

Literary Narratives and the Construction of National Identity in Indian Writing in English

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Abstract

Indian literature in English, especially its literary tales, has been essential in forming and expressing national identity. The rich and varied cultural, historical, and social environment of India is reflected in this corpus of writing. Indian authors have used English to both interact with and question dominant narratives, from the colonial era, when it was imposed as a weapon of control, to the post-independence period, when it became a method of expressing new national ambitions.

This essay examines the ways in which Indian writers, from the colonial era to the present, have constructed, criticised, and redefined national identity via the use of the English language. It aims to reveal how these tales negotiate themes of cultural hybridity, historical memory, gender, diaspora, and postcolonial criticism by looking at important works and their thematic concerns. According to the research, Indian literature in English is a varied and dynamic area that constantly plays with the borders of nationhood and identity rather than being a monolithic art form.

The understanding of English as a contradictory medium—a language of the coloniser that has been adopted to communicate indigenous realities and aspirations—is fundamental to our investigation. English has been used by Indian authors to express opposition, record historical shifts, and delve into the subtleties of forming an identity in a country that is changing quickly. They have broadened our knowledge of what it means to be Indian in a globalised world via their artistic creations.

This study examines the relationship between language, literature, and identity in the Indian setting by looking at influential works like Jhumpa Lahiri's "The Namesake," Salman Rushdie's "Midnight's Children," and Arundhati Roy's "The God of Small Things." These tales give insights into the changing character of Indian national identity by engaging with wider socio-political concerns and reflecting both individual and collective experiences.

To sum up, Indian literature in English provides an insightful perspective on the creation and reshaping of national identity. It represents the conflicts and convergences between local and global, tradition and modernity, and the individual and the group, making it a valuable area of research for comprehending the current identity debate in India.

Introduction

Language and literature are two areas of Indian culture where the legacy of British colonialism has had a significant and long-lasting influence. English was adopted by the British during the colonial era as a method of administrative control and rule. The extensive

use of English in Indian education was made possible by Lord Macaulay's "Minute on Indian Education" from 1835. The goal of this document was to establish a class of Indians who were "Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect." The goal of this programme was to guarantee the continuation of colonial domination by making English the official language for higher education and government.

English was first used by colonial powers to impose Western ideals and values on Indian culture. But it also developed into a vehicle for cross-cultural and intellectual communication throughout time. English-educated Indian elites started interacting with Western literary and philosophical traditions, which resulted in a complex interaction between indigenous and colonial cultures. During this time, a new generation of English-fluent Indian authors and intellectuals emerged, using the language to criticise colonial authority and convey nationalist ideas.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, English became a potent weapon for self-expression and opposition as the independence movement gathered steam. The development of a national identity was greatly aided by writers like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, who wrote in both Bengali and English, and Rabindranath Tagore, who translated his writings from Bengali to English. Indians used English as a vehicle to share their stories of colonial tyranny with the world, which helped them win support for their cause on a worldwide scale.

English continues to be widely used in India after independence. English was kept as an associate official language alongside Hindi by the nation's authorities because they understood its significance in the international community. This choice was made to support India's international relations efforts and to preserve a common administrative language in a linguistically heterogeneous country. As a result, English evolved to represent modernity and advancement, creating new avenues for work, education, and global connection.

Since then, Indian literature in English has developed into a rich and varied literary legacy that covers a broad spectrum of topics and genres. Indian literature in English has come a long way, starting with the early works of pioneers like R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, and Raja Rao, who captured the realities of Indian life with simplicity and authenticity, and continuing with more recent writers like Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, and Jhumpa Lahiri, who tackle difficult questions of identity, diaspora, and globalisation.

The development and expression of national identity have been greatly influenced by this literary heritage. Indian authors in English-language literature have used their literary pieces to contemplate the nation's historical colonial history, confront the difficulties of constructing a postcolonial nation, and investigate the complex aspects of Indian identity within a globalised context. These writers have explored issues of historical memory, cultural hybridity, and societal change via their stories, providing a range of viewpoints on what it means to be Indian.

To put it briefly, Indian literature in English has evolved beyond its colonial beginnings and is now an essential component of India's intellectual and cultural legacy. It symbolises a dynamic and ever-evolving conversation between local and global identity, tradition and modernity, and individual and community identity. In addition to adding to the canon of literature worldwide, this corpus of work gives Indians a tremendous platform to express their own experiences and goals, which is important in the continuous process of forming national identity.

Historical Background

1. Colonial Era: English First Appearance in India

- The British Introduced English Education

Early in the 19th century, English education was first introduced in India. The British colonial government, influenced mainly by Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay, aimed to establish a class of middlemen who would act as a link between the colonial authorities and the Indian population. The necessity for English education to create "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" was stated in Macaulay's "Minute on Indian Education" (1835).

The introduction of English-medium schools and institutions as a result of this programme had a profound effect on the Indian educational system. Founded in 1857, universities like the University of Calcutta, the University of Bombay, and the University of Madras rose to prominence as major hubs for English instruction. Inadvertently, this new educational framework produced an educated Indian elite that could converse with Western literary and philosophical concepts while also preparing Indians for administrative positions in the colonial administration.

Early English-language Indian Writers

This was the start of Indian authors using English as a literary language. Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan, two early pioneers, were instrumental in developing Indian literature in English. Their writings, which demonstrated a close familiarity with Indian topics and surroundings as well as an influence from Western literary traditions, often tackled the intricacies of Indian culture under colonial authority.

The 1938 book "Kanthapura" by Raja Rao (1908–2006) is the author's best-known work; it describes how a little Indian community became involved in the freedom movement. Rao's storytelling approach, which included mythical allusions and Indian oral traditions, flowed naturally into English while presenting a distinct Indian voice within the framework of the colonial language.

Another influential person, R.K. Narayan (1906–2001), is renowned for his depiction of Indian life via the made-up town of Malgudi. His writings, which highlighted the common

experiences and moral quandaries of his characters, offered perceptive commentary on the sociocultural environment of India in works like "Swami and Friends" (1935) and "The Guide" (1958). Through English, Narayan's straightforward yet insightful narrative introduced Indian sensibilities to a worldwide audience.

- The English Language's Twofold Function as a Colonial Imposition and a Resistance Tool

At first, English as it was enforced by the British was seen as a tool of cultural imperialism meant to replace native languages and knowledge systems. But it also developed into a potent instrument that Indian authors and intellectuals used to express their opposition to colonial authority. This contradiction may be seen in the writings of a number of Indian authors who expressed their nationalist feelings and critiqued colonialism in English.

Indian writers were able to reach a wider audience both domestically and abroad because to their proficiency in English. English was a language that leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi used to spread their views and rally support for the independence fight. Gandhi's English-language "Hind Swaraj" (1909) is a foundational work that promotes Indian self-rule while criticising Western culture.

English has developed into a language for intellectual and multicultural communication. Indian authors delved into international literary and philosophical traditions, so enhancing their own creations and fostering a more varied and diversified literary milieu. Thus, Indian authors' adoption of English represented a kind of identity assertion and cultural resistance, turning a colonial imposition into a platform for empowerment and self-expression.

In conclusion, English emerged in India throughout the colonial period as a literary and political opposition medium in addition to a weapon of imperial authority. A significant part of this intricate interaction was performed by early Indian authors in English, such Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan, who used the language to portray Indian reality and refute colonial myths. The rich history of Indian literature in English that is still developing now was established during this time.

Post-Independence Era: Identity Redefining

India's literary environment saw a dramatic change in the years after independence. In the context of India's war for independence and the subsequent creation of a new country, Indian authors writing in English started delving into the difficulties of national identity. During this time, well-known authors rose to prominence and successfully conveyed the cultural and sociopolitical changes of the day. These authors explored nation-building, cultural syncretism, and division in their writings, offering a complex picture of India's changing identity.

Literature as a Window into India's National Formation and Independence Struggle

An important period in Indian history, the fight for independence had a significant impact on the nation's literature. Writers after independence often used this historical background to study the founding of a new country, highlighting both its successes and its setbacks. Writing evolved become a tool for reflecting on and recording the experiences of the Indian people as a whole, emphasising their resiliency, goals, and difficulties.

Notable Writers Following Independence

Mulk Raj Anand

One of the first Indian authors to be recognised internationally for his English-language writings was Mulk Raj Anand. His short tales and novels often addressed the lives of those who are oppressed and marginalised in Indian society. Anand's work is distinguished by a strong dedication to social justice and a profound empathy for the impoverished.

Remarkable Pieces:

Untouchable (1935): This book, which centres on the life of a young "untouchable" child called Bakha, offers a striking depiction of the caste system in India. Anand advocates for social transformation and criticises the inflexible social hierarchies via Bakha's experiences.

- **Coolie (1936):** The book chronicles the journey of Munoo, an impoverished young man who travels around India in pursuit of a better life. Anand draws attention to the brutal realities of poverty and exploitation that the Indian working class faces via Munoo's trip.

Khushwant Singh

Another well-known author who successfully conveyed the complexity of India after independence was Khushwant Singh. His writing often addressed the issues of community violence and division, offering an open examination of the human cost of these occurrences.

- **Notable Works:** - **Train to Pakistan (1956):** The 1947 Indian Partition serves as the setting for this book. Singh focuses on the experiences of a tiny town on the border between India and Pakistan, eloquently describing the turmoil and bloodshed that followed. The terrible effects of the division and the ingrained animosity between communities are shown in the book.

- **A Novel of Delhi (1990):** This semi-autobiographical book weaves real events with fiction to cover many centuries of Delhi's history. Singh's story gives readers a broad overview of Delhi's changing identity by capturing the city's historical changes and ethnic variety.

Nation-Building, Cultural Syncretism, and Partition Themes

Dividend

A catastrophic occurrence that resulted in massive relocation, violence, and fatalities was the partition of India in 1947. In post-independence literature, authors have explored the agony of partition and its effects on both people and societies.

An Analysis of Trauma: Partition produced psychological and emotional wounds that have been explored by writers such as Khushwant Singh and Saadat Hasan Manto. Their artwork often portrayed the savagery of intergroup conflict as well as the millions of people's emotions of loss and dislocation.

Identify Yourself: Those who were forced from their homes by the division also began to search for their identities. This era's literature often captures the effort to find a new sense of belonging and to come to terms with a divided nation.

Building a Nation

Post-independence India faced several difficulties in its nation-building process, including social change, economic growth, and political instability. Writing provided a forum for delving into these intricacies and imagining the country's destiny.

- **Social and Political Analysis:** Authors who commented on the socio-political concerns of their times, such as Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan, did so via their writing. They reflected the hopes and disappointments of a recently independent country, addressing issues like poverty, corruption, and the desire for social justice.

Impartition and Actuality: Literature from the post-independence era combined idealism with reality. A more critical viewpoint was presented by certain authors, who emphasised the discrepancy between aspirations and reality, while others praised the newly discovered independence and possibilities for advancement.

Synchronistic Culture

India's multiplicity and diversity define its cultural landscape. This cultural syncretism was often lauded in post-independence literature, which examined the coexistence of many customs, languages, and faiths.

- **Identities Hybrids:** Writers who have tackled the idea of hybrid identities—in which people juggle many cultural influences—include Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh. The flexibility and vitality of Indian identity in a globalised environment is reflected in their works.

The Interaction of Modernity and Tradition: Literature published after independence usually portrayed the conflict between modernity and tradition. The authors looked at how the nation's changing identity was shaped by the way traditional beliefs and practices either blended in with or clashed with new influences.

Eminent Themes in English-language Indian Writing

1. Diaspora and Cultural Hybridity

English-language Indian literature often examines the nuanced identities that result from cultural hybridity and the experience of diaspora. In the context of migration and globalisation, when people move between many cultural contexts, these concerns are especially pertinent.

Identity Exploration in the Context of Migration and Globalisation : Writers explore the experiences of people who live in two distinct cultures, often emphasising the difficulties and rewards associated with this dual life. Characters struggle with their background and the expectations of their new cultures, and a recurring theme is their feeling of both alienation and belonging.

The following are Salman Rushdie, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Bharati Mukherjee : - Salman Rushdie's "The Satanic Verses" and "Midnight's Children" address the disintegration and reconstruction of identity in postcolonial contexts, blending personal and collective identities through the use of magic realism.

- "Interpreter of Maladies" and "The Namesake" by Jhumpa Lahiri focus on the experience of immigrants, especially Indian Americans, portraying the tensions between generations and cultures within diasporic families.

The novels "Jasmine" and "The Tiger's Daughter" by Bharati Mukherjee examine how Indian women change as they travel across the world, tackling topics like uprooting and attempting to find their identity in a foreign society.

The Idea of the 'Hyphenated' Identity :

'Hyphenated' identities, such as Indian-American or British-Indian, highlight the intricate relationship between two or more cultural identities. This idea is essential to comprehending the hybrid identity that results from the blending of several cultural origins because authors portray the complex reality of being in multiple cultures.

2. National Identity and Gender

Indian women authors who write in English have significantly influenced the national identity debate by emphasising the intersections of caste, class, and gender. Their creations provide alternate national narratives and subvert patriarchal systems.

Depiction of Women's Contributions to the Formation of National Identity :

Authors who identify as female often highlight how women have shaped and challenged national myths. Their works challenge conventional roles, highlight the gendered aspects of national identity, and promote women's equality and more autonomy.

- Input from Women Writers such as Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, and Kamala Das :

Poems by Kamala Das : Kamala Das is renowned for her audacious investigation of female sexuality and identity. Her art defies expectations and affirms the uniqueness and independence of women.

- "The God of Small Things" by Arundhati Roy: This book critiques the structural injustices that define national identity by examining the effects of gender, caste, and class on individual and political history.

The works "Clear Light of Day" and "Fire on the Mountain" by Anita Desai delve into the inner lives of women, emphasising their psychological landscapes and navigating social restrictions.

- Gender, Class, and Caste Intersectionality :

These writers often illustrate the ways in which caste and class interact with gender to create multi-layered tales that capture the complexity of Indian identity. Through these works, we can see how women's identities are shaped and challenged in relation to the larger national identity framework.

3. History, Modernity, and Myth

Indian writers of English often reinterpret mythological themes and historical accounts to establish a conversation between the past and present. The conflict between modernity and tradition in the formation of national identity is highlighted by this issue.

Reimagining Mythological Themes and Historical Narratives :

Writers often use India's abundant mythological and historical legacy to craft tales that strike a chord with modern concerns. Through their unique interpretations, these topics provide fresh perspectives on the identity and cultural memory of the country.

Input from Writers like Shashi Tharoor and Amitav Ghosh :

- "The Shadow Lines" by Amitav Ghosh: This book explores topics of memory, identity, and border mobility by weaving together personal and national histories.

- Shashi Tharoor's "The Great Indian Novel" : Tharoor delivers a criticism of both current society and its historical foundations via his satirical retelling of the Mahabharata in the context of contemporary Indian politics.

The Conflict between Modernity and Tradition in the Formation of National Identity :

These stories often highlight the continuous battle to strike a balance between tradition-keeping and new needs. The writers investigate how these conflicting influences shape both individual and societal identities, raising concerns about what it means to be Indian in a world that is changing quickly.

4. Resistance and Postcolonial Critique

English-language literature by Indians challenges colonial legacies and promotes a more inclusive and egalitarian national identity via postcolonial criticism and resistance.

Literature as a Space for Postcolonial Critique and Resistance : Postcolonial literature examines how colonialism's long-lasting impacts continue to shape Indian identity and

society. Through their writing, authors challenge and dismantle colonial narratives and provide other interpretations of history and culture.

- Theoretical Frameworks from Scholars such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha :

- Homi K. Bhabha's Concepts of Hybridity and Mimicry : Bhabha's theories provide a prism through which to view the intricate relationships between power and identity in postcolonial settings. Whereas mimicry reveals the ambiguity of colonial discourse, his concept of hybridity emphasises the formation of new, mixed identities.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" : Spivak criticises the prevailing narratives imposed by colonial and postcolonial power systems and highlights the significance of providing voice to marginalised communities.

- English's Function in Examining and Dissecting Colonial Legacies :

Indian authors have embraced English, despite its colonial origins, and used it as a weapon of resistance and criticism. These writers participate in a larger conversation about colonialism, identity, and power by writing in English, which allows them to reach a worldwide readership. Through their works, they fight against past injustices and promote a new, inclusive, and fair national identity.

In summary, Indian literature in English is a thriving and active discipline that tackles important national identity-related issues. Indian writers contribute to the continuing conversation about what it means to be Indian in a varied and dynamic country by delving into the complexity of cultural hybridity, gender roles, historical reimaginings, and postcolonial criticism via their stories.

Case Studies

1. "Midnight's Children" by Salman Rushdie

Historical narrative and national identity symbolism

Many people applaud "Midnight's Children" for its deft depiction of India's national identity. Saleem Sinai, the main character, was born on August 15, 1947, the day India gained its freedom, and he represents the country symbolically. Rushdie examines the turbulent history of contemporary India, particularly the partition and the ensuing sociopolitical upheavals, via Saleem's life. The political and personal are inextricably linked, illustrating how national history shapes individual identities.

The Partition and Independence of India: An Allegorical Representation

Rushdie uses metaphor to illustrate the difficulties the newly independent country faces. The experiences of the characters reflect important historical developments and societal changes. For example, the split of India and Pakistan and Saleem's family are similar. The book

explores the psychological and social effects of the division, illustrating the pain and uprooting that millions of people went through. Rushdie is able to criticise the social upheavals and political shortcomings that came with independence because to this allegorical technique.

Magic Realism as a Form of Fiction

"Midnight's Children" is known for its magic realism, which combines the magical with the real to provide a more in-depth knowledge of India's complicated reality. The nation's variety and promise are symbolised by Saleem's telepathic ability and the presence of other "midnight's children" with special capabilities. Rushdie is able to tackle weighty subjects like identity, power, and historical memory in a manner that is both thought-provoking and engrossing because to this storytelling method. The assumption that Indian reality is too complex to be adequately represented by traditional realism alone is reinforced by magic realism.

2. "The God of Small Things" by Arundhati Roy

A Study of Gender, Caste, and Class in the National Context

"The God of Small Things" by Arundhati Roy is a moving examination of how caste, class, and gender intertwine in India. The story, which is set in Kerala, emphasises the inflexible societal structures that endure in spite of modernity. A powerful indictment of the caste system is provided by the forbidden romance between the untouchable Velutha and the upper caste Ammu. Roy reveals the pervasive inequalities and biases that still influence Indian society.

How Political and Personal Histories Affect Individual Identity

The book focuses a great deal on the ways that larger political settings impact individual histories. The social pressures and political unrest of the protagonists' era directly contributed to the pain that the twins Rahel and Estha endured. Roy demonstrates how intimate ties exist between smaller-scale political forces and human lives by interweaving personal stories with historical occurrences, such as the Communist revolution in Kerala.

Linguistic Innovation and Story Structure

Roy's storytelling is distinguished by its inventive language and non-linear structure. The narrative is told via a sequence of flashbacks and jumbled recollections, which represent the protagonists' erratic and horrific experiences. Roy uses language in an equally inventive way, combining English and Malayalam terms, experimenting with grammar, and using poetic imagery. In addition to enhancing the story, this artistic choice highlights the fragmentation theme and the intricacy of memory and identity.

3. "The Namesake" by Jhumpa Lahiri

The Diasporan Immigrant Experience and Identity Construction

Jhumpa Lahiri's "The Namesake" explores the experience of immigration through the lives of the Ganguli family, who relocate from Calcutta to the US. The difficulties of adjusting to a new culture and the search for identity abroad are topics covered in the book. The main character, Gogol Ganguli, struggles with his dual ethnicity and feels cut off from both his American upbringing and his Indian origin. The psychological and emotional difficulties of juggling two cultures are depicted by Lahiri.

Cultural Integration and Generational Disagreement as Themes

The issue of cultural integration and the generational strife it causes is central to the book. Gogol and Ashoke, the first-generation immigrants, want to blend in with American culture, but their parents, Ashoke and Ashima, work hard to preserve their traditional customs. This conflict draws attention to how different generations see identity and belonging. Lahiri depicts the challenges of preserving cultural identity while adjusting to a new setting with empathy.

Identity and Naming's Role

The importance of names and naming appears often in "The Namesake." Gogol has identity struggle as a result of his name, which was given to him in remembrance of Russian writer Nikolai Gogol. The name, which stands for both his own feeling of estrangement and his parents' ethnic background, weighs heavily on him. The process of naming and renaming is a recurring motif in the book, reflecting larger concerns of identity construction and alteration. Lahiri used Gogol's path of self-acceptance and comprehension of his cultural identity as a metaphor for his own, more general search for these things.

Results

English-language works by Indian authors provide a deep and complex examination of national identity. Indian writers have tackled difficult issues of history, culture, and identity via their literary works, connecting with readers throughout the world while also expressing experiences that are uniquely Indian through the use of English as a medium. The dynamic and multidimensional character of Indian national identity is reflected in the literary tradition's continual growth.

1. Intricate Themes of Identity, Culture, and History

English-language Indian literature explores extensively the historical moments that have influenced the country, including the British colonial period, the independence movement, and the pain of division. Writers such as Salman Rushdie in *Midnight's Children* and

Khushwant Singh in *Train to Pakistan* provide readers an insight into how these historical events have shaped the Indian people's collective psyche by incorporating them into their stories. A recurrent topic is also cultural variety, with authors delving into India's many languages, faiths, and customs to highlight the depth and diversity of Indian culture.

2. Establishing a Global Reach

Indian authors may break beyond language and geographic limitations to reach a worldwide readership by using English as a literary medium. This global reach promotes a better knowledge and respect of Indian culture and concerns by helping to spread Indian tales and opinions around the globe. Writers who bridge the gap between India and the rest of the globe by underlining the universal themes of identity, belonging, and cultural struggle include authors like Jhumpa Lahiri, whose investigation of the Indian diaspora in works such as *The Namesake*. By placing Indian literature in the larger framework of world literature, this link to a worldwide readership also contributes to international literary discussions and exchanges.

3. Explaining Experiences That Are Clearly Indian

Indian writers have a strong connection to their original culture, customs, and social realities even when they write in English. They capture the essence of Indian life with all its complexity and contradictions by using their storytelling to describe distinctively Indian experiences. For example, the socio-political environment of Kerala is shown vividly in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, which tackles themes of gender, caste, and forbidden love. Readers within and outside of India are drawn to the authenticity and uniqueness of these experiences, which provide a window into the rich and complex fabric of Indian culture.

4. Literary Tradition's Evolution

The dynamic character of Indian society and its continued interaction with modernity and globalisation are reflected in the literary heritage of Indian literature in English, which is always changing. In addition to exploring historical and cultural topics, modern authors are tackling contemporary problems including social fairness, environmental concerns, and economic progress. The emergence of new voices and genres—such as crime novels, graphic tales, and speculative fiction—shows how versatile and inventive Indian authors can be. This progression guarantees that Indian literature preserves its rich legacy while being current and adaptable to the times.

5. National Identity: Dynamic and Multifaceted

The stories written in English by Indian authors demonstrate how vibrant and complex Indian national identity is. This identity is a dynamic synthesis of several factors, including

historical legacies, cultural norms, and modern realities, rather than a fixed entity. Through the exploration and negotiation of these many facets of identity, literature offers a platform for a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of what it means to be Indian. The incorporation of many viewpoints and voices in Indian literature in English results in a more intricate and all-encompassing depiction of national identity.

To sum up, Indian literature in English is a monument to the fortitude and inventiveness of Indian writers who have managed to effectively negotiate the difficulties of identity, culture, and history. They have made a distinctive mark on the literary landscape of the world with their rich and diverse tales, providing insightful perspectives into the Indian experience and assisting in the continuous process of constructing national identity. This literary heritage promises to deepen our knowledge of India and its global position as it develops further.

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