

Contours of Contemporary Indian English Fiction: 21st Century Perspective

Purvi Vakotar¹ and Dr. Viki Modi²

UGC NET Qualified¹ and Adhyapak Sahayak²

Vivekananda College of Arts, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India

Abstract: *Indian English fiction has undoubtedly achieved a high position in the world of literature. In 21st-century Indian English literature, contemporary Indian English fiction has established a niche for itself. There is a new wave of novels with a very different tone. Through the use of experimental narrative approaches, recent Indian English novels present a wide range of subject matter, including women's writing, crime fiction, terror novels, science fiction, campus novels, graphic novels, disability texts, LGBT voices, Dalit writing, eco narratives, myth and fantasy narratives, philosophical novels, historical novels, postcolonial and multicultural narratives, and diaspora novels. Popular literature that depicts contemporary Indian life has become more and more popular over the last ten years; while it may have been created with an Indian readership in mind, it has received praise from an increasingly international audience. This essay will concentrate on the latest advancements and how they represent India overall.*

Keywords: Nation, culture, politics, gender, and identity themes

I. INTRODUCTION

Early Literature

In essence, Indian literature is a tapestry woven from the rich threads of its diverse cultural landscape. It highlights a wide range of languages, cultural perspectives, religious beliefs, and regional variations across its numerous literary works, with ancient texts like the Vedas and epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata serving as the foundation. Modern literature also continues to explore diverse themes through various regional languages like Tamil, Bengali, Hindi, and more. Another example of this multicultural setting is found in English-Indian literature.

The topic range and literary quality of Indian novels in English have greatly increased since the nineteenth century, when Lal Behari Day's Govind Samanta (1874) and Bunkim Chandra Chatterjee's Rajmohan's Wife (1864) were published. Toru Dutt's 1878 book Bianca, or The Young Spanish Maiden, was the first written by an Indian woman. Saguna: A Story of Native Christian Life, Krupabai Sathianadhan's autobiographical book, was serialized in The Madras Christian College Magazine from 1887 to 1888. His sole other book, Kamala: The Story of a Hindu Life, was published in 1894.

II. 20TH CENTURY FICTION

In the 20th century, an effort was made to awaken society in a positive way. Many of the novelists were both secularists and poets. A progressive frame of view was prevalent at the time. A sense of national identity and new principles were sought. The violence of caste, class, and religious differences; the rise of social inequities; the partition and the ensuing communal riots; the subjugation of women; and the poverty of the illiterate masses were among the main themes. The contributions of prominent writers such as Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markendya, Khushwant Singh, Chaman Nahal, and Manohar Malgoukar to the development of the Indian English language are mainly overlooked, with the exception of the three main figures who founded the Indian novel in English: Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, and Raja Rao. The second generation of Indian novelists experimented with language and incorporated aspects of Indian culture into the foreign language, whereas the first generation focused on a variety of social issues, including poverty, class-based discrimination, societal dogmas, and rigid religious standards.



The majority of them, including Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai, V.S. Naipaul, and others, are global Indians—Indians by birth who have lived, studied, or worked abroad and hence have an objective view of Indian reality. They have given the language a new taste and produced new English idioms and phrases, so they are no longer slavish imitations of the language. Many female writers of the time began to challenge the patriarchal traditions of Indian cultures and introduced a strong feminist voice. Their writings condemned exploitation and explored the complexities of the feminine psyche.

III. CONTEMPORARY INDIAN ENGLISH FICTION

In addition to interacting with the forces of modernity and globalization, contemporary Indian English novelists are retracing the borders of Indian literature. Fiction with a political bent that attempts to confront the issues their country faces in the era of global capitalism. Allegorical books use melodramatic rhetoric, dark humor, and strange characters to explore philosophical and historical concerns.

3.1 Fictional retellings, historical Theme

Indian English novelists were given a fresh boost by the reworking of mythology and history. Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Tharoor, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and Salman Rushdie frequently use Indian mythology and history to frame their English novels.

Amita Kanekar's 2005 book *A Spoke in the Wheel* is a fascinating history of India that explores the Vedic ceremonies and the Lord Buddha. Similar to Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* (1940), which provided a poignant look at Indian life and its dying old order, Salman Rushdie laments in *Shalimar the Clown* (2006) that "the crumbling weight of Islamic jihad and military repression" is tearing apart Kashmir's secular fabric. Easterine Kire, the first Indian English novelist from Nagaland, wrote historical novels about the Japanese invasion of India during World War II and the war between the Nagas and the British forces in *A Naga Village Remembered* (2003) and *Mari* (2010), respectively. Three novels—*The Twentieth Wife* (2002), *The Feast of Roses* (2003), and *The Shadow Princess* (2010)—are the result of Indu Sundaresan's passion for Mughal history.

3.2 Expatriate, diasporic or immigrant writing

The sense of displacement is a recurring theme in all exile literature, and non-resident Indian authors like Bharti Mukherjee, Shashi Tharoor, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Sunetra Gupta, Rohinton Mistry, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Hari Kunzru have all written about it. It deals with a feeling of geographical and sociocultural dislocation. It explores identity and nationalism using complex literary tactics like magic realism.

Diaspora fiction writers are currently plagued by the necessity to re-examine their identities and creative impulses, both domestically and internationally, from a new and suitable perspective. In their imaginative depiction of the essence of the "new times," its cross-cultural or trans-cultural reality, they have not only transcended as well as partially or totally dissolved their socio-cultural and geographic boundaries. Among the historically painstakingly researched works by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni that center on the experiences of immigrants are *Neela: Victory Song*, *The Vine of Desire*, and *Queen of Dreams*. The Gorkha movement in Darjeeling serves as the setting for Kiran Desai's in-depth reflections on race, identity, exile, and nationalism in *The Inheritance of Loss*.

3.3 Dalit Literature

Literature about the socially underprivileged is referred to as "writing from the edges" or "resistance literature." It affirms the socio-political status of the oppressed and disadvantaged. This writing reveals reality and retells history from the perspective of the downtrodden. Dalit writing reflects a wide range of issues, such as the subordination of the working and lower classes, gender discrimination, oppression, and disdain for women and other socially underprivileged groups.



3.4 Translations

Another fantastic way to expand one's knowledge is to translate previously published books. The diversity of Indian English fiction is also enhanced by regionally produced literature and its many translations. For example, the works of several famous authors, like Munshi Premchandra, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Subramania Bharathi, Vijay Tendulkar, Vasudevan Nair, and many more, are now translated into English for readers worldwide. Notable English adaptations include *Samsakara* by U.R. Anantha Murthy, *Draupadi* by Mahashweta Devi, *Tale of a Tamarind* by Sundara Ramasamy, *He Conquered the Jungle* by Kesava Reddy, and *Chemmeen* by Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai.

3.5 Graphic Novels

In India, graphic books are not as popular. However, big publishers are becoming increasingly interested in this genre. A new series of graphic books is published every year. Two distinct circumstances combined to make graphic novels a sophisticated and well-liked genre in India in 2004. First, the main character in the Bollywood movie *Hum Tum* ('Me and You') was a cartoonist. Second, one of the most well-known graphic novelists in India, Sarnath Banerjee, published his first graphic novel, *Corridor*, via Penguin Books. Artists have focused a lot of emphasis on this genre since then. The cause was systematically taken up by a group of young artists.

Somesh Kumar's memoir, *Little by Little*, is a gripping story of grief, addiction, family, and separation, but it is fundamentally a reflection of childhood. Since its launch in April 2021, Orijit Sen's *Comixense* has introduced us to vibrant, vibrant, and profoundly thought-provoking comics created by some of India's most captivating modern authors and illustrators. Zi, an 11-year-old child in Debasmita Dasguta's *Zardozi*, is often the subject of remarks from his family, friends, and even neighbors about who he is. However, Zi's grandmother supports him in pursuing his identity, voice, and skills outside of social norms. Two close friends jump off their apartment building in Amruta Patil's well-received graphic novel *Kari* (2008); one is saved, while the other falls into a sewer. *Kari*, who fell into a sewer, battles suicidal thoughts and has struggled with inner turmoil all of her life.

3.6 Literary Gerontology

The "greying" of the population is currently a hot topic in India. Literary gerontology, or gerontological narratives, can be found in a lot of literary works. The biological components of aging are typically not the main focus of these publications. The stories do not medicalize aging, despite their references to drugs, tests, and other topics.

Many Indian literary works deal with aging, including Upamanyu Banerjee's *The Last Burden*, Ranjit Lal's *Our Nana was a Nutcase*, Rohinton Mistry's *Family Matters*, and Anuradha Roy's *The Folded Earth*. Literary works like *Family Matters* (2002) by Rohinton Mistry explore the ways in which aging impacts the entire family, including caregiving, behavior (such as the irascible behavior of the older person), and family relations. Some of the literature also discusses the expectations that families have of the elderly and those who are experiencing "chronic forgetting," as Stephen Post refers to dementia. Their isolation from the family is often the result of these expectations.

3.7 Campus Novels

The primary subjects of campus novels around the world are student life that is mostly connected to academics and institutions, as well as stories about the lives of academics, problems, and events pertaining to academic institutions that were established, flourished, and attained international renown. Some Indian students have got the chance to compose new novels about their college experiences in the twenty-first century. It is believed that these younger writers are creating popular fiction.

Professor K.L. Kamal's novel *Campus* (2002) illustrates how universities are currently failing. It follows the challenging life of a determined vice chancellor who aspires to make his university one of the best in the country by promoting higher learning and research. Githa Hariharan's novel *In Times of Siege* (2003) tells the subject of a controversial online history course that fosters liberal division. "A subtle dissection of the contest between religious intolerance and liberal dissent in modern-day India," Shabano Bilgrami said (*Asian Review* 2 Mar 2005).

A new trend of students writing novels has emerged since Chetan Bhagat's debut. *Five Point Someone* (2004), Bhagat's best-known novel, is set at the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi. It details the complete tale of three students who



suffered abuse at the hands of the IIT's grading system. Mediocre But Arrogant (2005), a campus novel by Abhijit Bhaduri, describes student life at the "Management Institute of Jamshedpur," where the main character graduates and gets his first job in human resources.

Like in other nations, the three main topics of academic or campus life—students, instructors, and administration—were the focus of Indian campus novels. India serves as the backdrop, and the characters are shown as either following or breaking Indian social mores.

3.8 Queer Literature

Over the past 20 years, there has been a huge surge in contemporary queer writing across a variety of genres, such as short stories, novels, essays, poetry, memoirs, ethnographies, and graphic narratives. To celebrate Pride Month and make sure the voices of the LGBT community are heard, we have chosen five LGBTQIA+ books, from autobiographies to fiction, that will help you understand, relate to, or empathize with "queer" life in India.

In Shyam Selvadurai's six-story *Funny Boy*, we witness the first blushes of love, the oddities of his extended family, and Arjie's discovery of his sexual identity as tensions simmer and the protagonists race towards inevitable disaster. In addition to shedding light on contemporary India, Arundhati Roy's novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* tackles the challenging subject of gender identity. In addition to the works already listed, some notable works in gay literature are Suniti Namjoshi's *The Fabulous Feminist*, Hoshang Merchant's edited *Yaraana: Gay Writing from South Asia*, and Sachin Kundalkar's *Cobalt Blue*, which was translated by Jerry Pinto.

3.9 Chick Literature

The term "chick literature" is a type of fiction written in India in the twenty-first century that mostly centers on the lives, romantic relationships, and personal hardships of young, urban Indian women. This genre includes, for example, "Those Pricey Thakur Girls," "The Wedding Tamasha," and "Isha, Unscripted." The works of well-known writers in this area, such as Anuja Chauhan, Sudha Nair, and Sajni Patel, usually touch on issues including navigating contemporary relationships, family expectations, social pressures, and job goals.

Both Rajashree's *Trust Me* (2006) and Swati Kaushal's *Piece of Cake* (2004) might be considered regional chick lit. The humorous tale *Trust Me* explores friendship, love, and breakup. Teenagers, young females, and boys will find the novel appealing. The *Zoya Factor* (2008), a semi-autobiographical novel by Anuja Chauhan, is another popular and successful example of this genre of fiction. It tells the story of a woman who meets the Indian Cricket Team while working at an advertising agency and ends up being the lucky charm for the team that won the 2011 Cricket World Cup.

3.10 Nature and Literature/ Ecological Fiction

Literature and the environment have been found to be closely intertwined. Since ancient times, literature and the arts have depicted physical landscapes and human-environment relationships. As humankind has evolved, the bond between literature and the natural world has grown stronger. Numerous 21st-century Indian novels explore the relationship between humans and nature as well as the consequences of human activity on the environment. These novels are frequently categorized as eco-fiction or eco-critical.

Ecological issues are given their own room in Indian fiction. It has become common practice for Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan, and Kamala Markandaya to build the narratives of their novels and short tales from an ecological and environmental perspective. The eco-texts of Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Anita Desai, and several others show the growing awareness of the need for environmental conservation and the grave threat to the environment.

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004) documents the deaths of thousands of people in the grandiose aspirations of a multinational corporation; Suravi Sharma Kumar's *Voices in the Valley* (2012) highlights the topography and culture of Assam and human communities living in communion with nature; Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* (2007) recounts the struggles of Bhopal gas tragedy victims; and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) mentions the profound meaning of home while narrating the exotic exuberance of flora and fauna. *The House with the Thousand Stories*, written by Aruni Kashyap in 2013, also emphasizes how insurgency consumes Assamese natural environments.



IV. CONCLUSION

In today's literary environment, there are Indian authors who write in English and portray India's realities. In the literary community, they have a number of responsibilities. With extraordinary competence, they fulfill their responsibilities as anthropologists, sociologists, novelists, essayists, travel writers, and educators. As ambassadors, they also take on the duty of advancing international peace. With their huge bodies of work garnering international notice, contemporary writers have emerged as enormously important socioliterary characters. They are now the sole negotiators in charge of resolving India's and other colonial countries' fundamental social and cultural issues. It would be fascinating and significant to understand about the changes that have taken place in Indian society, especially because Indian English fiction has eventually gained recognition on a global level. Additionally, the most significant outcome of these changes is that Indian English writers are now writing with more assurance and fervor, incorporating magical scenarios with social elements in their fictional universes.

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