

## A Comparative Analysis of the Women's Struggles: A Study on Autobiographic Novels of Mannu Bhandari & Maitreyi Pushpa

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**Abstract:** The present research paper mostly focused on the compares of two Hindi autobiographical narratives by Mannu Bhandari and Maitreyi Pushpa. The purpose is to understand how they portray women's everyday lives and how narrative style shapes meaning. The research design of present research is qualitative and comparative. The approach is interpretivist with a feminist based on the primary texts from "Ek Kahani Yeh Bhi and Kasturi Kundal Base". The methods are close reading, thematic coding, and analysis of voice, tone, form, and pace. Tables and simple graphs are used to summarize patterns while The study has two objectives. The first objective is to compare the depiction of women's lives and show where the texts converge and where they differ. The second objective is to analyze narrative style and personal voice and show how form creates meaning and emotion. The findings show shared pressures in both texts. There is heavy domestic labour, unequal marriage rules, and a constant pull of duty over selfhood. The texture of these pressures differs by context. In Bhandari's urban literary world, control works through reputation and quiet gatekeeping, and change grows slowly by steady work. In Pushpa's rural and small-town world, control is explicit and policed, and change appears through visible and eventful acts. Convergence is clear in domestic labour, marriage, and the work-duty conflict. Divergence is clear in mobility, voice, and agency.

**Keywords:** Comparative, Women, Struggle, Study, Autobiographic, Novels, Mannu Bhandari, Maitreyi Pushpa, Analysis

### 1) Introduction:

The different decades have various writers writing on the different conditions and situations of women in society. Most disciplines not only involve experienced women but also struggles, social pressure, psychological conditions at various stages, inequality, cultural societies, etc. The autobiographic novel is the best way to express and make mirrors of different experiences in the society. Under Autobiographical narratives—Mannu Bhandari's Ek Kahani Yeh Bhi and Maitreyi Pushpa's Kasturi Kundal Base. Both texts document women's lives as they were lived, with uncertainty, resistance, and everyday strain. Together, they offer a grounded view of what it means to be a woman, writer, wife, and self in North Indian society.

Bhandari's account is introspective and candid, tracing the inner work of reconciling creative ambition with the pressures of marriage and literary institutions. Pushpa's narrative is outward-facing and forceful, depicting the material hardships and social constraints of rural and small-town patriarchy. While their tones differ—one meditative, the other declarative—both expose how gendered expectations shape women's choices and identities.

### 2) Objectives of the Research:

This research paper aims to present a comparative analysis of these two autobiographies, focusing specifically on how they depict women's experiences. By examining narrative style, personal voice, and thematic focus. The first object is compare of women's living phenomena under narration of both autobiography and the second object is an analysis of narrative style and personal voice.

### 3) Research Methods & Design:

The present research is a qualitative study with an interpretivist approach. The study focused on the comparative textual analysis, thus a comparative case study as research design under the purposeful scene sampling. Further data analysis method undertaken of qualitative textual analysis on a comparative basis. The first methods of data analysis is thematic analysis, while the second is narrative-voice analysis to achieve both objectives of the research study. The optional, as an alternative power mapping, used for the identify the approval, shame, rules and reputation the major tools used NVIVO and python for the analysis of this research study.

### 4) Results of Comparative Textual Analysis:

Here, Table:1 represents the two autobiographies side by side to show the same pressures working through different textures of life. Both writers record the weight of unpaid work, asymmetric marriages, limits on movement, and the constant negotiation over when and how a woman may speak. Yet the feel of these pressures changes with place and class.

**Table: 1: Comparative Mapping of Women's Lives**

| Theme                                    | Mannu Bhandari – Ek Kahani Yeh Bhi<br>(Illustrative evidence → Inference)   | Maitreyi Pushpa – Kasturi Kundal Base<br>(Illustrative evidence → Inference)  | Converge / Differ (Why it matters)  |
|--|---|---|---|
| <b>Domestic labour &amp; mental load</b> | Describes finishing house tasks before turning to writing late at night → Domestic work is assumed and invisible; creative time carved out. | Shows heavy, tangible household and community labour → Domestic work is visible, exhausting, and socially enforced. | Converge: burden is constant. Differ: urban “hidden” load vs rural embodied load; affects energy for self-work. |
| <b>Marriage &amp; negotiation</b>        | Emotional bargaining within marriage; protecting dignity while keeping routine stable → Quiet, strategic accommodation.                     | Open confrontations with spouses/kin; calling out unfair rules → Public, declarative challenge.                     | Converge: unequal power. Differ: private negotiation (Mannu) vs public contestation (Pushpa).                   |
| <b>Creative/paid work vs duty</b>        | Writing framed as duty to self yet secondary to family order → Recognition contested; self-worth tied to persistence.                       | Work includes both field/community tasks and writing/speaking → Labour politicized; self-worth tied to visibility.  | Converge: work is constrained. Differ: Bhandari’s quiet persistence vs Pushpa’s work-as-stance.                 |
| <b>Mobility &amp; public space</b>       | Movement often limited by reputation and literary gatekeeping → Soft boundaries curb access.  | Travel and public presence policed by norms; safety and permission explicit → Hard boundaries curb access.          | Converge: gatekeeping exists. Differ: reputational vs physical/social barriers.                                 |
| <b>Voice vs silence in family</b>        | Uses measured disclosure; preserves privacy while asserting self → Voice as calibrated survival.  | Uses direct address and naming of injustices → Voice as public claim to space.                                      | Converge: need to speak. Differ: low-volume assertion vs high-volume testimony.                                 |
| <b>Agency (how action happens)</b>       | Sets limits quietly (refusal, withdrawal, steady work) → Incremental agency.  | Sets limits loudly (exposure, refusal, collective backing) → Eventful agency.                                       | Converge: boundaries are drawn. Differ: slow-burn vs flashpoint agency.   |

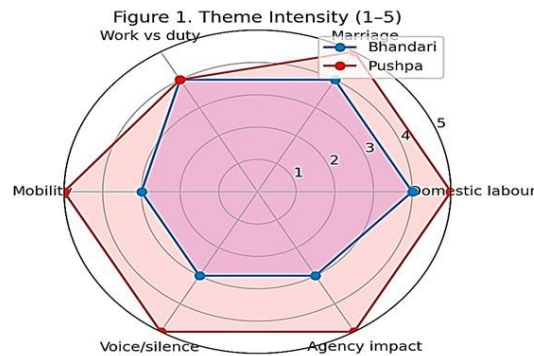
*Source: Data Analysis by Author*

In Mannu Bhandari’s world, control often arrives as reputation, politeness, and literary gatekeeping so it is soft on the surface but firm in effect. In Maitreyi Pushpa’s world, control is direct and visible—rules are stated, permissions are demanded, and labour is heavy on the body.

#### **Domestic labour and mental load:**

Bhandari’s entries show housework that slips into the background but silently schedules the day: the writing begins only after the home is quiet. The inference showing that domestic work is “assumed,” and therefore it invisible so that makes creative time something to be carved out rather than granted. Pushpa’s entries make the burden unmistakable where water, food, errands, and community tasks are named, counted, and felt. Here, the inference is that labour is public and policed and it claims hours and strength in ways that can be measured. Read together, both texts confirm the same weight but describe two different textures: ambient pressure in the

urban household and embodied pressure in the rural/small-town setting. That difference matters because it shapes the energy available for self-work and choice.

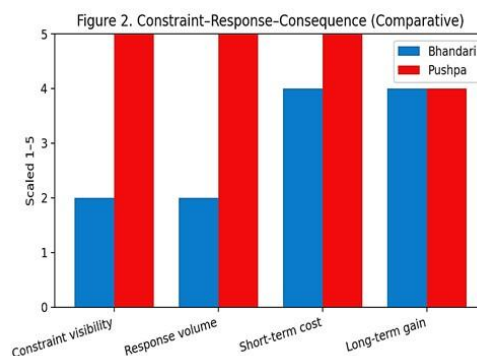


### Marriage, Work, And The Grammar Of Negotiation:

In Bhandari, the marital sphere is a place for quiet boundary setting where dignity is guarded through routine, understatement, and persistence at the desk. This path to recognition is continuity. In Pushpa, the marital and kin sphere is openly contested where unfair rules are named and refused and it often with witnesses. Pushpa's path showing here visibility. she speaks where she stands. The table's comparison column highlights this pattern like two routes to the same goal of self-respect. One route keeps the household steady while making slow, durable gains while the other forces the issue and risks backlash but can win space quickly. The difference is not about courage, it is about which tactics make sense in the social weather each woman inhabits.

### Mobility, Voice, And The Cost Of Stepping Out:

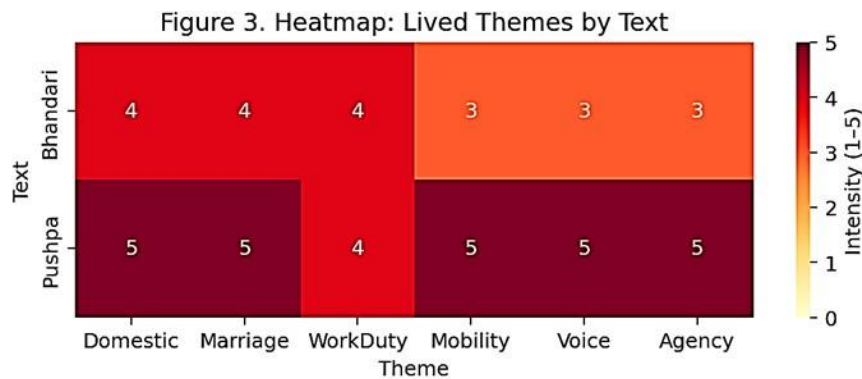
Bhandari's movement is curbed by reputation and by who opens doors in literary circles. These are "soft" barriers and nobody may stop you at the gate, yet the room does not really welcome you. Pushpa's movement is curbed by explicit permission and safety so that these are "hard" barriers that can be pointed to and enforced as well as Voice follows the same pattern. Bhandari uses calibrated speech—enough to stay whole, not so much as to break the fragile peace while Pushpa uses direct address and public testimony and the speech that seeks not only relief but recognition. The cost profile differs under the internal strain for the quiet path, social risk for the loud one.



### Agency As Tempo: Slow-Burn And Flashpoint:

The last row of the table brings the strands together. Bhandari's agency looks incremental—refusals made gently, work done daily, respect earned over time. Pushpa's agency looks eventful—lines drawn in public, allies gathered, rules challenged. Both produce lasting change: one through accumulation, the other through

shock. The implication is simple and important: “women’s agency” is not a single behaviour but a rhythm. Context chooses the tempo. Recognizing this keeps criticism from mistaking quiet survival for passivity or loud defiance for the only authentic form of strength.



The **Figure 3** heatmap condenses coded readings into a single, comparable picture of women’s lives across the two texts. Both narratives score high on Domestic and Marriage (4–5), this one confirming a shared core like heavy unpaid work and unequal marital expectations structure everyday life. While Work Duty sits at 4 for both and this one showing that creative/paid work is persistently squeezed by household obligations. The decisive split appears in Mobility, Voice, and Agency where Bhandari stays at 3–3–3 while Pushpa reaches 5–5–5. Analytically, this means Bhandari depicts soft constraints—reputation and literary gatekeeping—so movement and speech are calibrated and change accumulates slowly. While Pushpa representing by contrast, faces hard constraints—explicit permission, surveillance, physical risk—so movement is negotiated openly, voice becomes public testimony, and change arrives through visible, eventful acts. In short, the architecture of constraint is common, but the mode of living and resisting it diverges.

#### Elementary Evidence:

Here, **Objective 1:** (compare women’s lives), explore and shows the texts converge (home, marriage, duty) and where they differ (mobility, voice, and agency), with a clear rationale: different social locations create different textures of constraint. While in **Objective 2:** (narrative style and voice), the pattern predicts form: Bhandari’s lower scores on mobility/voice/agency align with an intimate, measured voice and incremental agency on the page; Pushpa’s higher scores align with declarative address and eventful, outward-facing scenes. Thus, here the heat map goes beyond description, providing a logical bridge from lived themes to narrative form, helping you argue that context shapes both experience and the way that experience is told.

#### 5) Results of Narrative Style & Voice: (Scores Based)

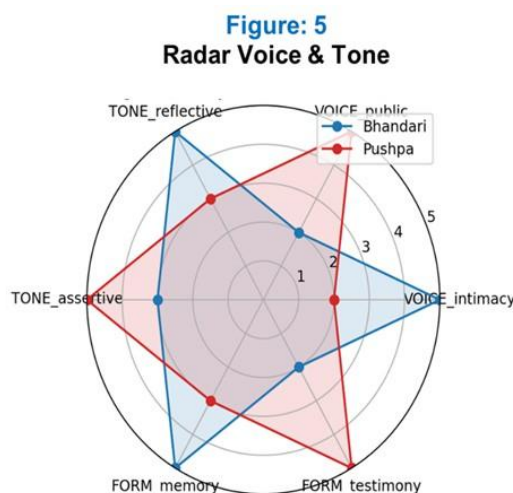
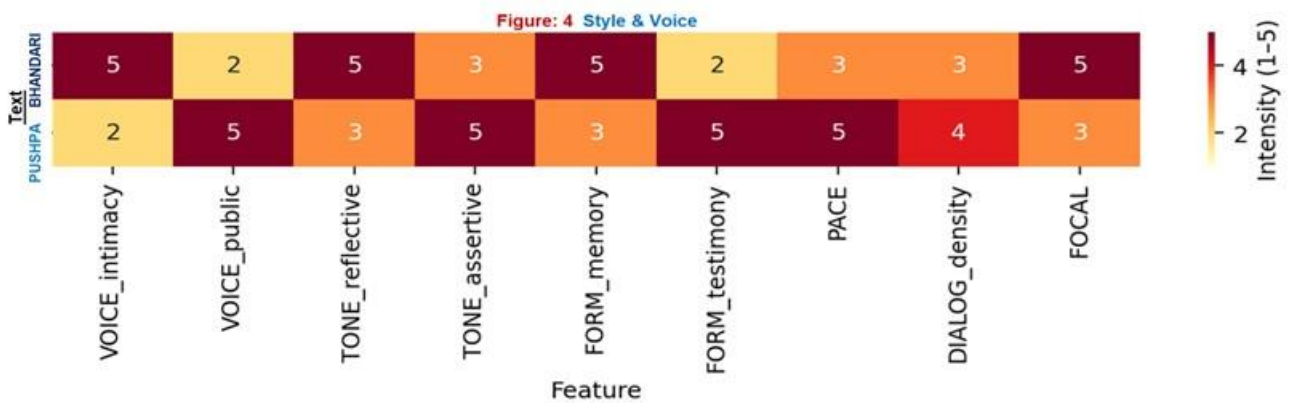
The second object of the present research study based on narrative style-voice where coded on the scale 1 to 5 given which clearly showing in the **Table: 1**. It has classified two column under both authors: Bhandari & Pushpa”

**Table: 2: Narrative Style & Voice Mapping**

| Feature         | Bhandari | Pushpa |
|-----------------|----------|--------|
| VOICE_intimacy  | 5        | 2      |
| VOICE_public    | 2        | 5      |
| TONE_reflective | 5        | 3      |
| TONE_assertive  | 3        | 5      |
| FORM_memory     | 5        | 3      |
| FORM_testimony  | 2        | 5      |
| PACE            | 3        | 5      |
| DIALOG_density  | 3        | 4      |
| FOCAL           | 5        | 3      |

*Source: Data Analysis by Author*

The voice intimacy & voice public have address to audience where higher score represents to higher intimacy as a confessional which single to testimony addressed to an audience.

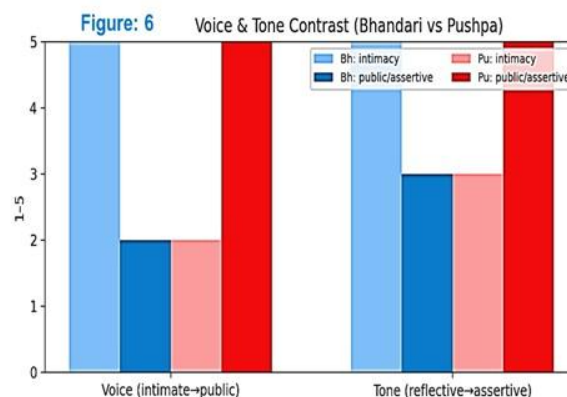


Here, the result exploring the Voice\_intimacy, Tone reflective, Form\_memory and Focal have higher score in Bhandari which showing the urban literary matches under writing which control through reputation as well as gatekeeping. This response is measured to inward voice that builds meaning through memory and gentle self-interrogation. In the case of Pushpa, the higher score on voice\_public, Tone\_assertive, FORM\_testimony and as well as also in Pace & DIALOG\_density too. It reflecting the total or small town setting where rules – regulation most explicit as well as open reply.

Further, the comparison of voice and tone, between two authors, the highest intimate voice reflecting in the Bhandari writing with low on public voice. This one shows that women speak from close range as like private conversation. But in the case of Pushpa, it has a fully inverse reflection where low intimacy with very high public testimonial voice. Thus, this shows that she speaks to the room rather than for self. Under the tone, Bhandari has a stronger on reflective than assertive, so we explore the women's think through feelings, questions and nuances. So here, evident to both authors have different tone and voice.

**Objective 1.** Both books show the same core pressures: domestic burden, marriage rules, and the pull of duty over work. They differ in mobility, voice, and agency. Bhandari's world uses soft controls like reputation and polite gatekeeping, so limits are felt but seldom named. Pushpa's world uses hard controls like spoken rules, permissions, surveillance, and heavy labour, so limits are visible and enforced.

**Objective 2.** Here, also both are difference in speak and feel explorations, the Bhandari writes in quiet noted which one intimate and reflective presentation. She represents scene through memory with slow and steady pace. Here, not shown any loud declaration in the meaning built by careful reflection. The feelings has soft effect and gradual insight. In the case of Pushpa, exploring the public noted with assertive as well as direct. Here scene represents faster pace read like testimony. Here, meaning was made by the wrongs naming with taking stand. The urgency and visible confrontation effect are seen

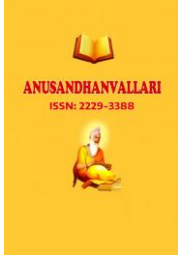


## 6) Conclusion:

The present research study compared two autobiographical narratives: Mannu Bhandari's *Ek Kahani Yeh Bhi* and Maitreyi Pushpa's *Kasturi Kundal Base*: to understand how they portray women's lives and how their storytelling shapes meaning. We found solid common ground: both texts show heavy domestic work, unequal marital rules, and a constant struggle to balance duty with selfhood and where they differ is in texture and response. Bhandari's world works through soft, reputational controls; her voice is intimate and reflective, and change comes slowly but steadily. Pushpa's world is ruled by explicit, public controls; her voice is assertive and testimonial, and change arrives through visible, eventful acts. Both authors are right and represent women's lived in different ways.

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**APPENDIX**

| Feature      | Bhandari                | Pushpa                          | Effect on meaning/emotion                  |
|--------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Voice (VOIC) | intimate, confessional  | declarative, public             | quiet intensity vs public urgency          |
| Tone (TONE)  | reflective, restrained  | forceful, assertive             | empathy vs mobilization                    |
| Form (FORM)  | vignettes, memory loops | linear testimony, direct scenes | inner negotiation vs outward confrontation |