, and institutional usage.

### 6.4 Data Processing

The selected data were organized into analytical tables which documented the lexical category, original semantic domain, historical attestations, contemporary usage, and associated psychological mechanisms. The lexical items were grouped by semantic categories to make it easier to compare within and between categories. The historical meanings were aligned with their pragmatic usage to clearly show shifts in meaning.

### 6.5 Data Analytical Procedure

The data analysis followed a multi-phase qualitative procedure: (1) lexical identification and categorization, (2) diachronic semantic tracing, (3) contextual discourse analysis, (4) mapping of interacting psychological mechanisms, and (5) comparative cross-category interpretation. This stepwise analytical process showed domain-specific patterns of pejoration, highlighting that semantic degradation in Hindi is structured, socially motivated, and reinforced through repeated usage rather than random lexical drift.

Table 1.

|        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|--------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Step 1 | कंजर /kəndʒər/ Caste-based Pejoration                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Step 2 | Entry: कंजर<br>m. & adj. 1. a scattered itinerant community, the members of which make and sell string, metal goods, &c. 2. a member of this group; a tinker, gipsy. 3. pej. a dirty, uncouth person. The Oxford Hindi–English Dictionary (R. S. McGregor) |

|        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |            |                                                               |                                                                                                                 |
|--------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Step 3 | Neutral Usage: The original meaning as category of caste: In the British Raj, the Kanjaris were listed under the <u>1871 Criminal Tribes' Act</u> as a tribe "addicted to the systematic commission of non-bailable offenses. Contemporary use evidence A dialogue cited in the context of Uda Punjab was flagged by the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) as offensive and abusive because of its use of the word कंजर in a demeaning way "zameen banjar toh aulaad kanjar" |            |                                                               |                                                                                                                 |
| Step 4 | Disgust & Moral Contamination (Rozin): physical/ritual impurity → Essentialism (Gelman): occupation treated as innate identity → Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner): caste-based out-grouping → Semantic Fossilization through repeated derogatory use                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |            |                                                               |                                                                                                                 |
| Step 5 | Comparative Cross-Category Interpretation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |            |                                                               |                                                                                                                 |
|        | Occupational terms                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | /ˈkəŋdʒər/ | Denoted professions, service roles, or hereditary occupations | Disgust & moral contamination; essentialization of occupation; caste-based out-grouping; semantic fossilization |

### 6.6 Ethical Considerations

The study includes terms that can be casteist, misogynistic, and dehumanizing. All terms were analyzed strictly within an academic and descriptive framework. The examples came from publicly accessible sources, and no new derogatory contexts were created. The study aims to explain the mechanisms of stigma rather than reproduce or legitimize them.

### 6.7 Methodological Rationale

A qualitative descriptive methodology is adopted for studying pejoration because semantic change involves gradual, context-dependent shifts that frequency alone cannot capture.

Thus, the study combines diachronic lexicography with social psychological interpretation. It provides a descriptive analysis while ensuring methodological transparency.

### 6.8 Results

The findings of the study indicate that semantic pejoration in Hindi is not uniform; it operates through different and recurring types. Each type reflects specific social, psychological, and practical forces that shape changes in meaning. The major types of pejoration identified in the dataset are discussed below, with representative examples in Table 2.

| Pejoration Type        | Representative Lexical Items (IPA)                             | Original Semantic Domain           | Observed Semantic Shift                   | Interacting Socio-Psychological Mechanisms                                                                      |
|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Caste-based pejoration | /ʃəmaːr/,<br>/bʱəŋgiː/,<br>/meːɦtər/,<br>/d̪oːm/,<br>/kəŋdʒər/ | Occupation / community identifiers | Neutral descriptors → fixed caste insults | Disgust & moral contamination; essentialization of occupation; caste-based out-grouping; semantic fossilization |

|                                    |                                                               |                                      |                                                           |                                                                                    |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sexual moralization pejoration     | /rəṇḍi:/, /ba:i/, /ṭəva:jəf/, /hɪdʒɾa:/, /ʃʰək:a:/, /mi:tʰa:/ | Gender, sexuality, performance roles | Social identity → morally derogatory label                | Moralization of sexuality; taboo association; objectification; stigma entrenchment |
| Pragmatic sexualization of kinship | /bʰa:bʰi:/, /ʃʰa:ʃʰi:/                                        | Kinship and familial relations       | Respectful address → context-dependent pejorative reading | Pragmatic reanalysis; sexual insinuation; affective intensification through humor  |
| Animal-based pejoration            | /koṭ:a:/, /soṛ:/, /sa:p/, /gəḍʰa:/, /bʰe:ɽ/, /ʃʰəməga:ɽ/      | Literal animal referents             | Animal reference → human insult                           | Dehumanization; metaphorical mapping; affective transfer (fear/disgust)            |

|                        |                                                                                |                                      |                                                 |                                                                                        |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Subcultural pejoration | /gəṇva:r/, /ḍe:ha:ti:/, /təpo:ri:/, /ʃʰəpri:/                                  | Region, class, youth culture         | Social label → marker of vulgarity/incompetence | In-group/out-group differentiation; stereotype formation; humor-mediated normalization |
| Evaluative pejoration  | /a:va:ra:/, /həra:mi:/, /kəmi:na:/, /pa:gəl/, /bəḍma:f/, /ḍo:gla:/, /ʃʰa:la:k/ | Legal, moral, behavioral descriptors | Descriptive term → generalized insult           | Moral policing; affective shift; cognitive simplification                              |

Table 3.

| Types of Pejoration | % of words |
|---------------------|------------|
| Caste based         | 16%        |
| Sexual Moralization | 20%        |
| Dehumanization      | 20%        |
| Subcultural         | 13%        |
| Evaluative          | 23%        |

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|                         |    |
|-------------------------|----|
| Pragmatic sexualization | 6% |
|-------------------------|----|

Illustrative Representation of selected Data

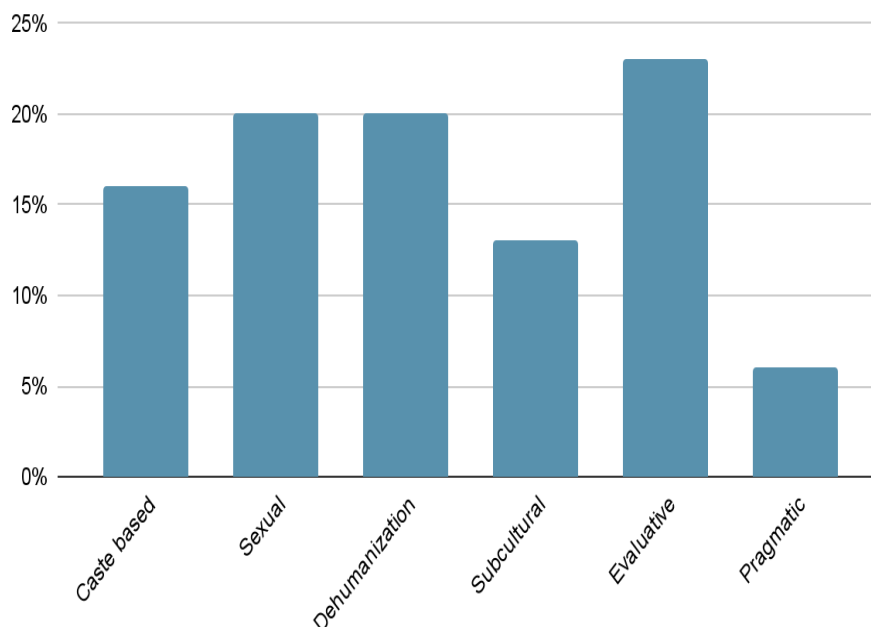


Figure 1.

## 7 Discussion

The present study establishes that semantic pejoration in Hindi is not an accidental or purely linguistic phenomenon, but rather a patterned, socially motivated, and historically sustained process. The lexical items that once served as neutral descriptors- relating to occupation, kinship, gender identity, animals, or social behavior, have, over time, taken on derogatory meanings as they become tied to practices of moral judgment, social exclusion, and identity regulation. These findings support the view that pejoration is deeply tied to structures of social hierarchy and cultural evaluation.

A key finding of the study with respect to the Hindi corpora is the prevalence of caste-based pejoration, which shows how essentialist thinking and in-group versus out-group categorization turn occupational labels into caste slurs, directly embedding stigma into the lexical meaning. Next, gender-linked and sexualized terms form the largest proportion of pejorative lexical items, highlighting how patriarchal norms tend to control and regulate female sexuality, moral conduct and behavior through language. The diachronic trajectory of items such as /'rəŋ.ɖi:/ highlights how sexual objectification, moral policing, and taboo reinforcement interact to stabilize derogatory meanings over time.

Dehumanizing extensions are also prevalent with respect to Hindi corpora. Animal terms such as /'kɒʈʈa:/ 'dog', /'su:.ə/ 'pig', and /'gəɖʱa:/ 'donkey' still refer to their literal referents, they are also used metaphorically to attribute traits like greed, impurity, stubbornness, or lack of intelligence to human targets. In such cases, people are mapped onto the unfavorable characteristics of the animal, reflecting processes of moral judgment and dehumanization.

Evaluative terms such as /kə'mi:.na:/ ('mean, base, ignoble') and /hə'ra:m.za:.ɖa:/ ('illegitimate, morally corrupt person') show how more general descriptive meanings condense

into specific moral judgments. Through repeated use in specific pragmatic contexts, these items become associated with moral corruption or social deviance, intensifying their pejorative force.

The findings show that pejoration is not strictly one-directional and is not an irreversible process. Linguistic counter-movements such as reclamation, amelioration, semantic bleaching, and performative subversion have challenged and reshaped entrenched meanings. Political reclamation acts or reappropriation, for example, are evident in movements like #ProudRandi and performative subversions like Sujal Thacker's queer slur subversion on social media. These acts have proved how marginalized groups have tried to take back the very terms that have been historically used against them. Semantic bleaching occurs when the repeated, often colloquial use of a slur can weaken its original impact, neutralizing its effect within certain social settings. Amelioration functions as a counterpoint to pejorative meanings. It is the process where a word's meaning shifts from a negative or pejorative connotation to a more positive one. This can be seen in the evolution of terms like "nice," which changed from "ignorant" to "pleasant," and "knight," which shifted from "servant" to a title of high social status.

## 8 Conclusion

The study highlights several directions for future research. Developing large-scale diachronic Hindi corpora would help track frequency patterns, collocations, and contextual shifts more systematically over time. Currently, the findings discussed here mainly rely on qualitative analysis of selected examples. Adding frequency counts and distribution comparisons would clarify whether these shifts happen regularly across data or are specific to certain contexts.

Additionally, computational methods for studying semantic change, such as embedding-based diachronic models, could help identify gradual changes across larger datasets. A comparison with other Indo-Aryan languages would also show whether the patterns found here are specific to Hindi or reflect broader socio-cultural trends. These areas highlight the importance and potential of the current study for future interdisciplinary research that includes sociolinguistics, semantics, and computational linguistics.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Lexico-Semantic Analysis of Pejorative Terms**

#### **Table A1**

Occupational and Caste-Based Terms

| Lexical Item | IPA       | Early Lexicographic Meaning                          | Neutral Usage Context                              | Pejorative Usage Context                                                        |
|--------------|-----------|------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| चमार         | /tʃəma:r/ | Leatherworker; tanner (Turner, CDIAL 4698 carmakāra) | Census of India (1881) occupational classification | Used as caste slur; documented under SC/ST Act (1989); political protest slogan |
| भंगी         | /bʱəŋgi:/ | Sweeper community (McGregor)                         | Gazetteers; occupational listing                   | Public apology incident (2019); caste insult                                    |
| मेहतर        | /me:ɦtər/ | Persian mihtar ‘chief’; later sweeper                | District Gazetteers                                | Used in caste-humiliation memes/social discourse                                |
| डोम          | /d̪o:m/   | Community linked to rope-making, cremation           | Census (1881)                                      | Human Rights Watch documentation of caste-based insult                          |
| कंजर         | /kəŋdʒər/ | Itinerant community; tinker                          | Colonial ethnography                               | Film censorship controversy; derogatory metaphor                                |

## 9 Table A2

### Gendered and Sexualized Terms

| Lexical Item | IPA        | Early Meaning                        | Neutral Usage               | Pejorative Usage                                     |
|--------------|------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| तवायफ        | /təva:jəf/ | Court dancer (Arabic tā’ifa ‘group’) | Urdu literary sources       | Moralized association with prostitution              |
| हिजड़ा       | /ɦɪdʒɾa:/  | Eunuch; court functionary            | Mughal administrative texts | Colloquial slur; noted in post-NALSA legal discourse |
| छक्का        | /tʃʰək:a:/ | Six; cricket term                    | Sports commentary           | Gender-policing insult                               |
| मीठा         | /mi:tʰa:/  | Sweet; pleasant                      | Culinary discourse          | Queerphobic slang usage                              |
| बाई          | /ba:i/     | Lady; honorific                      | Rani Lakshmibai             | Domestic servant reference in serials                |

## 10 Table A3

### Kinship Terms

| Lexical Item | IPA        | Early Meaning                             | Neutral Usage     | Pejorative Usage              |
|--------------|------------|-------------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|
| भाभी         | /bʱa:bʱi:/ | Elder brother’s wife (Turner CDIAL 9453a) | Premchand fiction | Sexualized humor (TV serials) |

| Lexical Item | IPA        | Early Meaning | Neutral Usage | Pejorative Usage                    |
|--------------|------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------------------------|
| चाची         | /tʃa:tʃi:/ | Paternal aunt | NCERT usage   | Sarcastic vocative insult in cinema |

### 11 Table A4

#### Animal Metaphor Terms

| Lexical Item | IPA         | Early Meaning | Neutral Usage             | Pejorative Usage                         |
|--------------|-------------|---------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| कुत्ता       | /kʊtːa:/    | Dog           | School textbooks          | Moral degradation insult (film dialogue) |
| साँप         | /sa:mp/     | Snake         | Zoological context        | Betrayal metaphor                        |
| गधा          | /gəɖʱa:/    | Donkey        | EVS textbooks             | Cognitive insult                         |
| भेड़         | /bʱe:t/     | Sheep         | Science texts             | Conformity metaphor                      |
| चमगादड़      | /tʃəməga:t/ | Bat           | Zoological classification | Moral suspicion metaphor                 |

### 12 Table A5

#### Rurality, Class, and Social Status

| Lexical Item | IPA          | Early Meaning                 | Neutral Usage      | Pejorative Usage         |
|--------------|--------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| गंवार        | /gə̃va:r/    | Rustic person                 | Tulsidas           | Urban class insult       |
| देहाती       | /de:ɦa:tʃi:/ | Rural inhabitant              | Premchand          | Classist stereotype      |
| टपोरी        | /tə'po:ri/   | Large; stout (Marathi origin) | Descriptive        | Street-rogue stereotype  |
| छपरी         | /tʃʰəpri:/   | Thatched hut                  | Architectural term | Youth-class slang insult |
| आवारा        | /a:va:ra:/   | Wanderer                      | Ghalib             | Criminal deviance        |

### 13 Table A6

#### Evaluative Terms

| Lexical Item | IPA        | Early Meaning      | Neutral Usage            | Pejorative Usage          |
|--------------|------------|--------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| हरामी        | /ɦəra:mi:/ | Illegitimate; base | Literary reclamation     | Villainy insult (film)    |
| कमीना        | /kəmi:na:/ | Low status         | Historical drama         | Deceit insult             |
| पागल         | /pa:gəl/   | Mad; insane        | Psychological descriptor | Everyday cognitive insult |

| Lexical Item | IPA        | Early Meaning      | Neutral Usage                     | Pejorative Usage         |
|--------------|------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| बदमाश        | /bədmaːʃ/  | Wicked; rogue      | Affectionate address (contextual) | Criminal label           |
| दोगला        | /d̪oːglaː/ | Hybrid; cross-bred | Biological descriptor             | Political hypocrisy      |
| चालाक        | /tʃaːlaːk/ | Clever; dexterous  | 19th c. prose                     | Ironic “scheming” insult |

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