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Language as Resistance: Hybridity and Marginalized Voice in Megha Majumdar's *A Burning*[*]

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Abstract

This paper examines how Megha Majumdar's A Burning (2020) portrays language as both a means of resistance and a marker of marginality in postcolonial India. The novel highlights the layered use of English, shaped by regional idioms, sociolects, and non-standard grammar, to reflect India's social hierarchies. The three protagonists, Jivan, Lovely, and PT Sir, inhabit distinct linguistic backgrounds that signify their socio-economic status and shape their access to voice, justice, and visibility. Drawing on postcolonial theory, including Bhabha's concept of hybridity, Spivak's critique of subaltern speech, and Berlant's notion of emotional legibility, the paper examines how Majumdar reimagines Indian English as both expressive and exclusionary. A Burning stands as a notable post-2000 Indian Anglophone novel, where English becomes a contested site for negotiating identity, power, and resistance.
Keywords: Indian Anglophone fiction, hybridity, language and power, marginality, postcolonial narrative

Introduction

In postcolonial contexts, such as India, English operates as both a colonial legacy and a means of aspiration, rendering it a charged medium where questions of identity, visibility, and exclusion are negotiated. Megha Majumdar's debut novel*, A Burning (2020),* operates within this contested linguistic space, portraying the lives of three socially marginalized protagonists whose experiences are shaped and often constrained by the languages they speak.

Set in contemporary urban India, the narrative unfolds through three first-person voices: Jivan, a young Muslim woman from a Kolkata slum unjustly accused of terrorism; Lovely, a hijra (transgender) aspiring to be a film actress; and PT Sir, a schoolteacher whose growing political ambition gradually leads him to moral compromise. Majumdar's novel is taken explicitly as the primary text for this study because each of the characters inhabits a unique linguistic space reflective of their socio-economic status, cultural marginalization, and personal aspirations. Majumdar avoids the homogenization of voice often seen in English-language fiction by allowing these distinct vernaculars—non-standard grammar, regionally inflected idioms, and performative syntax—to assert narrative presence. Through this stylistic fragmentation, she resists linguistic standardization and instead emphasizes the exclusions embedded in dominant forms of English.

This study focuses solely on the novel's internal textual world, interpreting Majumdar's portrayal of language as a deliberate literary strategy to reflect contemporary India's hierarchical structures. Rather than approaching English as a neutral or cohesive linguistic form, the novel reveals it as an

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affectively charged and ideologically loaded system. The characters' varying relationships to English illuminate how language functions both as a tool of empowerment and a mechanism of erasure.

By situating *A Burning* within the broader tradition of post-2000 Indian Anglophone fiction, this study argues that in *A Burning*, language functions not only as a means of representation but also as a symbolic structure of power wherein inclusion, erasure, and aspiration are encoded in linguistic choices. Majumdar reimagines English as a culturally loaded, affectively charged, and politically consequential medium. Drawing on postcolonial theories and affect theory, this study examines how the novel foregrounds hybrid English as both a survival strategy and a marker of marginality, further examining how it constructs linguistic hybridity not merely as a stylistic choice but as a deliberate literary strategy that mirrors the entrenched social hierarchies and cultural marginalization in contemporary India. Through a close examination of the novel's three central characters, Jivan, Lovely, and PT Sir, the study analyzes how their distinct ways of speaking, shaped by class, gender, and religious identity, function as reflections of their social positioning.

The paper is organized around thematic explorations of each protagonist's linguistic expression, deciphering and interpreting how character-specific language and its idiosyncrasies affect the acts of resistance, exclusion, and marginalization. Jivan's truncated and emotionally charged language, consistently misread by institutional forces, reflects the systemic denial of narrative legitimacy to the marginalized. Lovely's hybrid English, infused with theatricality and regional idioms, reclaims agency through linguistic performance. PT Sir's transformation from hesitant educator to polished political mouthpiece illustrates how fluency in bureaucratic English can legitimize complicity and power. Additionally, the study critiques the surveillance apparatus of digital and state media that reconfigures subaltern speech into instruments of criminalization and suspicion.

Ultimately, this study interrogates how English, as deployed in the narrative, operates simultaneously as a vehicle for personal agency and a mechanism of systemic exclusion. It asks how these varied speech patterns, ranging from Jivan's emotionally charged but institutionally illegible language to Lovely's performative hybrid syntax to PT Sir's polished bureaucratic diction, mediate access to justice, identity, and narrative authority. Furthermore, the research considers whether Majumdar's depiction of linguistic diversity in *A Burning* challenges the dominant norms of Indian Anglophone fiction and how this contestation of standard language practices redefines voice and representation in a postcolonial context. In doing so, the paper contributes to broader discussions on language, power, and marginality in post-2000 Indian English literature.

Literature Review

Post-2000 Indian Anglophone fiction has become increasingly aware of how language constructs identity and exclusion. English is viewed not as neutral but as a medium of both empowerment and marginalization. The intersection of language, identity, and power has long been a cornerstone of postcolonial literary scholarship. This study employs a postcolonial and affect-theoretical lens, drawing on the concepts of Bhabha's hybridity, Spivak's subalternity, and Berlant's notion of emotional legibility to analyze how characters' speech encodes resistance and complicity.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, in his influential work *Decolonising the Mind*, argues that the continued dominance of colonial languages, such as English, results in psychological and cultural dislocation among colonized peoples. He asserts that linguistic imperialism reinforces structures of domination by alienating individuals from their native cultural expressions and histories (Ngũgĩ 16). In response to such critiques, many Indian Anglophone writers have used English in hybrid

and subversive ways to reclaim narrative space and reflect the layered social realities of postcolonial India.

Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity, developed in *The Location of Culture*, provides a critical lens for understanding how postcolonial subjects create new meanings in the "third space"—a site of cultural negotiation where dominant and subaltern voices intersect (Bhabha 56). In literary texts, this hybridity often emerges through code-switching, non-standard grammar, and regional idioms, all of which challenge the authority of "standard" English. Such linguistic fragmentation, far from indicating incoherence, becomes a resistant strategy that reflects the realities of the marginalized. In *A Burning*, Lovely, a hijra and aspiring actress, embodies this space.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", critiques how dominant epistemic structures render marginalized voices either inaudible or misinterpreted. She introduces the notion of "epistemic violence" to describe how institutional discourses distort or erase subaltern agency, even when the subaltern attempts to speak (Spivak 308). This theoretical framing is particularly useful when examining the character Jivan and her arrest for a social media post, which reflects the fact that her critique is misread as sedition.

Lauren Berlant further theorizes the role of affect and emotional expression in marginalized discourse in *Cruel Optimism*. Berlant's notion of "emotional legibility" contends that feelings must conform to socially recognizable frameworks to be deemed valid or sincere (Berlant 61). Jivan's heartfelt but grammatically imperfect pleas fail to register within the legal and media systems that demand a particular kind of rationalized and polished articulation. In contrast, characters like PT Sir, who conform to institutional norms of communication, gain both credibility and power.

Rajeswari Sunder Rajan extends this analysis by highlighting how English, especially in the postcolonial Indian context, serves as a gatekeeping mechanism that determines legitimacy and authority. In *The Scandal of the State*, Rajan argues that English often functions as a regulatory force, allowing access to institutions of power for some while excluding others based on linguistic performance (Rajan 189). Similarly, in Majumdar's novel, fluency becomes a marker of trustworthiness, while non-standard or emotionally expressive English is viewed as threatening or illegible.

Additionally, recent scholarship has turned to the precarities of digital expression in postcolonial societies. Devina Sarwatay and Usha Raman, in their study on youth and social media, note that marginalized individuals often self-regulate their online speech, aware of the heightened risks of misinterpretation, censorship, or surveillance (Sarwatay and Raman 546). This concern finds fictional reflection in *A Burning*, where Jivan's social media post, a rhetorical question, is reinterpreted as sedition, highlighting the fragile boundaries of expression in digitally mediated public life.

Despite growing interest in the themes of violence, injustice, and marginality in *A Burning*, a noticeable gap remains in critical engagement with the novel's linguistic construction. While several readings acknowledge its political critique, few have explored how Majumdar's stylistic strategies, particularly her use of fractured, hybrid English, highlight the exclusionary mechanisms inherent in language itself. This study addresses that gap by situating *A Burning* within broader debates about postcolonial voice, linguistic agency, and narrative authority in contemporary Indian fiction.

The study thus reveals English not as a unified medium, but as a contested and fractured system that mirrors the stratified realities of contemporary India. Majumdar's characters navigate this terrain with varying degrees of agency, making the novel a critical intervention in debates about voice, visibility, and the politics of linguistic representation. The novel's polyphonic voices —

fractured, hybrid, silenced, or theatrical — illustrate how English in postcolonial India functions not only as a medium of communication but also as a symbolic architecture of power, resistance, and exclusion.

Language as Terrain of Resistance and Exclusion

In *A Burning*, Megha Majumdar portrays language as both a site of resistance and a structure of exclusion. The novel's tripartite structure—alternating between the voices of Jivan, Lovely, and PT Sir reflects a unique relationship to English shaped by their position within India's socio-political hierarchy. Rather than offering English as a unifying national language, Majumdar exposes its fragmentary and exclusionary nature, where fluency or lack thereof directly correlates with access to justice and public visibility. As Yalda Poorghorban and Abolfazl Ghaderi note, contemporary fiction often highlights how "the subaltern subject's language is either mistranslated or aestheticized in ways that obscure political urgency" (Poorghorban and Ghaderi 45).

Jivan's speech, often fragmented and unpolished, accentuates her vulnerability as a young Muslim woman from the slums. Her rhetorical plea, "If the police didn't help me... then what is democracy?" (Majumdar 6), illustrates how her sincere yet linguistically non-normative voice fails to meet institutional standards of credibility. Despite her attempts to express anguish and seek accountability, her words are reframed as threats. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theory of "epistemic violence" is applicable here; Jivan's voice, though present, is systematically invalidated by state institutions that translate her speech into guilt rather than grievance (Spivak 308).

In contrast, Lovely, a transgender woman aspiring to stardom, speaks in an idiosyncratic blend of English and regional idioms, non-standard grammar, and vernacular expressions. Her declaration "Arrey baba, I am telling you, I am actress material" (Majumder 38) highlights how linguistic hybridity becomes a performative tool for asserting agency in a hostile society. Homi K. Bhabha's notion of the "third space" reveals how such hybrid expressions challenge normative discourses and allow alternative forms of identity to emerge (Bhabha 112).

PT Sir's language undergoes a notable transformation. Initially modest and hesitant, his diction grows increasingly refined and ideologically charged as he becomes complicit with political institutions. His carefully curated rhetoric positions him as a legitimate public actor, demonstrating how mastery of institutional language can cloak ethical compromise. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan has argued that English often functions as a "gatekeeper" in postcolonial contexts, regulating access to authority while excluding marginalized voices (Rajan 189).

What distinguishes Majumdar's narrative is its refusal to flatten these distinct linguistic registers into a single normative voice. Instead, the novel emphasizes contrast: Jivan's emotionally charged yet institutionally illegible pleas, Lovely's performative and flamboyant syntax, and PT Sir's polished, bureaucratic tone. Lauren Berlant's idea of "emotional legibility" suggests that affect must conform to normative expectations in order to be socially or legally recognized (Berlant 61). Jivan's effect, lacking the linguistic polish required for state recognition, is treated not as grief but as danger.

By weaving together disparate linguistic modes, *A Burning* critiques not only state violence and media sensationalism but also the linguistic structures that uphold them. English is not neutral in this novel; it is loaded with the weight of caste, class, religion, and gender. Through this interplay, Majumdar reveals how language becomes both a medium of self-expression and a terrain of symbolic struggle.

Jivan's Silenced Voice: The Limits of Subaltern Speech

Jivan's story in *A Burning* illustrates how language becomes a site of erasure for the marginalized. In their book, *Unequal Citizens: A Study of Muslim Women in India*, Hasan and Menon mention, "Muslim women probably comprise the poorest and most disadvantaged group in the country... the majority of them being among the poorest of the poor in India" (6). Jivan's characterisation by Majumdar corresponds with the above statement, as she is depicted as a poor Muslim woman living in a Kolkata slum. Moreover, due to this marginal identity, her credibility is constantly called into question. Her religious and class location denigrate and make her critical speeches hyper visible as threatening and hateful; her utterances when she tries to defend herself are made invisible, resulting in her ultimate voicelessness. Her attempts to articulate her innocence and humanity are repeatedly ignored, misinterpreted, or dismissed as illegitimate. Although linguistically articulate, her voice fails to penetrate institutional structures that have already cast her as guilty. Her social media post, "If the police watched them burn the train, doesn't that mean they are the terrorists?" (Majumdar 4), intended as a critique, is reinterpreted as sedition. This distortion embodies Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's notion of the subaltern's inability to "speak" within dominant discourses (Spivak 308), exemplifying that even when the subaltern speaks, their words are reframed to suit institutional agendas "the subaltern cannot speak" not because they are mute, but because no one is listening in good faith (Spivak 287).

Furthermore, the novel felicitously critiques the predominant discourses that plague contemporary India about being a "good" or "bad" Muslim. In the study examining Indian Muslim identities, Ahmed notes how the dominant discourses related to Muslim identities, even the so-called "liberal narratives", at times, unwittingly uphold this dichotomy that if one is nationalistic and secular, then they are regarded as "good" examples of Muslims. On the other hand, traits such as religious piety and expressions of anger and resistance, relegate one to the status of a "bad" Muslim. "This description of secular-progressive Muslim intelligentsia as representative of Muslim secularism is highly problematic... It goes well with the *good Muslim/bad Muslim* framework—an established template of Muslim politics in India" (Ahmed 782). Jivan's speech questioning and criticising the government unequivocally cast her as the above-mentioned bad Muslim. Jivan's situation effectively conveys the real-life challenges of Indian Muslims' requirement to continuously prove and reiterate their loyalty towards their nation, which especially involves speech acts that never disparage India.

Another instance that reiterates Jivan's desire to reclaim her narrative can be observed in these words: "Nobody is believing me... I only want to tell my story" (Majumdar 114). However, her appeals receive no meaningful response, highlighting Spivak's concept of epistemic violence, where subaltern knowledge is rejected as unintelligible or irrelevant to dominant narratives (Spivak 308). Her voice, though public and emotionally direct, is dismissed not because it is incomprehensible but because it originates from a position deemed socially illegitimate. This disavowal is most visible during Jivan's trial. Her observation, "The judge was not looking at me. The lawyers were talking fast, like I was not even there" (Majumdar 177), captures the alienation experienced in judicial settings. Legal discourse, couched in abstraction and speed, marginalizes those who lack linguistic fluency. Her physical presence is overshadowed by a procedural language that excludes her lived experience. In this light, the courtroom becomes a space where institutional decorum substitutes for justice.

Lauren Berlant's theory of "emotional legibility" offers insight into this erasure. Berlant notes that emotional appeals must conform to dominant frameworks to be recognized as authentic or actionable (61). Jivan's fear, grief, and longing do not align with the bureaucratic standards of

empathy and are, therefore, not registered as legitimate affective claims. Her emotions, rather than generating solidarity, are filtered through state suspicion and media sensationalism. Moreover, Jivan's social positioning as a poor Muslim woman renders her voice especially vulnerable to co-option and distortion. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan has argued that institutional narratives in postcolonial democracies often recast minority women as symbols of threat rather than victims of injustice (Rajan 165). Jivan's words are thus not evaluated on their merit but reframed to reinforce pre-existing narratives about national security and religious identity.

Jivan's final reflections before execution, "I wanted to tell her that I loved her. I wanted her to know I didn't do this thing" (Majumdar 282), are raw and intimate. Nevertheless, this emotional clarity fails to alter her fate. The state machinery that surrounds her never intended to hear her truth. Instead, her speech, while linguistically coherent and emotionally powerful, is rendered mute by systems that define what counts as credible or worthy. Majumdar uses Jivan's voice not only to narrate a personal tragedy but also to interrogate the broader structures that determine whose voices are heard and whose are silenced. Her fate is a stark reminder of Spivak's claim. In the absence of institutional will to listen, subaltern speech collapses into silence, not because the subaltern is voiceless but because the dominant power refuses to listen.

Jivan's voice is not only marginalized by class and gender but also by her Muslim identity in a political climate increasingly hostile to religious minorities. Her linguistic vulnerability is inseparable from the broader politics of Islamophobia in India's post-CAA context (Hussain 2023). Jivan's failure to achieve narrative legitimacy starkly contrasts with Lovely's linguistic exuberance, which transforms marginality into a theatrical assertion of identity.

Lovely's Performed Hybridity: Language as Aspiration and Agency

Ruth Vanita in *Love's Rite: Same-Sex Marriages in Modern India,* writes, "Indian tradition has never been solely heterosexual or patriarchal; it has always had space for those who love differently, live differently" (1). In *A Burning*, Majumdar substantiates this argument through Lovely's characterisation as a hijra woman who is also a participant in the cultural and emotional tapestry of India. Her usage of English is emblematic of her pursuit of stardom, fame, and validation. Her silence in the court and the refusal to testify in favor of Jivan represent the survival strategy undertaken by marginalised people. Her silent act preserves her newfound fame and validation, but makes her complicit in condemning an innocent person.

Lovely, the hijra (transgender) character in *A Burning,* exemplifies linguistic hybridity as both a survival mechanism and a form of self-assertion. Her English, theatrical and non-standard, sharply contrasts with the bureaucratic fluency of PT Sir and the anxious articulation of Jivan. Rather than aiming for grammatical correctness, Lovely embraces a vibrant, hybrid syntax that blends regional idioms with cinematic imagery. Her claim, "My English, it is the Best... like a heroine in the movie!" (Majumdar 38), reflects how language becomes a stage for identity performance. Drawing on Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity, Lovely's voice emerges from an "in-between" space that resists cultural binaries and asserts presence through linguistic creativity (Bhabha 114).

Unlike Jivan, whose voice is misread by institutional systems, Lovely uses language to project aspiration: "In the future, I am becoming heroine in big movie. Then I will be walking on red carpet in golden sari" (Majumdar 57). Her speech does not seek assimilation but reinvents visibility. As Judith Butler notes, gender is performative, a reiteration of social acts (Butler 191). Lovely's stylized language is one such act, challenging dominant norms of femininity and transgender expression. Her voice becomes both expressive and constitutive of her identity.

Nevertheless, hybridity does not exempt her from systemic pressures. Faced with testifying at Jivan's trial, she reflects, "If I am doing right thing, I will be poor forever. If I am keeping mouth shut, I can become film star" (Majumdar 208). Her silence is not betrayal but a consequence of survival under institutional compulsion. Even empowered speech can be rendered mute by systemic coercion.

While Jivan's voice is criminalized and PT Sir's legitimized, Lovely inhabits a precarious middle ground. Her linguistic exuberance risks being dismissed as a spectacle. Ashley Tellis cautions against reducing hijra characters to caricatures in Indian fiction (Tellis 89). However, Majumdar grounds Lovely's voice in emotional realism; her hybrid English articulates a longing for dignity, love, and recognition. Through her, the novel demonstrates how marginalized voices use language not for conformity but to reimagine the self. Lovely's unapologetic, unorthodox expression reveals the subversive potential of hybridity in postcolonial narratives.

PT Sir's Language of Complicity: The Grammar of Power

PT Sir's transformation in *A Burning* illustrates how linguistic fluency can facilitate moral compromise. In contrast to Jivan and Lovely, whose speech reflects exclusion and resilience, PT Sir's mastery of formal English expands with his proximity to political authority. Initially cautious, "I am only attending the rally because I was passing by. No interest, no political ambitions" (Majumdar 24), his tone becomes increasingly bureaucratic: "We must target the right kind of people for our schemes, the ones who can deliver votes" (Majumdar 141). His evolving rhetoric marks a shift from personal hesitation to ideological alignment.

In Decolonising the Mind, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o argues that language internalizes cultural control, severing individuals from lived realities while embedding them within systems of dominance (Ngũgĩ 16). PT Sir's polished English facilitates institutional access but distances him from ethical accountability. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan describes English as a "gatekeeper" in postcolonial societies, granting authority while excluding dissenting voices (Rajan 189). PT Sir's fluency camouflages complicity, as seen when he tells Lovely, "The system will take care of everything. You need not worry" (Majumdar 197). His impersonal reassurance cloaks inaction beneath bureaucratic formality.

Eventually, PT Sir adopts the rhetoric of exclusion: "This country is for those who respect its values. We will not tolerate enemies within" (Majumdar 212). His speech reflects how language aligned with state power can reinforce majoritarian ideologies. His transition from a hesitant teacher to a vocal nationalist underscores how institutional discourse can enable detachment from justice. Even in moments where ethical action is possible, such as when Lovely approaches him about Jivan's case, PT Sir chooses to remain ambiguous. He tells her, "The system will take care of everything. You need not worry" (Majumdar 197).

Majumdar presents PT Sir's linguistic arc as a cautionary narrative. His refined English, once a tool of mobility, becomes a mechanism of ideological conformity. In contrast to Jivan and Lovely, whose voices remain constrained by marginality, PT Sir's voice expands but at the cost of ethical clarity. Through him, the novel critiques how power and language intersect to obscure moral responsibility in contemporary political life.

Digital Surveillance and Emotional Legibility

In *A Burning*, digital expression emerges as both a tool for visibility and a site of vulnerability. Jivan's arrest for a social media post, "If the police watched them burn the train, doesn't that mean they are the terrorists?" (Majumdar 4), demonstrates how online speech, particularly from

marginalized voices, is easily misread, criminalized, and manipulated. Her rhetorical question, meant as a critique, is stripped of nuance and recoded as sedition. This process exemplifies how digital platforms, while seemingly democratic, often reproduce structures of surveillance and suppression. Lauren Berlant's idea of "emotional legibility" is particularly relevant. She argues that public emotion must conform to dominant frameworks to be recognized as sincere or actionable (Berlant 61). In Jivan's case, her outrage is not read as grief or concern but as aggression. Her effect is filtered through nationalistic paranoia and media sensationalism, which reframe her expression as a threat rather than testimony.

The novel's critique becomes sharper when situated within India's contemporary digital climate. Real-life incidents, such as the May 2025 arrest of a student in Pune for a post on Instagram related to Indo-Pakistan tensions, mirror the fictional narrative. In both instances, the state reacts disproportionately to minor acts of online expression, invoking sedition or anti-terror laws. These parallels highlight the precarious nature of digital speech in environments characterized by heightened surveillance. The Indian #MeToo movement offers another point of comparison. While platforms like Twitter amplified voices long silenced by patriarchal structures, many testimonies were met with disbelief, defamation suits, or media distortion. Journalist Priya Ramani's case, in which she was acquitted only after a prolonged trial in 2021, exemplifies the conditional nature of digital empowerment. Like Jivan, her voice had to pass through legal and public scrutiny before it was validated.

Scholars Devina Sarwatay and Usha Raman note that Indian youth today constantly navigate between visibility and risk in their online lives. Their study of social media habits reveals how users from marginalized backgrounds are especially conscious of how their posts may be interpreted by both peers and authorities (Sarwatay and Raman 546). *A Burning* tap into this precariousness, revealing how English, when used in digital spaces, becomes a double-edged sword that offers agency but also exposes users to ideological policing. Majumdar's novel thus complicates the idea of free expression. It reminds readers that linguistic fluency, even in a globally dominant language like English, offers no protection from misinterpretation when power intervenes. Whether through courts, media, or algorithms, speech is continually shaped by the structures that receive it. Jivan's fate stands as a stark critique of the contemporary state's role in shaping, silencing, and criminalizing marginal voices online.

Conclusion

Megha Majumdar's *A Burning* illuminates the complexities of language as both an instrument of empowerment and a vehicle of marginalization in contemporary India. Through the intersecting narratives of Jivan, Lovely, and PT Sir, the novel illustrates how linguistic expression is intricately linked to questions of visibility, identity, and systemic power. Jivan's grammatically imperfect yet emotionally resonant voice is emblematic of a subject denied institutional legitimacy. At the same time, Lovely's hybrid, performative English illustrates the potential of linguistic play to subvert normative expectations and assert a marginalized identity. In contrast, PT Sir's refined and politically aligned language reveals how fluency can both confer privilege and mask complicity.

This study has demonstrated how Majumdar's use of hybrid English destabilizes the monologic dominance of the standard language, reflecting the fractured and layered realities of postcolonial Indian life. By embedding linguistic plurality into the very structure of her narrative, Majumdar creates a textured space where voice becomes not only a medium of self-expression but a terrain of resistance. In brief, *A Burning* challenges the reader to rethink the cultural and political economies of English in India, drawing attention to who is allowed to speak, how they are heard,

and what is lost in translation. This novel and the resultant discourse, emphasize the critical need to listen to voices that emerge from the peripheries, not despite their linguistic differences, but because of them.

As Indian English fiction continues to grapple with questions of representation and legitimacy, novels like *A Burning* challenge scholars to consider how language operates not merely within texts but within the sociopolitical circuits of reception, translation, and censorship.

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