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Review Article

Voices of Incomprehension: Feminine Subjectivity, Linguistic Violence and Existential Disorientation in “I Could not Understand “By Naseem Shafaie”

Bisma Shafi

Research Scholar, Department of Kashmiri University of Kashmir, Jammu and Kashmir, India

Corresponding Author: *Bisma Shafi

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Abstract	Manuscript Information
This paper presents a critical analysis of Naseem Shafaie’s poem “I Could Not Understand”, examining its exploration of linguistic violence, internalised control, and existential disorientation. Through close textual reading, the study argues that the poem constructs a fragmented subjectivity shaped by social conditioning and psychological suppression. The repeated refrain “I could not understand” becomes a central device that reflects both the breakdown of meaning and the speaker’s subtle resistance to imposed structures. By analysing imagery, repetition, and symbolic language, the paper demonstrates how Naseem Shafaie transforms silence and confusion into a powerful articulation of feminine experience and constrained identity. This study contends that the perceived lack of understanding is not to be taken in a literal sense, but rather as a symbolic representation. It arises from a context where language is altered, expression is constrained, and meaning loses its stability.	▪ ISSN No: 2584-184X ▪ Received: 26-03-2026 ▪ Accepted: 24-04-2026 ▪ Published: 27-04-2026 ▪ MRR:4(4); 2026: 225-227 ▪ ©2026, All Rights Reserved ▪ Plagiarism Checked: Yes ▪ Peer Review Process: Yes
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KEYWORDS: Naseem Shafaie, feminine subjectivity, linguistic violence, psychological constraint, existential disorientation, silence, identity.

1. INTRODUCTION

Naseem Shafaie's poetry is marked by its deep engagement with emotional interiority and the complexities of human expression. In "I Could Not Understand," she constructs a poetic voice that appears fragmented, uncertain and constrained. However, this apparent confusion is not a sign of weakness; it reflects a deeper critique of the conditions that regulate thought, language and identity. The poem presents a speaker who repeatedly claims an inability to understand the world around her. This paper argues that such incomprehension is not literal but symbolic. It emerges from a condition in which language is distorted, expression is restricted, and meaning becomes unstable. The poem thus explores how individuals, particularly women, experience internalised forms of control that shape their subjectivity.

2. REPETITION AND THE BREAKDOWN OF MEANING

The most dominant structural feature of the poem is the repeated line: "I could not understand". This repetition serves multiple functions. It creates a rhythm of disorientation, reinforcing the speaker's psychological state. At the same time, it destabilises the very concept of understanding. The repetition suggests that the problem does not lie within the speaker's inability to comprehend but within a system that renders comprehension impossible. Thus, the refrain becomes both a reflection of confusion and a critique of imposed structures that lack coherence. The speaker's repeated statement transforms into a subtle form of resistance, exposing the irrationality of the conditions she inhabits.

3. LINGUISTIC VIOLENCE AND THE BODY

The poem establishes a strong connection between language and physical suffering:

"I have to carve words
Embellish them after carving
With the blood from my throat"

لفظ گرنی چہم
گرتہ جرنی چہم
بٹیک مٹتہ رتہ

The poem frames language as something that must be forcibly extracted from the body. The expression becomes an act of suffering, indicating that speech is shaped less by freedom and more by external constraints and internalised tension. This idea intensifies in the line:

"The pen comes out, slicing the tongue"
قلم چہ نیران زبان رٹی تھے

The pen, typically a symbol of creativity and knowledge, is transformed into an instrument of harm. This inversion reveals how systems associated with language, such as education or authority, may suppress rather than enable expression. Linguistic violence in the poem, therefore, refers to the way language is controlled and manipulated, making expression difficult, painful, and dangerous.

4. INTERNALIZED CONTROL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSTRAINT

A key shift in the poem occurs when control becomes internal:

"If I bear a thought / it is to be chewed within"

خیال ووتہ کاٹھ
اندری چہ راپن

This line indicates that the speaker does not merely face external restrictions; she has internalised them. Thoughts are suppressed before they can be expressed, suggesting a deep form of psychological conditioning. The absence of a clearly defined authority ("they," "someone") reinforces this idea. Power is not localised but diffused, operating through everyday expectations and internal habits.

As a result, the speaker becomes both:

The subject of control and the agent of her own suppression. This creates a fragmented identity, unable to fully articulate itself.

5. SOCIAL CONDITIONING AND BEHAVIOURAL UNCERTAINTY

The poem also reflects the effects of social conditioning:

"Is laughing allowed? / Is crying forbidden?"

اسن روا چہا؟
وڈن منع چہا؟

These questions reveal a profound uncertainty about basic human behaviour. The speaker is unsure of what is permissible, indicating a system where norms are unclear yet strictly enforced. This uncertainty produces a state of constant self-surveillance. The individual must continuously monitor her actions, even in the absence of visible authority.

The line:

"If they write on my forehead / what can I do?"

لنکھتہ ڈیکس یم
تھون مے کر کیاہ؟

Suggests imposed identity. The self is defined externally, leaving little room for autonomy or self-determination.

6. FEMININE SUBJECTIVITY AND SILENCED IDENTITY

From a feminist perspective, the poem can be read as an articulation of feminine subjectivity under constraint. The speaker's voice is present, yet restricted; expressive, yet interrupted.

The body becomes a central site of control

The throat → source of speech and pain

The tongue → symbol of silenced expression

The mind → space of suppressed thought

The repeated inability to "understand" reflects a condition in which the speaker is denied clarity, agency, and recognition. Her subjectivity is shaped by forces that limit her capacity to define herself.

7. SYMBOLISM AND THE IMAGE OF THE “BLUE THROAT”

The reference to a “blue throat” introduces symbolic depth:

“Someone may tell me / that I have a blue throat”

مے ما ونیم کانہہ
ژے نیول بوٹ چہے

This image suggests the internalisation of something toxic or harmful. It represents the accumulation of unspoken words, suppressed emotions, and endured suffering. The “blue throat” becomes a metaphor for silent endurance, where pain is contained rather than expressed. It reinforces the poem’s central theme of constrained expression.

8. EXISTENTIAL DISORIENTATION

At a deeper level, the poem engages with existential concerns.

The speaker exists in a world where:

- Meaning is unclear
- Rules are inconsistent
- Identity is unstable

The repeated assertion of not understanding reflects a broader philosophical condition. It suggests that the problem is not simply social but existential—the individual is unable to locate certainty or meaning within her environment. This disorientation becomes the defining condition of the speaker’s existence.

9. OBJECTIVES OF THE PRESENT STUDY

1. To analyse Naseem Shafaie's poem "I Could Not Understand" for its themes and structure.
2. To examine how feminine subjectivity is affected by social and psychological limits.
3. To investigate how linguistic violence affects expression, voice and meaning in poetry.
4. To evaluate how the poem uses silence and incomprehension to promote resistance and critical awareness.

10. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Investigators are required to follow research methods. The study will be conducted using a qualitative research design. The data for this study is entirely textual and secondary in nature, consisting of the selected poem as the primary source. There is no empirical or field-based data used. The analysis is interpretive and analytical, drawing on critical reasoning and established theoretical views.

11. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant as it offers a focused critical reading of Naseem Shafaie’s poem “*I Could Not Understand*,” highlighting its deeper engagement with language, identity and power. The study is especially relevant in feminist literary criticism since it examines how women's voices are frequently fragmented or suppressed within social and cultural frameworks. By examining the poem through this lens, it reveals the nuanced forms of resistance that exist within silence and incomprehension. The study adds to our knowledge of existential themes in poetry, specifically the sense of doubt and disorientation in a world with ambiguous meaning. The study sheds light on how poetic

language can reflect complex psychological, social, and philosophical realities, making it useful for literary scholars, gender studies and cultural analysts.

12. CONCLUSION

To conclude, we can say that “*I Could Not Understand*” is a powerful exploration of language, control and identity. Naseem Shafaie creates a literary language that highlights the intricacies of internalised restriction and existential ambiguity through repetition, fractured structure, and striking imagery. The poem explains how language may become a place of violence, how control can function within the brain and how unidentified forces can mould one's identity. In the end, the author's continual inability to comprehend eventually becomes a type of understanding, revealing the inconsistencies of the world she inhabits. Rather than providing a solution, the poetry welcomes ambiguity, transforming perplexity into a type of critical awareness. This asserts the presence of a voice that can be heard even in quiet.

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About the corresponding author



Bisma Shafi is a Research Scholar in the Department of Kashmiri at the University of Kashmir, Jammu and Kashmir, India. Her research interests include Kashmiri literature, cultural studies, and gender discourse. She is engaged in academic research focusing on regional literary traditions and their contemporary relevance in society.