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A Critical Discourse Analysis of Populist Rhetoric in Imran Khan's Minar-e-Pakistan Address
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Abstract
The study examines populist rhetoric in Imran Khan's Minar-e-Pakistan address. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) investigates how influential figures use language to shape others' thoughts and actions. CDA is a research approach that analyses various themes in Khan's speech. This research utilizes Fairclough's three-dimensional model to explore Khan's speech on textual, discursive, and social levels, revealing the ideologies behind his words. The qualitative method is employed, focusing on the social constructivist paradigm, since the reality presented in Khan's speech is influenced by its context. Imran Khan's Minar-e-Pakistan speech serves as a case study, with non-probability purposive sampling used. This analysis examines how Khan's spoken discourse aims to evoke feelings among ordinary people, foster a sense of inclusion, and inform them about his concerns regarding their rights and his plans to address their issues. Populist discourse appears in his speech, as he differentiates between the common people and the elite. His address criticises leaders of two prominent Pakistani political parties; Khan accuses both of neglecting the public and misusing resources gained through taxpayer funding.

Introduction

The use of language in Pakistan is deeply rooted in the power dynamics, reflecting a complex socio-political landscape (Saleem, Bhatti, & Chattha, 2024). Language serves two functions: transactional and interactional. The transactional function emphasises the transfer of hypothetical data and the creation of concepts in culture, literature, thought, and feeling (Ali, 2024). In the interactional function, the focus is on maintaining strong interpersonal connections (Ali, 2024). The concept of populism is growing in many Asian countries within the discourse of political leaders (Omar, Hamouda, Aldawsari, 2020). They utilise populist discourse to influence the minds of ordinary people and evoke their sentiments to gain support from the general populace.

Weyland (2001) defined populism as a strategy politicians employ to exercise governmental power through unmediated and institutionalised support. Populism represents the common people against the elite, emphasising the people's choices and working in their favour (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014). The nature of populism is shaped and reshaped by the context in which it is constructed. The hybrid nature of populism can be observed in Europe, America, and Asia, as populism is influenced by the social environment (Gidron/Bonikowski 2013).

Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto was the first populist leader of Pakistan who stood against the elites and supported the common people, advocating for their rights on various platforms by promoting one slogan, 'food, clothes and shelter' (Zahoor, 2017). The Tehreek-e-Insaf political party was established under the leadership of Imran Khan in 1996, with his most famous slogan, 'end corruption, clear out the political mafias' (Delcan, 2005). The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party won the 2018 election following a prolonged struggle by Khan and his team, which culminated in his nomination as the 22nd Prime Minister of Pakistan (Hassan, 2020). It is considered one of the parties that most frequently employs populist rhetoric to sway people's sentiments and demonstrate that they stand with them against the oppressive elite system (Faiz, 2022). Critical discourse analysis focuses on the language used by speakers and the ideologies they portray in their speech to influence public opinion, yielding desired outcomes (Omar, Hamouda, & Aldawsari, 2020).

Research Objective

To explore Imran Khan's use of language in political discourse, emphasizing on the employment of populist rhetoric in his speech.

Research Questions

Q.1. How does Imran Khan use language in political discourse, particularly in terms of populist rhetoric in his speech?

Rationale

Populism is a rapidly growing concept in the modern world; it is promoted by politicians to appeal to the sentiments of the general public. The main reason for selecting this topic is that critical discourse analysis of populist rhetoric is one of the least explored fields in the Pakistani context, particularly focusing on Imran Khan's populist ideologies by differentiating the common population from the corrupt elite. Khan is regarded as a populist leader; the language he employs to engage the general public is analysed using Fairclough's three-dimensional model.

Literature Review

Populist ideologies are gaining momentum worldwide as public interest increases. Although populism is spreading globally, it still lacks a clear definition. Muller (2016) describes populist discourse as an approach used by politicians aimed at popular classes, often involving criticism of the regime, its officials, and elites in support of the common people. It meets the needs of ordinary citizens by addressing their demands and ideas (Chilton, 2004). Populist ideology distinguishes the general public from corrupt elites, placing them at opposite ends (Aslanidis, 2015). Mudde (2004) argues that politics should be viewed as a broad expression of the people's will.

Critical discourse analysis centres on the underlying meaning of texts and the ideological narratives behind the language employed, alongside the utilisation of power (Tahir, Nawaz, & Yousaf, 2022). CDA aids analysts in understanding, resisting, and exposing social realities (Van Dijk, 1993). It reveals uneven and politically influenced narratives constructed by those in power (Fairclough, 1993). CDA scrutinises the language of influential figures to uncover the narratives they seek to construct and the ideologies they aim to instil in public consciousness.

Sociohistorical studies position populism within the framework of democracy, as the ideological core of this term centres on two key components: nation and people. It emphasises the agenda that power belongs to the people in a pure democratic state (Urbinati, 2019). From the perspective of the economic dimension, populism focuses on weak governance, it is a failure of dominant parties to fulfil the needs of the common public (Ibid).

Trump wasn't truly a populist, as his speeches failed to pay homage to common people. However, following the inclusion of Stephen Miller and Steve Bannon in his team, his speeches incorporated themes associated with populist rhetoric (Rubsamen, 2020). His 2016 presidential campaign embraced populist rhetoric, enabling him to win the election by appealing to the masses with his language (Rubsamen, 2020). Whereas, Narendra Modi`s Independence Day speech emphasised Modi's populist communicative style and his implementation of discursive strategies for having strong ties with the population. The data highlights that the discursive strategies used by Modi in his speech are: "narrative slavery", politics of appeasement, Amrit Kal, and "Nation First", which are used to hold the sentiments of the population (Inam, Manzoor, & Mukhtar, 2024).

Bilawal Bhutto alternates between English, Urdu, and Sindhi languages in his speeches, signalling his navigation of class distinctions, centralised authority, and regional affiliations. In contrast, Imran Khan exclusively uses Urdu, aligning himself with populist ideals that oppose the elite and resonate with the public. This contrast underscores the significant role of language in constructing political identities and shaping power relations (Saleem, Bhatti, & Chattha, 2024). A study was conducted to analyse populist language in ten of Imran Khan's speeches by implementing Ruth Wodak's discourse-historical approach using Jan Werner Müller's theory of populism. The result of the study highlighted that in most of Khan's speeches, superlative language was used, and most often, he focuses on imagined moral legitimacy to power rather than empirical legitimacy (Shahab ud din, Ilahi, & Khan, 2024).

A study was conducted focusing on nationalist and populist discourse of the right-wing movement towards immigrants in different Arab countries, with an emphasis on Egypt, Lebanon, and Jordan. The results of the study highlighted that the nationalist and populist discourse is in opposition to Arab countries' migrants and refugees (Omar, Hamouda, & Aldawsari, 2020).

Research was conducted on the rise of populism in Western democracies, with a specific focus on the United States and Hungary. This research centres on two main populist leaders: Trump and Orban. Both Trump and Orban have portrayed a negative perception of immigration, often referring to immigrants as aliens. Each leader had their own technique of dealing with the public. They employed a language in which they exploited public fear and threatened the pillars of democracy (Bruno, 2024).

Research Methodology

This research study employs a qualitative method that collects abundant participant data (Holliday, 2015). The social constructivism research paradigm is used, in which individuals develop their subjective meanings that are socially and historically formed through interaction with others (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I have adopted this research paradigm because the populist language used by Imran Khan influences the minds of common people, and the meaning is constructed from the context in which the speech was delivered. This language helps him emotionally manipulate people so that they can support him in the election by telling them that he is one of them. Fairclough's three-dimensional model is utilised to analyse the data. The analysis occurs on three levels: 1. Textual Analysis (Description), 2. Discursive practice (Interpretation) 3. Social Practice (Explanation) (Fairclough, 1995). The sample of this study is Imran Khan's Minar-e-Pakistan Speech. The sampling strategy involves non-probability sampling specifically; I have focused on purposive sampling. I used purposive sampling, because I want to analyse the populist rhetoric used in Imran Khan's address. The main objective is to analyse the language used in this speech by Khan and the ideology he is trying to propagate amongst the public. The speech was delivered in Lahore on 20th October 2011, Sunday. The language used in this speech was Urdu, and the researcher has translated the speech from Urdu to English. Merlin AI: AI chat assistant was the application used to translate the speech from Urdu to English. The spoken corpus was collected from a social media database.

Norman Fairclough's 3D Model

Fairclough (1995) proposed a three-dimensional model elaborating on the connection between language, power, and ideology. His model is considered the hub of CDA and is one of the most prominent models. Norman Fairclough has further subdivided this model into three levels: Text analysis (Description), Discourse Practice interpretation (Process Analysis), and Socio-cultural practice Explanation (Social Analysis) (Fairclough, as cited in Tahir, Nawaz, & Yousaf, 2022).
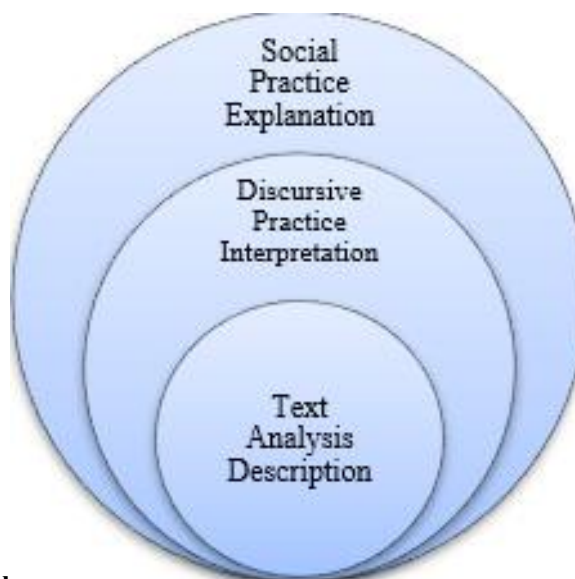

Figure 01: Fairclough 3D model

In textual analysis, the focus is on the lexical items, cohesive devices, semantics and language structures within a text (Alassiri, 2024). Moreover, in discursive practice, the emphasis is placed on the interconnection between the creative and explanatory process of discursive practice and text (Fairclough, 1995). At the third level of the Fairclough 3D model, the social practices are analysed to explore societal implications of the discourse (Martin Rojo, 2001).

Findings and Discussion

Textual Analysis

The primary level of Fairclough's three-dimensional model is the textual level. The textual analysis of discourse concentrates on the form of language and interprets the content from a grammatical perspective (Zehra, Rehan, Hayat, & Batool, 2022). Analysis begins at the level of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences, following grammatical rules. The textual analysis of Khan's speech is limited to the use of pronouns, adjectives, parallelism, repetition, and cohesive devices (Zehra, Rehan, Hayat, & Batool, 2022).

The use of Pronouns

Khan used pronouns in his speech to evoke sentiments amongst the public and promote a sense of inclusion, encouraging people to support him. The most common pronouns in Khan's speech are Personal, Demonstrative and Possessive. Pronouns can develop a friendly environment as they carry relational value to attract the ideologies of common people (Fairclough, 1996). Pronouns such as " We", " You", "My", "Them", "Our", "They", "Their", " I", "He", " It". According to Fairclough (1996), the use of the second-person pronoun is usually associated with power. Some extracts from Khan's speech are given below:

"**We** are one! Where **we** stand today, **we** are beginning a new Pakistan".

"**We** are one! **My** brothers, my sisters—today I want to give you a program. I won't speak of past politicians anymore".

"**We**, Pakistan's youth, know how to break this partnership".

"One slogan, one name—Imran Khan! Imran Khan! **We** are one!".

"**We** will bring these crocodiles of corruption to justice".

Khan used the pronoun "we" to foster a sense of inclusivity among the public. This approach aims to encourage the sentiments of the people; as a result, the public will support him during elections. He intends to present a model of a better Pakistan with their help, promoting the idea that he is a superior politician compared to others. The pronoun "we" nurtures a positive relationship between Khan and the public. It is also employed to express populist thought. Khan refers to politicians as crocodiles who seek to consume the rights of the general populace, depicting these elite politicians as corrupt. Khan and the public will stand together as one unit to eliminate these corrupt elites who have consistently sidelined the public from their true rights and misused public funds for investments.

"But, O Lahoris, I have a great complaint with **you**— **You** are very slow; it takes time to wake **you** up. But once **you** awaken, no one can stand against **you**".

"Today, standing before **you**, **I** promise: No power—neither Asif Zardari nor Nawaz Sharif—can stop this flood".

"But **you**, Asif Zardari, have done wonders— Forget bread and shelter—because of **you**, 16,000 people committed suicide".

"**My** young people, **my** sisters, PTI workers, ISF".

Khan used the pronoun "you" to refer to the public and to inform them that these strong political parties and their leaders, Asif Zardari and Nawaz Sharif, can't suppress the power of the common people. Khan metaphorically described the audience as the flood in his speech, because the turnout of the public for his address was massive. Khan prioritises the common public, a leader who works selflessly for the public, and should be allowed to showcase their expertise in the field.

By using the pronoun "my," he seeks to gain the confidence of youth, women, and the educated class, which makes up more than half of the country's population. By demonstrating that he includes them, he conveys an ideology suggesting that they should also include him, as he attempts to refer to them as part of the family. Through this kind of language, he aims to manipulate them.

The Use of Adjectives

Imran Khan has used several positive and negative adjectives in his speech. The positive adjectives mainly serve to praise Khan and his efforts, such as "Great leader, Ideological leader, massive inswinger." These adjectives emphasise Khan's qualities as a leader, leaving a lasting impression on people. Meanwhile, Khan mostly uses negative adjectives to criticise politicians in the country who oppose him and his supporters. Negative adjectives like "Crocodile, cowardly, corrupt, politicised" reflect the undesirable traits of opposition politicians.

Table 1: Positive and Negative Adjectives in Khan's Speech

Positive Adjectives	Negative Adjectives
Massive crowd or **massive** inswinger	**Crocodiles** of corruption
Great leader	**Cowardly** gatherings
Ideological leader	**Politicised** police
New Pakistan	You are very **slow**
Happy from within, that change is coming	**Corrupt** politicians
Your country is **rich**	**Poor** people

Khan achieved his rhetorical purpose by using adjectives in his speech, resulting in a positive impact on the audience by appealing to their emotions, portraying Khan as one of the best leaders to govern the country. Additionally,

the use of a negative adjective highlighted that he employs populist discourse, and the words indicate that he is against injustice and wants to unveil the secrets of dirty politics played to manipulate the minds of the common public.

The Use of Parallelism

Parallelism in textual analysis focuses on the repetition of grammatical structure, creates a rhythm and emphasises the relationship between concepts, thereby balancing the ideas (Fahnestock, 2011). The main purpose of using parallelism in the speech was to emphasise certain parts of the address, which can draw the public's sentiments and attract their attention. Along with the sentence structure, there is repetition at the level of words, especially at the noun level.

Table 2: Parallelism in Khan's speech

Rickshaw drivers, taxi drivers, street vendors, laborers, farmers
Police stations, courts, and land clerks
Justice is bought, not given
Iqbal dreamed, Quaid made it real. It's our duty to build it. We are sons of Pakistan
Factories shut down, there's no gas, and unemployment rises
Long live Pakistan! Long live Imran Khan!
Zulfiqar Bhutto was a nationalist. He stood against imperialism. He gave the slogan of 'Roti, Kapda, Makaan
Unemployment, inflation, slavery to the U.S.!

In the list above, parallelism is used in the language Khan speaks in his address. Repetition takes place at the lexical, phrasal, clausal and sentence levels, showing solidarity and inclusivity.

The use of Repetition

The list below highlights the pronouns repeatedly used by Khan in his speech. The main reason for using these pronouns was to create a sense of inclusivity amongst the public, to help them understand that he is concerned about the rights of common people, and he will work against all odds to protect the rights of common people.

Table 3: Frequency of Pronouns in Khan's Speech

Pronouns	Frequency
It	18
Them	3
Our	15
They	5
Their	6
My	10
Your	12
Me	6
I	18
We	25
You	30
He	5

The Use of Cohesive Devices

Cohesive devices focus on a series of lexical and grammatical structures that create consistency amongst sentences (Hidayat, 2016). They enhance clarity and add reader comprehension (Hidayat, 2016). According to Fairclough (1996), conjunctions and cohesive devices are used to link vocabulary and ideas together.

Table 4: Cohesive Devices in Khan's Speech

Coordinating and Subordinating Conjunctions	Cohesive Devices
Although	Also
That	Besides
Neither…nor	Most of all
As	However

Even if	Before
But	Shortly
Although	Now
While	Due to
So	After
Then	Although
Because	
And	
If	
While	

Some sentences are given below, highlighting contextual examples from Khan's speech:

But, O Lahoris, I have a great complaint with you. You are very slow; it takes time to wake you up.

Youth of the People's Party **and** even Nawaz Sharif's current workers.

Most of all, I want to salute Pakistan's media today. You awakened the Pakistani nation! You awakened Lahoris!

These are some of the examples taken from Khan's speech to highlight the cohesive devices in the text, including: Conjunctions, lexical cohesion, references, etc. Both types of coordinating and subordinating conjunctions are used along with several other cohesive devices.

Discursive Practice

This stage of Fairclough's three-dimensional model is divided into two facets: Institutional (e.g., editorial procedure) and discourse process (which focuses on the production and consumption of the text by altering it). Discursive practice examines the intertextuality of the text and is more interpretive (Sheyholislami, 2001). The address is further analysed on these sub levels: Text production, consumption, intertextuality and interdiscursivity.

Text Production

Khan and his scriptwriter co-produced the piece. The primary aim of the production is to utilise populist rhetoric in favour of the common people and against corrupt elite reformists. The selected context for this address was Minar-e-Pakistan, Lahore, as it is a historic site in the country. He recognises that the crowd will gather at this location, which will significantly impact his election campaign.

Text Consumption

The consumers of the text are the masses of Lahore. Furthermore, the address was broadcast on the most popular television news channels in Pakistan, specifically targeting the people of Lahore while generally addressing the entire population to garner support for his election campaign. The target audience included working-class individuals, youth, farmers, labourers, and police officers.

Intertextuality

According to Fairclough (1995), the discursive analysis also includes intertextual analysis, which examines the text and discourse in the analytical framework. Intertextual analysis focuses on analysing the text from an interpretative perspective.

The intertextual analysis of Imran Khan's speech is given below in the table. The discursive Strategies, along with references from the spoken text, are highlighted to identify the intertextual elements present in the speech. The findings indicate that Khan's speech revolves around political discourse, which is further moulded, according to convenience, into different discursive practices to appeal to the audience. It involves various discursive strategies, including populist discourse, inclusive discourse, discourse of the public realm, economic discourse, and the discourse of justice. Some of the intertextual elements include a nationalist approach, populist language, global discourse of corruption, working-class representation, national unity, etc.

Discourse Strategies	Textual Reference	Intertextuality
Populist Discourse	➢ "No power, neither Asif Zardari nor Nawaz Sharif, can stop this flood". ➢ "I welcome rickshaw drivers, taxi drivers, street vendors, labourers, farmers". ➢ "A massive inswinger is coming— The first ball will knock out both batsmen!".	Representation of masses Working class representation Reference to cricket
Political Discourse: Emotive Language	➢ "Pakistanis' money in Swiss banks is approximately the same. Who will bring it back? Your **servant**, Inshallah, Imran Khan will!". ➢ "Iqbal dreamed, Quaid made it real. We must build it. We are **sons** of Pakistan". ➢ **"My young** people, **my sisters**, PTI workers, ISF, police officers who are **happy** from within that **change** is coming".	Global Corruption Discourse Appealing nature Nationalist Approach Populist Approach
Inclusive Discourse	➢ "We are one! Where we stand today". ➢ "We are beginning a new Pakistan". ➢ "One slogan, one name—Imran Khan! Imran Khan! We are one!". ➢ "Let's end hatred and conflict—let's unite. Then this land will yield gold, and every corner will bloom".	Nationalist Unity Political slogans National unity fostering prosperity
Discourse of Public Realm	➢ "Lahoris once you are awaken, no one can stand against you". ➢ "I congratulate you all for correcting your direction today". ➢ "Whoever stands in the way of the flood will be swept away".	Mobilise people for social or political awakening. Moral references Populist Language
Economic Discourse	➢ "No one can enter politics without declaring their assets". ➢ "We'll ask them—how did you become billionaires?". ➢ "We will bring these crocodiles of corruption to justice". ➢ "Inshallah, we will collect taxes in this country and defeat the corruption that has destroyed Pakistan!". ➢ "Because of corruption, unemployment, inflation, and slavery to the U.S.!". ➢ "One minister says, "I don't know how 40 million appeared in my account". ➢ " Has four crore rupees ever come into your bank account? O Mian Sahib, give us a break, let our turn come".	Accountability Corrupt politicians
Discourse of Justice	➢ "In courts, justice is bought, not given". ➢ "We will computerise all land records—just like the rest of the world". ➢ "First, we will depoliticise the police".	Corrupt system Global trends. Accountable law enforcement system.

Table 05: The use of Intertextuality in Khan's speech

Sociocultural Analysis

Sociocultural analysis connects the language with the social context in which it is being used and the social factors that affect the usage of the language (Tahir, Nawaz, & Yousuf, 2022). The data focuses on the language used in Khan's address and its impact on the public's mind. Populism is considered one of the growing phenomena in global politics in developing and developed countries (Hadiz & Chryssogelos, 2017). Populism is a distinct communicative style that focuses on the ideology embedded in the speaker's mind. It distinguishes between the two groups in society: the elite and the poor. In this speech, Khan supports the citizens of Pakistan by taking a stand against the elite politicians. Some extracts from the speech are given below, highlighting a sociocultural analysis of the text.

"I welcome here our auto drivers, taxi drivers, cart pushers, labourers, farmers, government employees, who today are inwardly happy that change is coming".

Khan uses populist language to persuade people by showing concern for them and addressing them directly. Most of the time, he speaks to low-income working-class individuals, whom he refers to as the supporters of change, those who believe in removing corrupt political leaders and have faith in him, as he considers himself one of them and consistently stands by the rights of the common public. Khan's address is designed to resonate with the sentiments of the people by informing them about their basic rights, enabling them to connect with the situation he discusses; as a

result, he has an edge in convincing people. He ensures that the public is persuaded that he is the man who will work for the rights of the public.

"Today, standing before you, I promise: No power, neither Asif Zardari nor Nawaz Sharif, can stop this flood. Whoever stands in its way will be swept away. We, Pakistan's youth, know how to break this partner".

Khan refers to the public as a "flood" due to the significant turnout at his address. He tries to convince them by criticising the leaders of two major political parties in Pakistan. By addressing them, he tells the audience that the power of the public is so strong that even the most popular politicians in the country cannot deny it. Anyone who stands against the public will face their wrath, and they will dismantle the partnerships of these political leaders who are colluding for their benefit while taking the public for granted.

"But Mian Sahib, answer me this, how will you stand against crocodiles like Asif Zardari? You can't even handle mosquitoes!

"No one can enter politics without declaring their assets. The day they declare assets, truth will emerge".

In his address, it is quite evident that he believes most of the politicians of Pakistan are corrupt and they should surrender in front of the court of law. Only then should they be allowed to enter politics if they are eligible and able to claim their assets. He believes that all of them are guilty under the court of law if the proper investigation begins. He also believes that the rich politicians have acquired these assets with the money of the public and their taxes, and by addressing this issue to the public, he wants to highlight to them these sensitive matters about the injustice the politicians have done to them by not assigning them their appropriate rights.

'First, depoliticise the police. If Karachi's police are depoliticised, peace will return.'

Khan asserts that for a long time, the police in Pakistan have remained under the control of political elites, maintaining different standards for elites and the citizens. However, he prefers a nation where there is no discrimination. Everyone will be treated equally in the court of law. This will promote peace, and justice will prevail under his governance.

" Lahoris, but no one can compete with you when you wake up."

Khan believes that the people of Lahore are in a long slumber. However, once they are awakened, their roar will be heard. He is trying to convince the citizens of Lahore that no power in the country surpasses the power of the public when it is utilised appropriately.

We are one! Where we stand today, we are beginning a new Pakistan.

By using a pronoun like "we", he evokes the sentiments of inclusivity amongst the public, that he is one of them. No one is superior or inferior. They believe in the slogan; unity is strength which will help them to have a better nation.

Who will bring money back from the Swiss bank? Your servant, Inshallah, Imran Khan will!

Khan is trying to set a narrative in society that he is a saviour in the state, and he is the servant of the public who will serve the public from every possible aspect. He is trying to convey an ideology that the main reason for joining politics is to end long-planned injustice in the country.

We will computerise all land records, just like the rest of the world.

He will digitise all the records to escape from foul play in the country, to have everything at his fingertips, so that no one can claim any property illegally. He believes that the world is moving towards the digitalisation of records, so he will implement things in his own country.
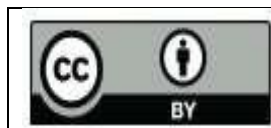
Conclusion

This study employs a Critical Discourse Analysis model on Imran Khan's Minar-e-Pakistan speech, using Fairclough's three-dimensional framework. Fairclough's 3D model has been implemented on Khan's speech at three levels: "Text, Discourse Practice, and Socio-cultural practice". The main purpose of this study was to analyse the language used by Khan in his address. It was observed that Khan employed populist rhetoric to appeal to the sentiments of the public. The choice of vocabulary indicates that Khan is against elite politicians and in favour of the public. He seeks to have a deep ideological impact on the minds of citizens by telling them that he is their servant and always thinks in favour of the public, and he will go against all odds to protect the rights of citizens. Conversely, he aims to challenge the image of two prominent political leaders who have consistently prioritised their interests over those of the public. By doing this, he endeavours to create emotional sensitivity among the public.

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