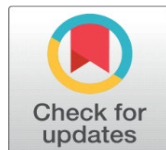


THE BURARI ENIGMA: A FORENSIC LINGUISTIC INVESTIGATION OF SHARED PSYCHOTIC DISORDER

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Received 29 March 2025

Accepted 21 April 2025

Published 25 April 2025

DOI [10.29121/granthaalayah.v13.i4.ISMER.2025.6039](https://doi.org/10.29121/granthaalayah.v13.i4.ISMER.2025.6039)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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ABSTRACT

Forensic linguistics and shared psychotic disorder are the two disciplines that can intersect in fascinating ways to aid criminal investigations and tragic outcomes linked to shared psychotic disorder. Forensic linguistics is the use of linguistic knowledge in addressing legal issues. It is an area at the junction of law that comes together to unravel important pieces of evidence. A shared psychotic disorder is a rare type of mental illness in which a healthy person starts to take on the delusions of someone who has a psychotic disorder such as schizophrenia. Netflix documentary 'House of Secrets: The Burari Deaths' revisited the tragic incident that tied a knot between forensic psychology and forensic linguistics, in which the shared psychotic disorder is the phenomenon wherein a person who does not have any pre-existing mental health disorder comes to believe the delusions of others with a psychotic disorder. The Burari case, involving the death of eleven members of the Chundawat Bhatia family in Delhi, remains a puzzling event. Though called a "mass suicide" at first, the circumstances of the deaths, including the retrieval of handwritten diaries detailing elaborate ceremonies, have fueled speculation and debate. Taking to the point, this research paper examines the possible influence of shared psychotic disorder on the Burari tragedy through forensic linguistic analysis of the recovered diaries. By analyzing the language used in the diaries parallel to the incidents, this research study hopes to provide insights into the psychoanalysis that may lead to this mass suicide.

Keywords: Burari Case, Forensic Linguistics, Psychological Investigations, Linguistic Analysis, Mass suicide, Shared Psychotic Disorder

1. INTRODUCTION

On July 1, 2018, eleven members of the Chundawat Bhatia family were found hanged in their home in Burari, Delhi, India. Initially, the deaths were suspected to be mass suicide, but further investigation changed the angle of suicide into various perspectives. Ten bodies were found hanging from the ceiling of their center hall, while the eldest member of the Chundawat family was found dead in the master bedroom. While the deaths themselves were suspected from the beginning to have some measures of psychological complication, the diaries transformed the case into a true enigma. One area this paper tackles focuses on what may have been a feature of the Burari tragedy, a case of shared psychotic disorder. The condition, better known as shared delusional disorder, explains a situation in which two or more

individuals feel the same delusional effects. The diaries, which were found in this case, highlight the delusions that the family members suffered and also highlight the potential role of a dominant individual in shaping those delusions. Ultimately, this research paper tries to determine the linguistic footprints and also bridge the gap between forensic linguistics and the delusion of shared psychotic disorder. Forensic Linguistics or legal linguistics is the application of linguistic knowledge used for legal issues or proceedings. Forensic linguistics is an umbrella term that covers many points based on legal contexts. Civil or criminal cases may contain some language evidence, such as emails, text messages, or suicide notes [Bagade \(2019\)](#). In this case, a forensic linguist will help the investigation team to unfold the crime scene. The term forensic linguistics was first used by Jan Svartvik, a Swedish professor of linguistics, in his "The Evans Statements: A Case for Forensic Linguistics," an analysis of statements by Timothy John. Shared Psychotic Disorder is also referred to as "induced delusional disorder.". It is the phenomenon where a person who does not have any delusional effects or preexisting mental illness comes to believe the delusions of other individuals with the same condition called psychotic or delusional disorder. In the case of the Burari deaths, shared psychotic disorder played a major role that led to the planning and designing of the mass suicide deaths of eleven members of the same Bhatia family. [Yadav and Chopra \(2021\)](#) Netflix documentary created by Leena Yadav and Anubhav Chopra, explores the themes behind the deaths of eleven members of the Bhatia family in Delhi in 2018. The three-part series is an examination of tragic accidents and deaths and explores how the diaries helped the crime investigation team to unfold the hidden motive of their deaths. This paper explains how the linguistic evidence aligns with the theories of shared psychotic disorder.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several researchers in the forensic and linguistic fields conduct studies to apply linguistic analysis, adding to criminal and legal proceedings. Their research mainly focuses on voice identification, deceptive language analysis, and authorship attribution. However, researchers on the other side focus on the psychological dynamics of the individuals present in criminal cases. Language and Psychology provide valuable insights for legal cases and ensure justice.

"Kurt Cobain's Suicide Note Case: Forensic Profiling Analysis", A study by [Sudjana and Fitri \(2016\)](#) examines why people are getting involved in activities related to suicide. The study explores the factors that affect the decisions, mainly their reasons and outside influences. By examining Cobain's suicide notes using linguistic tools such as pragmatics, phonetics, and semantics, the study tries to explore the significance of hidden intentions and motives embedded in their suicide notes. By analyzing their writing style and written words, we can see the different types of patterns used by them for communication used in their suicide [Sudjana and Fitri \(2016\)](#).

The study by Asma Hafeez and Rimsha Zahoor titled "The Burari Deaths: [Hafeez and Zahoor \(2024\)](#) explores the importance of evidence discovered during the Burari case investigation. The most critical evidence that shed some light on the mass suicide was the discovered diaries from the house during the investigation. The diaries unfold the ideas and practices of rituals and witchcraft followed by the family members. This study gives a close examination of specific linguistic aspects of this case. It also highlights the relationship between language and forensic science. Here, there were no suspects or witnesses found, and forensic linguistics

played a significant role in determining the truth behind this accidental tragedy [Hafeez and Zahoor \(2024\)](#).

Next, [Svartvik \(1968\)](#) focuses on how forensic linguistics is used in criminal investigation. The study shows how language comprehension uncovers concealed crime history in suspect testimonies. Svartvik analyzed Timothy John Evan's 1950 confession, revealing inconsistencies that cast doubt on its validity. His research validates forensic linguistics in court trials, demonstrating how experts systematically examine language in criminal cases. This research emphasizes the importance of forensic linguistics in examining the statements used in legal contexts [Svartvik \(1968\)](#).

Shared Psychotic Disorder: A Case Report by [Seva Korkmaz \(2010\)](#) explores more shared psychotic disorders with the help of a case study based on a nuclear family composed of a mother, brother, and sister, in which each of the individuals suffered from these delusions because of their mother's schizophrenic condition. If folie à deux affects all family members, it is called folie à famille. In this case, the mother led a very restrictive lifestyle, isolated from society, and also tried to raise children accordingly. This mental illness was frequently observed in nuclear family types, where the autonomy of the members is limited, and their personal and emotional borders are vague.

Similarly, in this case, we can see that all members are in dependent relationships with each other. Various researchers point out that pre-psychotic disorder affected by shared psychotic disorder is more paranoid [Korkmaz \(2010\)](#).

This study focuses on the tragic accidental deaths or the tragic mass suicide of the ChundawatBhamily, where eleven members of the same family were found dead in their home in Delhi. Relevant to this research area, "Psychological Autopsy of Mass Suicides: Changing Patterns in Contemporary Times" by [Misra et al. \(2019\)](#) from the Defense Institute of Psychological Research (DIPR) in Delhi, this research tries to explore the hidden reason behind the mass suicidal incidents and also explores the cases of suicides, where a group of individuals end their precious lives due to religious beliefs and pressures from society. Also, it explores more psychological factors in how psychotic illness or disorder controls each individual's mind. The study also focuses on the massive suicide done by twenty students. The primary cause was connected to the exam failure. Therefore, these cases from the Bhatia family and twenty students of Telangana highlight the different angles and perspectives [Misra et al. \(2019\)](#).

3. RESEARCH GAP

Significant research has been conducted on forensic linguistics and shared psychotic disorder. However, this study aims to examine the forensic linguistic analysis of the shared psychotic disorder and an area that has not yet been explored.

4. SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH

Examines how the Burari death case diaries were the linguistic evidence that illuminated delusions and communication patterns leading to the mass deaths, also discussing the role of shared psychotic disorder in these types of accidental deaths. According to the authorities, these diaries have strong similarities with methods used, such as tied and tapped hands and mouth. [Mirror Now Digital \(2018\)](#). This study is entirely centered on linguistic evidence like diary entries and videos demonstrating how delusions of affected psychotic individuals influence.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research study takes a qualitative forensic linguistic analysis with all established psychological frameworks to unfold the hidden role of shared psychotic disorder in Burari's death with the help of evidence left behind by the Bhatia family. We are focusing more on the Netflix show "House of secrets: The Burari Deaths," which was created by Leena Yadav and Anubhav Chopra. It is a three-part documentary series that explores the facts and rumors of the death of eleven members of the Bhatia family, in Delhi. This research paper employs discourse analysis as an architectural framework through which we can examine the functions of language and meaning changing in different contexts. While carrying out this research study, we have encountered several incidents, and scenes from the documentary were used to support our claim. Forensic linguists collect suicidal notes and useless information as evidence to prove the crime. The research paper pointed out a tragic accidental death case that happened in 2018. Netflix produced a three-episode documentary on this death, and many channels covered this and remade it in their own way. Burari's death is a case of the mass suicide of eleven members of the Bhatia family on July 1, 2018. Because of hidden intentions and theories, many investigators and psychologists were involved in this death case. In this case, eleven members of the family, including the oldest and the youngest hanged themselves in the ceiling, which we can consider as a case of shared psychotic disorder because of the condition of the affected individual from the same family. This research paper provides a forensic linguistic analysis of shared psychotic disorder with the help of eleven diaries found in the Bhatia family.

6. DATA COLLECTION

The data is collected from various sources, mainly from the Netflix documentary series House of Secrets: The Burari Deaths, as well as the central theme in this research, which is about the meticulous analysis of the eleven member diaries uncovered by the investigators. The data collected from the eleven diaries discovered various angles and perspectives of this mass suicide, which is the most important evidence revealing the practices and shared psychotic disorder that resulted in the mass homicide.

Throughout the study, we investigate the role of language in forensic linguistics and how the shared psychotic disorder or the induced delusional disorder led the entire family into the state of suicide. If we take the Burari death case, every member of the Bhatia family was part of a gut-wrenching act. The eleven diaries describe the rituals and incidents that took place before the death of the members and the rituals that needed to be performed. The role of linguistics in the forensic field is to analyze the linguistic evidence found in the crime. Also, the study examines what are the factors that led to the mass suicide of the eleven members. The reason behind their death is still unfolding. This spine-chilling crime also discussed the psychotic disorder of the family member Lalith, who suffered from a shared psychotic disorder and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

7. DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis of linguistic data in the Burari Death case provides different angles of valuable insights into the psychological dynamics that may have contributed to the shared psychosis, or the shared psychotic disorder observed within the family. By applying forensic linguistic techniques, this analysis aims to uncover the hidden

patterns of communication that could indicate the presence of collective delusion or psychosis within the family. Through detailed analysis of the communication patterns such as diary entries, voice clips, and videos this study mainly focuses on the linguistic markers from the case that link to the reflection of beliefs and delusional ideas of the family members. For this study, the discourse and interaction data collected will be analyzed through discourse analysis to examine how paranoia, control, and shared delusions were communicated through the use of language. To understand the link between the role of language as evidence, the discourse analysis is done by reading articles that cross-examine the eleven diaries. The diaries unfold the hidden intentions of the family members, such as the rituals and practices conducted, before the death. The role of linguistic and forensic linguistics is used for criminal investigation. This research examines the different perspectives of forensic linguistics and shared psychotic disorder. By conducting a qualitative research approach, we investigate the role of forensic linguistics and shared psychotic disorder, particularly by analyzing the contents in the diaries, found at the crime scene. As we analyze these eleven diaries it describes the psychotic condition of the family member named Lalit. These diaries describe the system followed by the Bhatia family.

The Chundawat Bhatia family, who runs the family business were close to the neighbors and led a pleasant life where they were different inside their house. The diaries found at the crime scene shed light on the truth behind mass suicides. Everything was clear to the crime investigation team by the eleven diaries. The first entry was dated 2007 and the last one was from 2018, just a day before their suicide. The discovered diaries were the most important evidence in the Burari case. The researchers found eleven diaries with the notes of the year 2007. The victims were Naryani Devi (77), her son's Bhavesh (50) and Lalit (45), and their wives Savita (48) and Tina (42). The family also had five grandchildren, Priyanka (33), Neetu (25), Monu (23), Dhruv (15), Shivam (15) as well as on their daughter Prabhita (57). The last entry reveals the "ritualist ceremony" to prepare for an experience of hanging themselves like a banyan tree. This joint family lives under the watchful eye of the patriarch, Bhopal Singh. He used to make all the responsible decisions for the family. [Mahwar \(2022\)](#). Things began to change after his death, Lalit the youngest son of the family successfully fills the vacuum created by Bhopal Singh. According to the investigation report, the practices were taken from July 2007, after the death of Bhopal Singh. All the diary entries were more focused on Lalit and their lifestyle. Each diary entry tries to focus on the delusional beliefs of the character Lalit, patriarch of the Bhatia family, his psychological condition and his influence over the family members were critical in the formation of this tragic event. the forensic analysis conducted by the handwriting expert revealed that Priyanka and Neetu, the daughters of Bhuvnesh and Pratibha, also used to write these notes. [Chand \(2021\)](#) It reveals that they were writing these notes at Lalit's direction and under his strong influence. In diaries, there was a repetition of "Nobody will disobey what's written here" [Yadav and Chopra \(2021\)](#).

The initial delusion found in Lalit's character according to the diary entry was reportedly after the death of his father Bhopal Singh. According to the reports, this may have affected his psyche, and a psychotic belief system. He began to believe that he was receiving spiritual guidance from his father, a belief that manifests in shared psychotic disorders. Lalit believed in the practices, of purification, which he communicated to the entire Bhatia family. The study tries to prove that he may be triggered by the trauma of his father's death and his struggles with mental health after the accidents he faced. This could have contributed to the development of a psychosis. In the case of shared psychosis, trauma, emotional loss, or financial

instability can trigger psychological vulnerabilities, leading to the formation of delusions. This pattern of shared psychotic disorder or the folie à deux is also reflected in Lalit's communication patterns. Lalit mostly used phrases and words like "this is the only way" or "we will be together forever", which sounds like ordering. Repetition of these words could have reinforced his delusions and led the family members to internalize them. The forensic psychologists involved in this case argue that the family's dependency on Lalit made it easy for the delusional transformation from his mind into the others. Lalit's severe injuries that happened in 1998 and 2004 can also be a reason for his psychosis. The rapid deterioration of his mental state by blending his delusions with inner thought paranoia and destruction of the entire family is reflected in this case. Some of the statements from the documentary and diaries that prove his conditions are as follows:

1) "If you want solutions to your problems, then you must follow Lalit's instructions,"

[Yadav and Chopra \(2021\)](#) These lines revealed that Lalit is dreaming in which his deceased father, Bhopal Singh gives instructions to the entire family. He believed that he was able to connect with his father's soul [Gothic \(2018\)](#). This proves the clear case of shared psychosis mind [Yadav and Chopra \(2021\)](#).

2) "One of the pages in the diary mentioned, nine people on the 'jaal', widowed sister baby should stand on a stool near the mandir, order food at 10 pm, the mother will feed roti to all, or the final act should be done at 1 am", [Yadav and Chopra \(2021\)](#).

These lines also prove that Lalit is experiencing a prolonged psychotic disorder. The hallucinations in his mind turns the family into the practice of Badh puja, this religious ceremony that led to mass suicide. According to the investigation, forensic linguists reveals that the whole family believed that they will saved by their dead father and none of them get hurt and also they concluded that the discovered diaries reveal how the accidents created delusion in Lalit's mind [Mirror Now Digital \(2018\)](#).

8. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To explore how the language of the Bhatia family reinforced and perpetuated their distorted perceptions of reality.
- To examine how the diaries left behind by the Chundawat family reveal the presence of shared delusional beliefs.

9. CONCLUSION

This study examines the importance of forensic linguistic analysis of the shared psychotic disorder in the Burari death case, which is an area that has not yet been explored and focuses on how it aided the criminal investigators in understanding the mass suicide of the entire Bhatia family, where eleven members of the same family hanged themselves in the ceiling because of the condition shared psychosis. The analysis of the family diaries reveals the disturbing details of how the linguistic patterns of Lalit Bhatia fostered a collective delusional belief system. The criminal investigation team concluded that this death case that shared the psychotic disorder of Lalit Bhatia might have led them to this kind of mass suicide. The crime investigation team, forensic department, and crime branch concluded that this mass suicide was a result of how death and accident changed Lalit's behavior into a person with shared psychosis. Also, the investigators found the tantric beliefs and

ritualistic practices done by the Bhatia family before the mass suicide. They also concluded that these mass suicides were accidental deaths in which all members believed that their father would save them from death, they did this ritual for spiritual liberation from all the inner conflicts and issues.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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