

Intersections of Cultures: Multiculturalism in Indian English Literature

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Abstract

The paper "Intersections of Cultures: Multiculturalism in Indian English Literature" investigates the dynamic interaction between many cultures in Indian English literature. This dissertation examines how multiculturalism is portrayed in Indian literature written in English. It does so to show the intricate web of Indian society and the numerous cultural influences that it is subject to. This research investigates how Indian English literature navigates cultural variety, identity, and hybridity themes. It does so by analyzing major works and critical views. This study aims to provide insights into the intricacies of multiculturalism in modern India. This article seeks to shed light on how writers negotiate cultural borders, challenge preconceptions, and celebrate the richness of India's multicultural history. This is accomplished by studying the intersections of cultures in Indian English literature.

Keywords: Indian English literature, multiculturalism, cultural diversity, identity, hybridity, cultural intersections, cross-cultural dialogue, representation, cultural heritage.

Introduction:

India has immense cultural diversity, where multiple languages, religions, traditions, and customs coexist vibrantly and harmoniously. With its rich cultural tapestry, India is a land captivated by its diversity. Indian writing, particularly works written in English, has been a

constant source of inspiration for scholars in the field of literature. The rich tapestry of civilizations provides a plethora of inspiration. Indian literature written in English has garnered global recognition in recent decades for its adept portrayal of modern Indian culture and exploration of multicultural themes.

Indian literature written in English showcases the intricate intermingling of diverse cultures within the framework of India. India's rich history has been shaped by migrations, conquests, and cultural exchanges, from the ancient Indus Valley civilizations to the medieval Mughal kingdoms and the impact of British colonial rule. These waves have been a consistent presence throughout the nation's history. As a researcher, one can delve into the rich historical legacy that set the stage for the emergence of Indian English literature. This backdrop not only offers insights into the diverse character of Indian identity and heritage but also serves as a prism for further investigation.

Embark on a captivating journey through the vast expanse of Indian English literature. We aim to explore the manifestation of diversity in the themes, characters, and storylines of Indian English literature. We will explore how Indian writers who write in English navigate cultural boundaries, question stereotypes, and embrace the diversity of India's multicultural heritage. We aim to delve into the intricacies of diversity in contemporary India and its representation in Indian English literature through an in-depth analysis of notable literary works and the perspectives of scholars.

An Overview of Indian English Writing History

In 1835, Lord Macaulay introduced English to provide direction within the framework of Indian education. The British rulers of India saw it as an educational tool that could help civilize the natives. India has a rich tradition of writing in over twelve living dialects, which predates the focus on English writing in school and university courses. Nevertheless, English writing in India rapidly attained a prestigious social standing, owing to its introduction and endorsement by the ruling authorities. Indian culture has beautifully assimilated elements from various other cultures. It has been experiencing effects that have gone unnoticed for quite some time. The English term culture is not as extensive as it should be. The current analysis lacks the depth required to encompass the diverse social dynamics in India fully. The term "unavoidable" is often used to describe a distinct social class or a specific group within

the global population. When examining social gatherings, it is valuable to utilize terms like "elite culture" and "middle-class culture" to capture their authentic social nature.

Indian Viewpoint on English Composition

When examining the topic, it becomes evident that discussing the multicultural context with Indian writing presents unique characteristics that set it apart from other post-provincial literary works written in English. Understanding the intricate connections between various social, linguistic, racial, and religious communities in India poses a significant challenge in sociological research. These distinct sub-societies defy simple categorization within conventional sociological or ethnic frameworks. It can be quite challenging to incorporate these diverse sub-societies into the equation. Examining simple and complicated multicultural circumstances from a research scholar's perspective is essential for a comprehensive understanding. It involves analyzing complex and intricate settings in a perplexing manner. Given the vast array of languages spoken by the general population, the diverse range of languages used for written work, and the rich history of social movements, it is inevitable to come across such issues. Indian literature in English has a relatively short history of about one hundred years, making it a relatively young academic tradition in India. Multiculturalism holds a prominent and influential position within the Indian way of life.

Aspect of Multiculturalism

Regardless, an Indian individual is immersed in both cultures and embraces the social norm of speaking multiple languages. She can adapt her social behaviour to fit the requirements of different social contexts, even when faced with a diverse range of social norms and fluctuations within her immediate surroundings. Marga and Desi were commonly employed in Indian languages to classify these influences. The Desi represents the dynamic and ever-changing aspects of an individual's social identity. At the same time, the Marga encompasses the entire way of life across the subcontinent. Usually, a deep interest in etymology, strict guidelines, and careful financial planning contribute to social mobility. This intricate social structure can be viewed as a complex interplay between the norms of the outsider, the Desi, and Marga. The Marga and Desi traditions in India draw inspiration from external conventions. They underwent rapid standardization and stylization and were bestowed with a prominent position in Indian society. Furthermore, employed a systematic and rational

approach in conjunction with everyday life, resembling the traditions of Desi culture. This dual character is achieved through realism and stylization, a prominent feature of English writing produced in India.

It is worth noting that there are certain issues with Indian writers in English who demonstrate exceptional skills in various areas of their writing. The initial passage is quite extensive. Immersing oneself in the unique customs of India fosters a deep appreciation for the nuances of the local culture through careful observation and emulation. This inclination is evident in the writing styles of Indian authors specializing in English-language literature. For instance, despite their extensive writing experience, R.K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand continue to grapple with aligning their regional ideas with the objective nature of English. An individual with expertise in English linguistics or a writer from South America explores a relevant subject. The importance of writing in an objective, unbiased, and nuanced is not solely influenced by the writer's dual cultural and linguistic background. Salman Rushdie and V.S. Naipaul, renowned Indian writers, also have bicultural backgrounds. Nevertheless, they have cultivated a distinct approach by rejecting the conventional societal expectations placed upon an average Indian writer. This division requires a significant focus on the inconsistency and humour, the narrative and style of speech, and the linguistic features of the characters.

In India, the English language is often regarded as superior to Indian dialects. The Indian writer aims to assert the distinctiveness of his writing, catering to readers from a specific socioeconomic class. This division hinders the development of a conversational tone in Indian English. The issue of development arises due to conflicting societal demands on English writing in India. English and Hindi are officially recognized as two of India's official languages. English does not have a dedicated geological basis, whereas Hindi is a deeply rooted language. From one perspective, it is considered a static language; from another, it is seen as a language of status. Given its global reach and non-Indian origins, English is often regarded as a symbol of prestige. India's language is known for its academic nature, making it more commonly studied than spoken. It acknowledges that it has ventured into new territory and is a creative form of communication. Journalists who strive to uphold the language's global standing often adopt an unexpected, educated tone. However, in doing so, they also introduce additional local tones that disrupt the equilibrium. Nissim Ezekiel's sonnets exemplify a mindset of ambiguity, resulting in a humorous and distinctly Indian use of

English. This other example is the epic *Savitri* by Aurobindo, written in a language reminiscent of Milton and with references to altered mythology from ancient times. English has been widely embraced as a commonly used language in India. However, it is widely acknowledged as a global language and is utilized to express local nuances. As a research scholar, I believe this topic delves into the intricate dynamics between the "Marga," the outsider, and the Desi in various social foundations in India.

Many journalists, especially those interested in self-reflection, demonstrate a strong social network. Consider R. Partha Sarathy, whose sonnet *Rough Passage* beautifully expresses this connection. The sonnet is divided into three sections: Exile, Trail, and Homecoming. In the initial segment, he finds himself in an unfamiliar British setting, appearing bewildered until his Indian background is unveiled. In the following section, we delve into the poet's journey and his intricate web of relationships. The concluding section delves into his profound self-awareness, beautifully portrayed through thought-provoking puzzles. The author skillfully combines Western, Marga, and Desi to maintain the theme. There are other noteworthy sonnets in Indian English literature, such as *Relationship* by Jayanta Mahapatra and *Savitri* by Sri Aurobindo.

Style of Investigative Writing

When English is employed as a medium for experimental writing in India, the scholar's canvas is expanded, but their shading may be somewhat diminished. The *Talkative Man*, a novel by R.K. Narayan, embodies the essence of Indian literature in English. It appears that Indian English literature has been destined for such a fate since its inception. The history of Indian English writing showcases a fascinating interplay between Western, Marga, and Desi social customs, with instances of both conflict and collaboration. Indian essayists had mastered writing in foreign languages long before English came to India. Indian essayists utilized languages such as Arabic or Persian, borrowed from external sources. Amir Khosrau from the thirteenth century and Jagannathpandit, a Sanskrit writer, were remarkable examples of individuals who possessed a deep understanding of multiple languages and could express themselves eloquently in languages that were not their native tongue.

Indian scholars were unsurprised when English writing was introduced into the instructional framework. Renowned scholars such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy and various British intellectuals inspired by Sir William Jones strongly supported the inclusion of Arabic and Sanskrit education in the existing educational framework. Currently, a discussion is taking place known as the Anglicist and Orientalist debate. Nevertheless, a clash arose between the Marga and Western cultures. During that period, various languages, such as Gujarati, Tamil, and Marathi, developed their own artistic standards. These customs were observed in Desi. The debate ultimately resulted in the British organization's decision to incorporate all three sections of the educational structure in India. The official name of the Indian government's linguistic policy is still the three-language plan. Considering the consistent implementation of this approach since 1835, Indian compositions in English are closely connected to all three social aspects and operate simultaneously within each of them.

In Indian literature written in English, one can observe four distinct compositional styles that emerge from its multicultural context:

- A way of life that embraces both patriotism and internationalism, where the social aspects of Marga and those from outside come together harmoniously. Raja Rao exemplifies the perfect fictional example as he skillfully intertwines a sense of longing for the past with a global perspective on existentialism.
- Exploring integrating neighbourhood or counter-cultural elements with patriotic or Marga societal elements. An exemplary work of fiction is Prathap Sharma's story, *The Day of the Turban*, which takes place in Punjab.
- The constant irritation between the public's conflict with the international social scene or the Marga movement reveals a sense of incongruity and nostalgia. The writing style of Mulk Raj Anand aligns well with this type of subject matter.
- A style that goes against the interests of the public and the local community, focusing on the broader social and cultural aspects. It seems that R.K. Narayan occasionally addresses this issue.

Poetry by A.K. Ramanujan, Jayantha Mahapatra, Sri Aurobindo, and R. Partha Sarathy beautifully showcases the four distinct categories. Building on this perspective, it can be argued that a completely independent style of Indian English is not feasible within India. The varied context of Indian English writing is connected to its wide array of styles. The

competition among the three social streams has witnessed remarkable innovation in contemporary India. The foreign culture reflected in the English language has a relatively recent history, spanning only a few centuries. The Desi culture in India has emerged since the early 20th century, encompassing and preserving the social characteristics of past centuries. Several Marga customs can be traced back to the ancient roots of Indian civilization. Each of the three societies begins with its distinct characteristics, whether it be an agricultural, medieval, or industrialized society.

Legend has it that the modern Indian culture is showcased through a combination of a middle-aged dress, a sophisticated hat, and worn-out shoes. The issue becomes more intricate due to the uneven valuation of ancient objects, even if they serve no practical purpose, and the emphasis on the potential of young objects, even if they are still developing. Consequently, Sanskrit and its rich cultural heritage, along with English and the modern lifestyle it represents, are held in high regard. Everything, including language, culture, and mindsets, is deeply influenced by the rich Indian sense of tradition and custom. Simulated dialects from Indian history have been carefully preserved in the country's social memory. In addition, Indians have a remarkable ability to grasp foreign languages quickly. Nevertheless, these complex dialects are consistently regarded as inherently foreign and inadequately acquired. India's literary output has undergone a moderate level of traditionalization.

Imperialism had a significant impact on the development of Indian literature in English. Two significant impacts of imperialism on Indian culture included a strong inclination to imitate the British and the rise of a Pentecostal inclination. The profound admiration for the ancient Indian civilization led to a resurgence of interest that made studying the distant Indian past unnecessary. The fascination with emulating it instilled a profound reverence for the English language. Sociologists commonly refer to these two trends as Westernization and Sanskritization. The Indian literature and culture of today have influenced these two trends. This kind of cycle has a detrimental impact on the development of a budding creative tradition as it leads to significant distortions in its understanding and hinders the establishment of its norms.

Analyses of Multiculturalism in Indian English Literature from a Critical Perspective:

Multiculturalism in Indian English writing has been thoroughly explored from various critical perspectives. Academics and critics have thoroughly examined how Indian English literature tackles cultural diversity, identity politics, and cross-cultural exchanges. Their insightful analyses shed light on the complexities of multiculturalism in contemporary India. The following analytical perspectives shed light on the role of diversity in Indian English literature:

1. **Postcolonial Critique:** Postcolonial theory offers an essential framework for understanding multiculturalism in Indian English writing. Critics such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak have extensively examined Indian English literature, exploring its reflection and response to the enduring impact of colonialism and imperialism. Postcolonial critics explore how Indian English authors grappled with cultural identities following the end of colonial rule, challenged prevailing narratives, and reclaimed their agency. They delve into marginalization, diaspora, and cultural hybridity, questioning prevailing notions of Otherness and power dynamics within Indian culture and beyond.
2. **Feminist and Gender Perspectives:** Understanding the portrayal of women and gender dynamics in multicultural environments in Indian English literature can be enhanced by examining feminist and gender perspectives. The exploration of patriarchy, female empowerment, and gender inequality in Indian English literature has been extensively studied by renowned critics such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Susie Tharu. They explore how women's experiences intersect with various aspects of identity, such as religion, caste, and class. Their research sheds light on the nuanced dynamics of resistance and power in multicultural settings.
3. **Ecocritical and Environmental Perspectives:** The connection between literature and the environment is thoroughly examined, considering ecocritical and environmental viewpoints. The focus is on how Indian English literature tackles and mirrors ecological concerns in diverse environments. Critics such as Amitav Ghosh, Vandana Shiva, and Rob Nixon have delved into the portrayal of the natural world, human relationships with the environment, and the impact of global environmental issues on local communities in

the works of Indian English authors. They explore how literature can promote environmental justice, sustainability, and environmental consciousness across different cultural contexts.

4. **Global Reception and Impact:** Global reception and impact perspectives explore how readers and critics worldwide engage with, interpret, and appreciate Indian English literature. Critics such as Elleke Boehmer, Aijaz Ahmad, and Priyamvada Gopal delve into the impact of Indian English literature on international literary marketplaces, exploring its influence on literary trends, cultural perceptions, and cross-cultural interactions. They examine the effects of Indian English literature on global understandings of multiculturalism and cultural diversity, contributing to broader conversations on globalization, cosmopolitanism, and transnationalism.

Multiculturalism's Potential and Difficulties in Indian English Literature

The multiculturalism in Indian English literature highlights the challenges of navigating multiple cultural identities within a diverse society. This essay explores the possibilities and challenges of diversity within the realm of Indian English literature. This study provides valuable insights into the complex relationship between literary representation and cultural diversity. It examines key issues such as identity politics, linguistic variation, cultural stereotypes, and the potential for fostering cross-cultural understanding.

Challenges:

1. Cultural Stereotypes and Misrepresentations:

One of the challenges of multiculturalism involves the need to combat the propagation of inaccurate cultural depictions and biases. To effectively capture cultural identities in a nuanced and thorough manner, writers must navigate a delicate balance between staying true to the essence of the culture and avoiding simplistic or exaggerated portrayals.

2. Linguistic Diversity and Translation Challenges:

The linguistic diversity in India challenges authors and translators in Indian English literature. Effectively capturing the richness of linguistic traditions can be challenging, as it

requires careful consideration of the cultural nuances, idioms, and phrases that may not directly translate into English due to linguistic and cultural differences.

3. Identity Politics and Marginalized Voices:

Exploring the complexities of multiculturalism brings attention to the important aspects of minority voices, identities, privilege, and representation. To fully understand and address the various forms of oppression that marginalized individuals face, writers must delve into the complexities of caste, class, gender, and religion within their literary works.

Opportunities:

1. Amplifying Marginalized Voices:

Multiculturalism offers an opportunity to amplify marginalized voices and challenge dominant narratives of power and control. Writers from marginalized communities can utilize Indian English writing as a platform to advocate for social justice and equality, reclaim their agency, and assert their identities.

2. Fostering Cross-Cultural Understanding:

Embracing multiculturalism fosters an environment that encourages empathy, solidarity, and a deeper understanding of different cultures. Through the power of storytelling, literature can cultivate compassion, facilitate meaningful dialogue, and promote mutual understanding between different cultures. By offering a diverse range of cultural experiences and perspectives, it serves as a bridge that connects people from various backgrounds.

Conclusion

The study's conclusion highlights the profound impact of diversity on the rich tapestry of Indian English literature. Through a thorough exploration of various perspectives, narratives, and cultural influences, Indian English literature can vividly depict the richness and intricacies of Indian culture and its multifaceted history of intercultural exchanges. Indian literature written in English has played a significant role in facilitating cultural exchange, dialogue, and appreciation, starting from the colonial era and extending into the present era of globalization. Indian writing has appreciated the rich artistic legacy that India has left behind.

Indian literature in English thoroughly explores the complexities of multiculturalism in contemporary India, delving into topics such as identity, hybridity, and the rich tapestry of cultural traditions. The authors delve into the intersections of different cultures, challenging common misconceptions and offering fresh insights that broaden our comprehension of Indian society and the diverse makeup of its population.

The connection between Indian English literature and diversity is a topic that is frequently explored as it constantly evolves and becomes even more diverse. This indicates the continuous phenomena of migration, globalization, and cultural exchange. Indian English literature highlights the importance of recognizing cultural diversity and promoting intercultural communication. It encourages the acceptance of differences, the cultivation of empathy, and the bridging of cultural gaps.

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