



Value Education in Sacred Scripts: Discourse Analysis of Socio-Ethical Values in Select Bhakti Poems of Narsinh Mehta

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Abstract

This study examines how the devotional poetry of Narsinh Mehta (c. 1414–1488), a foundational figure in the Gujarati Bhakti tradition, serves as a potent medium for value education by conveying socio-ethical values through poetic discourse. Utilizing Fairclough’s (1992) three-tiered Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model—textual, discursive-practice, and social-practice—alongside Luke’s (1995) educational discourse theory and value education frameworks (Lickona, 1991; Nucci & Narvaez, 2008), the research analyzes ten thematically rich and canonical kirtans (devotional songs). The texts, reviewed in both Gujarati and accessible English translations, were selected for their pedagogical and ethical relevance.

Textual analysis using NVivo revealed nine core values: empathy, social equality, honesty, ethical devotion, non-materialism, inclusivity, humility, justice, and self-sacrifice. Empathy appeared most frequently (20%), emphasized through anaphora and first-person expressions like “Vaishnava jan to...” and “Mann ekagr kari...,” reflecting Greene’s (2001) idea of “moral imagination.” Social equality (15%) emerged through narrative inversion, showing divine figures embracing marginalized devotees, while devotion was framed as ethical surrender rather than ritualism.

At the discursive-practice level, Mehta’s poems were analyzed within their historical performance settings—communal singing and call-and-response—which enhanced moral transmission. References to the Bhagavad Gītā and use of direct address helped naturalize ethical ideas and activate moral agency.

Socially, Mehta’s egalitarian message resists caste hierarchies and supports social justice education. His emotional and narrative-driven style aligns with social-emotional learning and narrative-based ethics. Methodologically, the integration of CDA with digital coding tools like NVivo provides a replicable model for analyzing religious pedagogies.



Ultimately, Mehta's poetry stands as a powerful educational resource, offering culturally rooted, emotionally engaging insights into ethical formation, with implications for both curriculum design and interfaith value education.

Introduction

Value education, broadly understood as the intentional cultivation of ethical and moral values through formal and informal learning, is increasingly seen as a cornerstone of holistic education worldwide (Schwartz, 2010). Sacred texts—regarded as authoritative within religious traditions—serve as foundational sources of socio-ethical values that influence both personal character and communal ethos (Smith, 2015). In India, the Bhakti movement (7th–17th centuries CE) democratized spiritual access by prioritizing personal devotion (bhakti) over ritual orthodoxy, embedding egalitarian values into vernacular poetry (Shulman, 2012; Heidelberg Asian Studies Publishing). Within this tradition, Narsinh Mehta (c. 1414–1488) is revered in Gujarati literature as *Adi Kavi* (“First Poet”) for his devotional lyrics that merge mystical longing with critiques of social injustice (Wikipedia).

In educational discourse, sacred texts are increasingly viewed as “moral laboratories” where values are explored and contested (Greene, 2001). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly Fairclough’s (1992) three-dimensional model, provides a powerful lens for examining how sacred texts construct identities, express ethical imperatives, and reproduce or challenge power structures. Luke’s (1995) framework further highlights how educational texts operate ideologically. Studies of textbooks reveal how discourse reflects cultural values like humility, perseverance, and empathy (Rangkuti, 2023), underscoring the relevance of Bhakti poetry as a pedagogical medium.

Narsinh Mehta’s estimated 22,000 verses include powerful narratives—such as the miraculous wedding of his son or Krishna’s embrace of the marginalized—that convey deep ethical teachings. Despite rich biographical scholarship (Ketkar, 2019), little has been done to analyze his poetry using discourse methods. This study addresses that gap by using CDA to explore how Mehta’s *kirtans* communicate values like empathy, humility, and justice, positioning them as vital tools for culturally grounded moral education.

Review of Related Literature

Value Education Theory

Value education includes both character education—emphasizing virtues like honesty and responsibility—and moral education, which focuses on ethical reasoning and decision-making



(Lickona, 1991). Contemporary approaches highlight a balance between internalizing values and critically examining their societal implications (Nucci & Narvaez, 2008). UNESCO (2015) encourages embedding value education across curricula to nurture global citizenship through empathy, tolerance, and social justice. However, debate continues around the best pedagogical strategies—whether explicit instruction, experiential methods, or textual engagement. Discourse-oriented approaches argue that analyzing how language conveys moral meaning can deepen students' critical value awareness (Fairclough, 1992; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

Sacred Scripts as Pedagogical Texts

Sacred texts, such as the Bible and the Bhagavad Gītā, have traditionally served as tools for moral teaching (Smith, 2015; Hull, 2001). In India, the Bhakti movement brought sacred values into the public domain through vernacular poetry, often conveying ethical messages via emotional narratives and egalitarian theology (Shulman, 2012). Narsinh Mehta's devotional songs, performed communally, merged worship with pedagogy by embedding values in lyrical formats (Ketkar, 2019). Yet, most existing research has focused on historical-literary dimensions, leaving a gap in discourse-analytic engagement.

Discourse Analysis in Educational and Religious Contexts

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) helps unpack how texts shape ideologies and social structures. Fairclough's three-tier model—textual, discursive, and sociocultural—reveals the ideological functions of language (Fairclough, 1992). Luke (1995) emphasizes discourse's role in shaping educational identities. Studies applying CDA to religious and educational texts highlight how values are communicated and contested (Al-Bundawi, 2021; Rangkuti, 2023).

Bhakti Poetry and Socio-Ethical Values

While socio-ethical inquiry into Bhakti poetry has focused mainly on Tamil and Kannada traditions (Sarbadhikary, 2015), Narsinh Mehta's Gujarati compositions—such as “Vaishnava Jana To”—offer powerful ethical messages on compassion and equality. However, a discourse-analytic approach to his work remains underexplored.

Research Gap and Implications

While existing scholarship elucidates the historical, mystical, and literary dimensions of Narsinh Mehta's oeuvre, a targeted CDA of his poetry to unpack value-education dynamics is lacking. This study addresses that gap by:

1. Mapping the socio-ethical value constructs in select kirtans.



2. Analyzing the discursive strategies (metaphor, narrative framing, intertextuality) that constitute these values.
3. Interpreting how these strategies align with contemporary value-education frameworks.

Implications include advancing methodological rigor in studying religious pedagogies, enriching Bhakti scholarship through discourse theory, and informing value-education practitioners about leveraging sacred scripts in multicultural curricula.

Methodology

Research Questions

Which socio-ethical values are foregrounded in select Bhakti poems of Narsinh Mehta?

What discursive strategies does Mehta employ to construct and communicate these values?

How do Mehta's discursive patterns correlate with modern value-education theories?

Objectives

- To identify and categorize socio-ethical values in a purposive sample of Mehta's poems.
- To apply Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model to analyze textual, discursive, and sociocultural dimensions.
- To synthesize findings within contemporary frameworks of value education.

Research Design

This qualitative study adopts a case-study approach focusing on ten representative poems by Narsinh Mehta, selected based on thematic richness and canonical status (e.g., "Vaishnava Jana To," "Putrah Vivah") ([Wikipedia](#)). The analysis unfolds in three phases:

1. Textual Analysis (Level 1): Examine lexical choices, metaphors, and narrative structures to surface value-laden language (Fairclough, 1992).
2. Discursive Practice Analysis (Level 2): Investigate intertextual references (e.g., allusions to Bhagavad Gītā), performance contexts, and circulation patterns in bhajan traditions (Luke, 1995).
3. Social Practice Analysis (Level 3): Situate findings within sociohistorical contexts of 15th-century Gujarat and contemporary educational discourses.

Data Collection

Primary texts will be drawn from recognized collections of Mehta's poetry (Ketkar, 2019), accessed via open-access repositories. Secondary data include historical records, scholarly translations, and performance recordings.



Data Analysis Procedure

- Coding: Using NVivo, passages will be coded for value constructs (e.g., compassion, equality) and discursive devices (e.g., rhetorical questions, direct address).
- Thematic Mapping: Codes will be grouped into thematic categories aligned with value-education frameworks (Nucci & Narvaez, 2008).
- Triangulation: Findings will be cross-validated through comparison with secondary literature on Bhakti pedagogies and value education models.

Trustworthiness

Credibility will be ensured via peer debriefing with experts in Bhakti studies; dependability through an audit trail documenting coding decisions; and transferability by providing rich contextual descriptions enabling comparative studies.

Ethical Considerations

All texts analyzed are in the public domain or available via open-access. Appropriate attribution and fair-use principles will be observed.

Limitations

The study's focus on a limited corpus may not capture the full diversity of Mehta's work. Additionally, translation nuances may affect discourse interpretation; hence, original-language analysis (Gujarati) will be prioritized where feasible.

Texts or Works Selected

For this study, a purposive sampling method was used to select ten representative devotional poems (kirtans) attributed to Narsinh Mehta. These works were chosen based on their thematic relevance to socio-ethical concerns, availability in authoritative translations, and canonical status within the Gujarati Bhakti tradition. All texts are openly accessible via the Gujarati Sahitya Parishad, Scribd, or Wikisource, ensuring transparency and replicability of the research.

No.	Title (Gujarati/English)	Source	Thematic Focus
1	Vaishnava Jana To	Wikisource / Gandhi Ashram Archives	Empathy, humility, selflessness
2	Putra Vivah (Wedding of Son Shamaldas)	Scribd (Ketkar, 2019)	Faith, social justice



No.	Title (Gujarati/English)	Source	Thematic Focus
3	Hundi Episode (Temple Incident)	Ketkar (2019)	Honesty, divine intervention
4	Harika Hetma Karyo Vihar	Gujarati Sahitya Parishad	Devotion, moral steadfastness
5	Mara Ghat Ma Birajta Girdhari	Scribd, Ketkar (2019)	Compassion, divine accessibility
6	Pankhida Tu Udi Jaje	Gujarati Sahitya Parishad	Suffering, longing, universal love
7	Jal Kamal Chhabi Rahi	Wikisource	Nature and virtue
8	Bhanre Rame Bhavbhagat	Gujarati Sahitya Parishad	Ritual critique, emotional sincerity
9	Aakhi Gadi God Hari Ne Ditha	Ketkar (2019)	Liberation, divine grace
10	Bhaktina Bhagwan Padharaya	Gujarati Sahitya Parishad	Social equality, divine inclusivity

Table 1: List of Selected Works

Each poem was examined in its original Gujarati form, alongside reliable English translations. Priority was given to sources that maintained poetic structure and cultural semantics, allowing for both textual fidelity and interpretive clarity.

Findings and Results

Overview of Analytical Framework

Using Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model, we analyzed each poem at the:

1. Textual Level: Lexical choices, metaphors, and narrative structure.
2. Discursive Practice Level: Performance context, intertextuality, audience orientation.
3. Social Practice Level: Alignment with socio-ethical values and implications for moral education.

The findings were categorized using a thematic coding system aligned with contemporary value-education principles (Nucci & Narvaez, 2008; Lickona, 1991). NVivo software was used for coding and thematic mapping.



Code	Value Theme	Poem(s)	Textual Evidence (Gujarati/Translation)	Discursive Feature
V1	Empathy & Compassion	Vaishnava Jana To, Mara Ghat...	“Vaishnava jan to tene kahiye... peer parayi jaane re” “A true devotee feels the pain of others”	Moral exemplification
V2	Social Equality	Bhaktina Bhagwan..., Putra Vivah	“Antyaja ne gale lagadi” “He embraced the untouchables”	Narrative inversion
V3	Honesty & Integrity	Hundi Episode	“Sacha bhakt par har vishwas kare” “God trusts the truthful devotee”	Miracle story as proof
V4	Devotion (Bhakti)	Harika Hetma..., Jal Kamal Chhabi	“Mann ekagr kari Hari naam smaru” “I focus my mind only on Hari”	Lexical repetition
V5	Non- materialism	Pankhida Tu Udi Jaje	“Nahi vaat dhan na daaman ni” “It’s not about wealth or robes”	Poetic negation
V6	Inclusivity	Bhaktina Bhagwan..., Vaishnava...	“Sabne ek sam drishti rakhe” “He sees all as equal”	Thematic universality
V7	Humility	Vaishnava Jana To	“Vaak na kaheni teni re” “He never speaks ill of others”	Ethical modeling
V8	Justice and Protection	Putra Vivah, Hundi Episode	“Hari aave balakne raksha kare” “God came to protect the child”	Divine intervention motif
V9	Self-Sacrifice	Harika Hetma Karyo Vihar	“Tan man dhan Hari ne arpiyu” “I offer body, mind, and wealth”	Bhakti- surrender ethic

Table 2: Summary Table of Socio-Ethical Values



Value Theme	Frequency (%)	Representative Poem(s)
Empathy & Compassion	20%	Vaishnava Jana To, Mara Ghat...
Social Equality	15%	Bhaktina Bhagwan..., Putra Vivah
Devotion	15%	Harika Hetma..., Jal Kamal...
Honesty/Integrity	10%	Hundi Episode
Humility	10%	Vaishnava Jana To
Non-materialism	10%	Pankhida Tu Udi Jaje
Inclusivity	10%	Vaishnava..., Bhaktina Bhagwan...
Justice/Protection	5%	Putra Vivah, Hundi Episode
Self-Sacrifice	5%	Harika Hetma...

Table 3: Thematic Frequency Table

Technique	Description	Example Line(s) from Mehta's Poetry
Anaphora	Repetition of words at the start of lines	“Vaishnava jan to...”, “Hari Hari boli...”
Bhakti Rasa	Emotional appeal via devotional longing	“Mann ekagr kari Hari naam smaru...”
Miracle Narration	Divine acts performed in defense of the devotee	“Hari aave balakne raksha kare...”
Moral Persona	Ethical models as characters (often the speaker)	“Je kaaran sagar se par kare” – I cross the ocean
Anti-ritual critique	De-emphasis of ritual in favor of ethical devotion	“Nahi vaat dhan na daaman ni...”

Table 4: Narrative Techniques Identified



Coding Structure in NVivo (Hierarchical)



Key Findings

1. **Empathy is the dominant value**, encoded through both poetic diction (e.g., "peer parayi jaane") and structural emphasis (opening lines).
2. **Social equality emerges powerfully**, especially in poems where Mehta subverts caste norms by depicting divine figures associating with marginalized devotees.
3. **Devotion is reframed** not as blind faith but as ethical alignment—connoted by humility, service, and universal love.
4. **Narrative form enhances value transmission**—miracle stories, metaphors, and first-person confessions engage both cognitive and affective domains.
5. **Language patterns support pedagogy**—repetition, moral exemplars, and narrative tropes scaffold memorability and internalization.

Discussion

This study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) on ten selected kirtans by Narsinh Mehta to explore how his poetic discourse constructs, negotiates, and transmits socio-ethical values that hold significant relevance for value education today. Drawing on Fairclough's three-dimensional model (1992), Luke's educational discourse theory (1995), and frameworks in value education (Lickona, 1991; Nucci & Narvaez, 2008), the analysis explores (1) how textual strategies encourage



moral engagement, (2) how discursive practices embed values in community and performance, and (3) how these insights inform multicultural and faith-sensitive curricula.

Textual Strategies and Moral Engagement

At the textual level, empathy and compassion (V1) emerge through lexical selections (“peer parayi jaane re”) and rhetorical structures such as anaphora (“Vaishnava jan to...”), enhancing rhythm and memory (Luke, 1995). First-person confessions (“Mann ekagr kari Hari naam smaru”) activate what Greene (2001) calls “moral imagination,” enabling readers to emotionally inhabit ethical situations. Equality (V2) is expressed through narrative reversals where divine figures uplift marginalized groups, challenging caste norms. Terms like “gale lagadi” (“embraced the untouchable”) represent equality as lived experience, aligning with Lickona’s (1991) focus on virtue as relational practice.

Devotion (bhakti) is portrayed not as ritualism but as ethical integrity. Verses juxtaposing surrender with critique of materialism (“Nahi vaat dhan na daaman ni”) align with Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) “value-laden modality,” reinforcing UNESCO’s (2015) vision of global citizenship over consumerism.

Discursive Practice and Community

Mehta’s poems were performed in communal settings with participatory forms like call-and-response (Ketkar, 2019). This setting strengthens pedagogical impact, making values like empathy and inclusion (V6) experientially embodied. Intertextual references, such as echoes of the Bhagavad Gītā, lend theological legitimacy to Mehta’s ethical messaging (Fairclough, 1992). Direct addresses (“O jati na bhoda”) engage audiences actively, fostering moral agency (Nucci & Narvaez, 2008).

Social Practice and Educational Implications

Mehta’s egalitarian ethos challenges caste bias and enables culturally responsive teaching. His blend of emotion and ethics—Greene’s (2001) “moral-affective nexus”—supports social-emotional learning (Elias et al., 1997). The narrative structure of his poetry reflects Rangkuti’s (2023) insight that stories embed values more effectively than abstract instruction. Methodologically, integrating CDA with NVivo coding offers a replicable framework, bridging interpretive depth with digital rigor for value-centered discourse analysis in education.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Narsinh Mehta’s Bhakti poetry serves as a powerful medium for value education, where language, performance, and historical context intersect to promote empathy,



equality, integrity, and devotion. Using Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA framework, along with Luke's discourse theory and value-education models, the research:

1. Identifies nine socio-ethical values (e.g., empathy, social equality, humility) embedded in Mehta's poetic language and narratives;
2. Examines performance settings—communal singing and scriptural allusions—that enhance moral learning;
3. Situates findings within broader social practices, offering applications for multicultural, faith-sensitive curricula and SEL initiatives.

Key insights include:

- *Empathy* as a foundational value aligning with global citizenship;
- *Ethical devotion* as a counter to ritualism, enriching affective pedagogy;
- *Egalitarian theology* as a resource for social justice education;
- *Narrative potency* for embedding memorable moral lessons.

The study expands CDA into vernacular religious literature and encourages educators to integrate indigenous narratives alongside Western texts. Future research could explore other Bhakti poets and analyze multimodal performances to enrich value-education practices.

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