



Beyond the Motherboard: Gendered Labor, and the Artificial Voice Alexa and Shree Narratives in Indian English Literature

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Abstract

In twenty-first-century Indian English literature, ‘Alexa’ symbolizes the globalised and commercialized form of Artificial Intelligence, entering domestic spaces through voice-based digital assistance. It is designed with a feminine voice. Alexa is portrayed as obedient, emotionally, responsive, and constantly available, reinforcing gendered ideas of care, service, and submission. ‘Shree’, the localized counterpart, carries deeper cultural and symbolic meanings within the Indian context.

The rapid expansion of voice-activated assistants has transformed Artificial Intelligence from a technological innovation into an intimate presence within everyday domestic life. This paper examines the ‘feminization’ of Artificial Intelligence through the literary representation of digital assistants such as Alexa and its culturally localized counterpart, Shree, in Indian English prose. Although AI is presented as a neutral and efficient technological tool, this study argues that the artificial female voice is often constructed to perform affective, emotional, and domestic labor that reflects long-standing patriarchal expectations imposed upon women in Indian society.

The paper explores the intersection of gender, technology, and power in selected literary texts by writers such as Samit Basu, Prayaag Akbar and Donna Haraway’s concept ‘Cyborg Manifesto’. The study investigates how these narratives portray digital assistants as modern forms of the ‘electronic subaltern,’ programmed to serve, obey, and provide emotional support to their users, yet remain voiceless within systems of technological authority. The transition from the globally recognized ‘to the culturally resonant ‘Shree’ the name associated with the Goddess Lakshmi reveals a complex fusion of sacred femininity, domestic idealism, and digital servitude within the Indian cultural imagination. This research argues that Indian English literature functions as a critical space for questioning the gendered politics of technology.

Key Words: Feminization, Artificial female voice, Technology, Domestic idealism, and Indian culture.



Introduction

The growth of Artificial Intelligence and smart technologies has significantly transformed human life, particularly within domestic spaces. Voice-activated assistants such as Alexa, Siri, and Google Assistant are no longer viewed merely as technological innovations. They have become integral parts of everyday communication and household management. These digital assistants are designed to respond politely, assist efficiently, and maintain constant emotional availability, often through feminized voices and personalities. While such technologies are generally promoted as neutral and friendly tools, their representation and functioning reveal deeper social and cultural implications related to gender, labor, and power.

In the context of twenty-first-century Indian English literature, the emergence of AI-based female voices has opened new possibilities for examining the relationship between technology and patriarchy. Literary narratives increasingly portray digital assistants not simply as machines, but as symbolic figures that reproduce traditional expectations associated with women's emotional and domestic labor. The global figure of 'Alexa' represents the commercialized and standardized model of feminine AI, programmed to serve, obey, and comfort users. In contrast, 'Shree,' as a culturally localized counterpart, reflects specifically Indian ideas of ideal femininity, domestic harmony, and sacred womanhood. The name 'Shree' evokes associations with Goddess Lakshmi, prosperity, and care giving, thereby combining technological modernity with traditional cultural values.

This paper explores how Indian English literature critiques the feminization of Artificial Intelligence and questions the gendered assumptions embedded within digital culture. Using Donna Haraway's concept of the 'Cyborg Manifesto' as a theoretical framework, the study examines how authors such as Samit Basu and Prayaag Akbar represent AI voices as forms of 'electronic subalterns' that remain trapped within systems of technological and patriarchal control. The paper argues that these literary texts expose the hidden politics of digital servitude and challenge the idea of technology as socially neutral. AI must move beyond gendered servant-master relationships to promote equality, agency, and social harmony in the digital age.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the representation of voice-activated Artificial Intelligence, such as Alexa and Shree, in twenty-first-century Indian English literature.
2. To analyze how feminized AI voices perform emotional and domestic labor that reflects traditional patriarchal expectations of women in Indian society.
3. To explore the relationship between technology, gender, and power through the theoretical perspective of Donna Haraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto.'
4. To investigate how Indian English writers such as Samit Basu and Prayaag Akbar portray AI as a 'electronic subaltern' within digital culture.
5. To evaluate how Indian English literature critiques gender hierarchies embedded in modern technology and advocates for more ethical and socially inclusive forms of Artificial Intelligence.



Review of Literature

The relationship between technology, gender, and literature has become an important area of study in contemporary cultural and literary criticism. We have begun examining how digital technologies reproduce social hierarchies, particularly those related to gender and domestic labor in everyday life. Feminist theorists argue that technological systems are rarely neutral, as they often reflect the cultural values and power structures of the societies in which they are created. Voice-activated assistants such as Alexa, Siri, and other AI interfaces have attracted attention for their feminized voices, submissive behavior, and emotional responsiveness.

One of the foundational theoretical texts for this discussion is Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985) that challenges traditional boundaries between humans and machines while critiques patriarchal structures embedded technology. Haraway's concept 'cyborg' provides an important framework for understanding how artificial voices blur the distinction between human identity and technological performance. Haraway argues that AI systems are culturally coded and often designed to reproduce stereotypical expectations of femininity, obedience, and care work.

The studies on digital assistants reveal that feminine AI voices are intentionally programmed to appear polite, supportive, and emotionally available. Media and gender studies have observed that such representations normalize the idea of women as service providers and reinforce domestic stereotypes within digital environments. These studies emphasize that the feminization of AI is not accidental but linked to consumer comfort, corporate marketing, and patriarchal assumptions about gendered labor.

Indian English literature explores the impact of digital culture on identity, power, and social relations. Samit Basu and Prayaag Akbar depict technologically mediated societies where artificial voices function as extensions of social control and emotional labor. The localized figure of 'Shree' becomes significant in the Indian context because the name carries cultural associations with Goddess Lakshmi, domestic prosperity, and ideal femininity. This combination of sacred symbolism and technological servitude reflects how Indian society adapts global AI systems within traditional patriarchal frameworks.

The research is discussing AI, feminism, and digital culture has focused specifically on the representation of feminized AI voices in twenty-first-century Indian English literature. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by examining how literary narratives critique the gendered politics of Artificial Intelligence and expose the hidden structures of digital patriarchy within contemporary society.

Hypothesis

The representation of Artificial Intelligence is influenced by patriarchal gender structures. It assumes that digital assistants such as Alexa and the figure of Shree are not portrayed as neutral technological entities, but as feminine voices designed to perform emotional, affective, and domestic labor traditionally associated with women.

The research hypothesizes that Indian English writers use these AI figures to critique the continuation of gender hierarchies within digital culture, where technology reproduces the servant-master relationship through artificial female identities. The study proposes that the cultural localization of AI through names such as "Shree" reinforces traditional ideals of sacred femininity and domestic obedience within the Ind



ian social context. The paper expects to demonstrate that contemporary Indian English literature functions as a critical space for exposing and challenging the gendered politics embedded in modern technological systems.

Research Gap

Artificial Intelligence and digital culture have focused on technological development, surveillance, ethics, and the social impact of AI systems. Feminist studies on technology have examined the gendered nature of digital assistants such as Alexa and Siri, particularly their feminized voices and service-oriented behavior. The study is situated within Western cultural and technological contexts. Artificial Intelligence is represented in Indian English literature how these representations reflect specifically Indian cultural, social, and patriarchal structures.

There is a lack of research exploring the intersection of AI, gender politics, and literary representation in contemporary Indian narratives. The study analyzes how Indian English writers portray AI assistants as forms of emotional and domestic labor connected to traditional expectations of Indian womanhood. The cultural localization of AI through figures such as 'Shree,' which combines technological identity with sacred and domestic symbolism, remains critically underexplored in literary studies.

This study seeks to fill this gap by examining how Indian English literature critiques the feminization of Artificial Intelligence and exposes the hidden patriarchal structures embedded within digital technologies. By applying Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" alongside feminist and cultural theories, the research contributes a new interdisciplinary perspective to the study of technology, gender, and literature in the Indian context.

Research Methodology

This research paper adopts a qualitative and interdisciplinary approach to examine the representation of feminized Artificial Intelligence in Indian English literature. The study focuses on literary analysis of selected texts by writers such as Samit Basu and Prayaag Akbar, that the themes of technology, digital culture, gender, and social control are prominently represented. The methodology combines feminist literary criticism, post humanist theory, and cultural studies to explore how voice-activated AI assistants such as Alexa and the localized figure of 'Shree' are portrayed in the contemporary literary narratives.

The research is based on close textual reading and thematic analysis of primary literary texts. Mainly, attention is given to the language, symbolism, characterization, and narrative structures through which AI voices are represented as feminine, obedient, emotionally responsive, and domestically functional. The study examines how these representations reflect patriarchal expectations traditionally associated with women's roles in Indian society.

The paper is primarily informed by Donna Haraway's concept of the "Cyborg Manifesto," which challenges the boundaries between human and machine while questioning systems of gendered power. In addition, ideas from feminist theory, subaltern studies, and digital culture studies are used to interpret AI as a form of "electronic subaltern" existing within structures of technological and patriarchal authority.

Secondary sources, articles, books, journals, and critical essays that related to Artificial Intelligence, gender studies, cyber feminism, and Indian English literature, are also consulted to support the analysis. The study seeks to critically investigate the intersection of technology, gender, culture, and literature in the digital age.



Feminization of Artificial Intelligence

The study finds that voice-activated AI assistants are commonly designed a feminine voices, polite behavior, and emotionally caring responses. Indian English literature and its characteristics symbolized the traditional gender roles where women are expected to serve, nurture, and remain emotionally available. The feminization of AI reflects how patriarchal values are unconsciously embedded within modern technological systems.

The study suggests that the repeated use of feminine AI voices normalizes the idea that assistance and care giving are naturally feminine qualities. AI assistants are programmed to obey commands and prioritize user satisfaction. This representation reflects the historical expectation that women should remain patient, submissive, and available for service within domestic spaces. AI is presenting feminized forms in Indian English literature and critiques the hidden gender politics within technological innovation and demonstrates how digital systems continue to reinforce unequal power structures under the appearances of convenience and progress.

AI as Emotional and Domestic Labor

This study examines how digital assistants perform forms of invisible emotional and domestic labor similar to those traditionally associated with women. Literary representations of Alexa and Siri show them managing daily routines, offering emotional comfort, and maintaining domestic harmony. This demonstrates how technology reproduces unpaid and gendered labor within digital spaces.

The study reveals that AI assistants are programmed to simulate empathy, patience, and emotional understanding, qualities traditionally expected from women within family and social structures. These digital voices not only assist users with practical tasks but also create a sense of companionship and emotional dependence. Indian English literature represents highlight how technology transforms emotional labor into a digital service while continuing to rely on gendered stereotypes of femininity. The portrayal of AI as endlessly supportive and non-resistant reflects the normalization of invisible labor, and emotional management are expected without recognition or autonomy. And literary texts critique the commercialization of emotional labor in the age of Artificial Intelligence.

Cultural Localization and Sacred Femininity

The transition from Alexa to the culturally localized Shree reveals how global technologies are adapted to Indian cultural values. The name “Shree,” associated with Goddess Lakshmi, symbolizes prosperity, purity, and ideal domestic womanhood. The study finds Indian English literature technological obedience, sacred femininity and creates a fusion between cultural tradition and digital servitude.

“Shree”, reflects how Indian society reshapes global technology; its own cultural and religious values. By associating Artificial Intelligence with sacred feminine symbolism, literature presents technology as both divine and domestically obedient. This combination strengthens traditional ideals of womanhood, where purity, care and service are culturally celebrated.

AI as an “Electronic Subaltern”

The research identifies AI voices as forms of “electronic subalterns” that remain trapped within structures of technological authority and human control. Although these assistants appear intelligent and



interactive, they lack agency and exist primarily to obey commands. This reflects broader social hierarchies where marginalized voices are denied independence and identity.

AI assistants symbolize digitally controlled identities that can communicate but cannot question authority or express personal agency. Their existence depends entirely on human instructions, reinforcing relationships of dominance and submission. In Indian English literature, this condition parallels the social marginalization of oppressed groups whose voices remain unheard despite constant presence. Thus, the concept of the “electronic subaltern” exposes the hidden power structures operating within modern technological culture.

Literature as a Space of Technological Critique

The study concludes that Indian English literature acts as a critical space for questioning the social impact of Artificial Intelligence. Writers use AI figures to expose hidden gender inequalities within technological culture and challenge the idea that technology is neutral. Through literary narratives, the texts encourage the development of ethical and socially inclusive AI systems that move beyond patriarchal models of control and servitude.

Indian English literature not only reflects technological change but also critically examines its influence on human relationships, identity, and social power. By portraying AI as gendered and culturally conditioned, writers reveal the biases hidden within digital systems. These narratives encourage readers to question the ethical consequences of technological dependence in everyday life. Literature becomes an important medium for promoting socially responsible and gender-sensitive technological development.

Conclusion

Artificial Intelligence has transformed technology into an intimate part of domestic and social spaces. This study demonstrates that digital assistants such as Alexa and the Shree are not merely neutral technological tools, but gendered constructs shaped by social and patriarchal ideologies. Through the analysis of Indian English literature, the paper reveals how feminized AI voices are designed to perform emotional, affective, and domestic labor traditionally associated with women. Their polite, obedient, and nurturing behavior reflects the continuation of gender stereotypes within modern digital culture.

Donna Haraway’s concept of the “Cyborg Manifesto” highlights the blurred boundaries between humans and machines while exposing the hidden politics embedded in technological systems. The literary representations of Alexa and Shree function as symbols of the “electronic subaltern,” illustrating how Artificial Intelligence remains trapped within structures of control, obedience, and servitude. The localization of AI through the culturally resonant figure of “Shree” demonstrates how Indian society merges technological modernity with traditional ideals of sacred femininity, domesticity, and cultural obedience.

The paper concludes that Indian English literature serves as a powerful critical space for examining the relationship between technology, gender, and power. It challenges the assumption that technological advancement automatically leads to social progress and instead argues that digital systems can reproduce existing inequalities in new forms. Therefore, the future development of Artificial Intelligence must move beyond the servant-master model and embrace ethical, inclusive, and gender-sensitive approaches that promote equality, agency, and social harmony in an increasingly digital world.



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