



## Indian authors writing in English: Formation of national consciousness through literature

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### Abstract

This paper explores the role of Indian authors writing in English in the development of national consciousness. It investigates how Indian writers, through the medium of English, contributed to the awakening of India's national identity, particularly during and after the colonial period. The paper critically examines works by significant authors such as R.K. Narayan, Salman Rushdie, and Arundhati Roy to showcase how literature became a tool for articulating political, social, and cultural aspirations. The study highlights how these writers constructed a collective national identity while navigating between local and global influences.

**Keywords:** Writing, English, national consciousness, literature, political, social

### Introduction

Indian literature in English occupies a unique place in the literary world. Born out of colonialism, Indian authors have adopted and adapted English to express their distinct cultural and national identity. This paper seeks to explore how these authors have contributed to the formation of Indian national consciousness through their works. The introduction will set the context by discussing the colonial legacy of English in India and how Indian writers transformed it into a medium for national awakening.

Kamala Das's literary journey is deeply rooted in the socio-cultural and historical contexts of post-independence India. Born in 1934 in Malabar, Kerala, Das grew up in a period marked by significant social and political transitions. India's post-colonial era was characterized by a struggle to define its national identity and cultural values, a context that heavily influenced Das's writings. Her experiences as a woman in a patriarchal society, along with the broader socio-political dynamics of the time, profoundly shaped her literary voice.

Das's engagement with English literature began during her education, where she was introduced to Western literary traditions. This exposure provided her with a framework to articulate her thoughts while simultaneously positioning her work within a global literary context. English, though a foreign language, became a medium through which Das

could address both universal and uniquely Indian experiences, thus bridging the gap between local realities and global literary discourses.

Kamala Das's exploration of gender and sexuality is one of the most striking aspects of her literary work. In a society where discussions about female sexuality and personal desires were often taboo, Das's writings broke new ground by addressing these themes with a raw and unvarnished honesty. Her poetry and prose reveal the struggles of women negotiating their identities within a restrictive social framework, highlighting the complexities of gender roles and expectations.

Authors are characterized by their candid portrayal of female desire and emotional vulnerability. Her work often depicts the female body and psyche as sites of conflict and liberation. In poems like "An Introduction" and "My Grandmother's House," Das challenges traditional notions of womanhood and domesticity, portraying women as individuals grappling with their desires and identities beyond societal constraints.

In *My Story*, her autobiography, Das provides an introspective account of her life, revealing the personal struggles and societal pressures she faced. The autobiography, written with unfiltered honesty, explores themes of marital discord, infidelity, and sexual identity, offering a nuanced portrayal of a woman's journey in a

conservative society. Das's use of English in *My Story* allowed her to articulate these experiences in a manner that resonated with a global readership, thereby amplifying her voice in international literary circles.

Kamala Das's writing is notable for its challenge to traditional norms and conventions, particularly in the context of gender roles and expectations. Her work often critiques the patriarchal structures that confine women and restrict their freedom of expression. By writing in English, Das was able to address these issues in a language that was accessible to a global audience, thereby fostering a broader dialogue about gender and societal norms.

In her poems and stories, Das frequently explores the tension between societal expectations and personal desires. Her characters often struggle with the constraints imposed by traditional gender roles and seek to assert their individuality. For example, in "The Looking Glass," Das presents a woman who confronts her own reflection and grapples with the dichotomy between her public persona and private self. This internal conflict reflects the broader societal pressures faced by women, revealing Das's critique of the rigid norms that govern female behavior.

Das's writings also highlight the intersection of gender with other aspects of identity, such as class and ethnicity. Her stories often portray the experiences of women from different socio-economic backgrounds, shedding light on the diverse ways in which gender norms impact their lives. This intersectional approach enriches her exploration of gender and provides a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities of female identity in a multi-faceted society.

One of the significant achievements of Kamala Das's literary career is her ability to reach a global audience through her use of English. By writing in English, Das was not only able to engage with the international literary community but also to present Indian women's experiences to a wider readership. Her work resonated with readers across different cultures, offering insights into the universal and culturally specific aspects of her themes.

Das's international success can be attributed to her unique narrative voice and her ability to address universal human experiences while remaining deeply rooted in her Indian context. Her work was translated into several languages, further expanding its reach and impact. The global reception of Das's writing underscores the power of English as a medium for cross-cultural communication and the ability of literature to transcend geographical and cultural boundaries.

Kamala Das's contributions to Indian literature in English have had a lasting impact on both literary scholarship and popular discourse. Her bold exploration of gender, sexuality, and personal identity has influenced subsequent generations of writers and scholars, prompting further discussions about the representation of women in literature.

Das's work has inspired numerous writers to address similar themes and to experiment with language and form. Her ability to articulate the complexities of female experience with such raw honesty has set a precedent for future literary endeavors. Scholars and critics continue to study Das's work for its innovative approach to gender and its impact on the discourse surrounding women's issues in literature.

Moreover, Das's influence extends beyond the realm of literature, as her work has contributed to broader conversations about gender equality and social justice. By

challenging traditional norms and offering a nuanced portrayal of women's lives, Das has played a role in shaping public perceptions and fostering discussions about gender and identity.

Kamala Das's literary achievements reflect a profound engagement with themes of gender, sexuality, and personal identity, articulated through the medium of English. Her decision to write in English allowed her to connect with a global audience and to address issues that were often considered taboo in Indian society. Das's work stands as a testament to the power of literature to challenge societal norms, explore complex personal experiences, and engage with global discourses. Through her emotional intensity and unflinching honesty, Kamala Das has made a significant impact on Indian literature and has left a lasting legacy that continues to influence and inspire.

### Aims and Objectives

1. To explore the role of Indian authors writing in English in the formation of national consciousness.
2. To analyze how literature served as a vehicle for expressing national identity and socio-political aspirations during the colonial and postcolonial periods.
3. To examine how Indian writers used English as a means to engage with both local and global audiences.
4. To study the thematic elements of identity, resistance, and nationalism in selected works of Indian authors.

### Review of Literature

The literature review will focus on existing scholarship on Indian English literature, particularly in relation to nationalism and identity formation. Works by Graham Huggan, Homi Bhabha, and Edward Said will be discussed for their theoretical insights into postcolonialism. The review will also engage with critical studies on individual authors like R.K. Narayan's "The Guide," Salman Rushdie's "Midnight's Children," and Arundhati Roy's "The God of Small Things" to demonstrate how these authors have contributed to the national discourse. Existing debates on linguistic appropriation and cultural alienation will be included.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* offers a poignant exploration of family dynamics and social injustices in Kerala. The novel's non-linear narrative and rich, evocative language capture the nuances of regional and personal experiences, revealing the impact of historical and socio-political factors on individual lives. Roy's use of English serves as both a bridge and a barrier, allowing her to address local issues while engaging with an international audience.

Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* (1993) presents a detailed portrayal of Indian society through the lens of a family saga. Seth's narrative, characterized by its expansive scope and attention to detail, captures the diversity of Indian life while making the story accessible to readers from various cultural backgrounds. The novel's exploration of themes such as family, politics, and love underscores the ways in which English can be employed to represent the complexities of Indian society.

Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) offer reflections on the immigrant experience and the negotiation of cultural identity. Lahiri's stories highlight the emotional and

psychological challenges faced by immigrants, while Desai's novel addresses issues of colonialism and globalization through the lens of a diasporic community. Both authors use English to articulate the subtleties of cultural displacement and adaptation, contributing to a broader understanding of the immigrant experience.

### Materials and Discussion

This paper will employ qualitative research methodologies, with a focus on close textual analysis of selected works. Primary sources will include the novels of R.K. Narayan, Salman Rushdie, and Arundhati Roy, with attention given to how these texts engage with national identity and socio-political issues. The research will use postcolonial theory to interpret how these authors navigate the complexities of identity, language, and power. Secondary sources such as scholarly articles, books, and critical essays will be utilized to support the analysis.

In addition to examining individual authors, archival research allows scholars to study the broader literary networks and publishing industries that shaped Indian English literature. The archives of literary journals, publishing houses, and literary societies offer valuable insights into how Indian authors were received both in India and internationally. For example, archives from Indian literary magazines like *The Indian Review* or *The Modern Review* provide a record of the literary debates and discussions that were taking place in India during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. These magazines often featured the works of emerging Indian authors writing in English, offering a platform for literary experimentation and the development of a distinct Indian English literary voice.

Similarly, the archives of British and American publishers who championed Indian authors provide insight into the global reception of Indian English literature. These archives often contain correspondence between authors and publishers, reviews of Indian novels in Western newspapers and journals, and marketing materials that reveal how Indian literature was positioned within the global literary market. This material is invaluable for understanding how Indian authors were received by Western audiences and how their works contributed to cross-cultural dialogue.

### Results and Interpretation

The analysis will demonstrate that Indian authors writing in English played a pivotal role in shaping the narrative of Indian national consciousness. Through their use of English, these authors were able to critique colonialism, celebrate indigenous culture, and engage with global readers. For instance, Salman Rushdie's "Midnight's Children" offers a fictionalized account of India's independence, blending history and mythology to reflect the complexity of the nation's identity. Similarly, R.K. Narayan's "The Guide" highlights the tension between tradition and modernity in postcolonial India. These interpretations will reveal how literature became a tool for expressing and shaping the national imagination.

The continued hegemony of English in contemporary India can also be seen as a reflection of broader global trends. As the world becomes more interconnected through processes of globalization, English has emerged as the dominant language of international communication. This has had

significant implications for countries like India, where English is seen as a key to accessing global markets, institutions, and networks. The Indian state and market have both played a role in promoting English, recognizing its importance for economic growth and international competitiveness. However, this promotion of English often reinforces existing inequalities, as access to English education remains unevenly distributed across the country.

The legacy of colonialism, therefore, continues to shape the linguistic landscape of India. English, as the language of the former colonizers, has maintained its position of dominance in part because it has been embraced and promoted by the postcolonial ruling classes. These elites, who were often educated in English and benefited from their fluency in the language, have ensured that English remains a language of power and privilege. At the same time, the global rise of English has reinforced its status, making it difficult for other languages to compete in certain domains.

In conclusion, the dominance of English in South Asia, particularly in India, the language was initially introduced as a tool of British colonialism, it has since been adopted and promoted by the Indian ruling classes, who have benefited from its association with power and privilege. At the same time, the dominance of English has reinforced existing inequalities, as access to the language remains unevenly distributed across the country. Understanding the continued hegemony of English in South Asia requires an examination of both its colonial origins and its contemporary global significance.

The relationship between literature and history is deeply intertwined, with both serving as mediums through which material realities of a specific historical period are captured and communicated by individuals located within a particular space-time continuum. This reflects the role of the subject, a thinking being such as a writer, historian, poet, or artist, who is inevitably influenced by the social relations, forces, and historical context of the time. When a writer or historian reflects on the past or attempts to reproduce a social reality from history, they are not acting in isolation. Instead, their efforts are mediated by the social, political, and economic forces of their present time, which invariably shape how they perceive and depict the past.

Cultural production, in all its forms-whether it be literature, art, poetry, or historical writing-can be seen as an ongoing process of reflection upon the dynamics of production and property relations in society. These relations are tied to the broader productive forces that sustain and structure the social matrix of any given historical period. In this sense, every cultural artifact, from novels to historical accounts, reflects the tensions, contradictions, and struggles present in the material base of society. This base, composed of economic and property relations, influences the form and content of cultural output, often unconsciously shaping the artist or writer's work through the lens of these larger societal forces.

This process of reflection or representation is not neutral, nor is it free from the contradictions inherent in society's structure. When a writer or historian engages with the material realities of their time, they cannot escape the underlying tensions present in the production and property relations of their society. These tensions often manifest themselves in subtle or overt ways within the cultural

products they create. Whether in the form of a novel or a historical text, the work often reveals, consciously or unconsciously, the latent conflicts and contradictions embedded in the material base of society. These tensions, which may be caste-based, class-based, or related to other forms of social stratification, are inherent in the process of knowledge production itself.

In societies such as India, where the social fabric is characterized by sharp class and caste divisions, these underlying tensions in the domain of knowledge production become even more pronounced. The material base of Indian society, with its deep-rooted caste and class divisions, influences the cultural superstructure—the arena of ideas, art, and literature—in profound ways. Knowledge production in such a context is always contentious, as it is shaped by the power dynamics of the ruling classes and the subjugated masses. In the Indian context, the caste/class dichotomy plays a critical role in determining the content and form of cultural production, including literature and history. Therefore, when writers or historians attempt to reflect on the social realities of India, they are inevitably influenced by these deep-seated social divisions, even if they are not consciously aware of it.

Indian authors writing in English have played an essential role in shaping and reflecting the complexities of national consciousness, addressing the socio-political, cultural, and historical realities of India through the lens of literature. Their works offer profound insights into the challenges and aspirations of a society that has been deeply influenced by colonial legacies, the process of nation-building after independence, and the forces of modernization and globalization. Writers such as R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, and Amitav Ghosh have used the English language not merely as a tool for communication but as a vehicle to engage with the multifaceted identity of the Indian nation, its diverse cultures, and its intricate history. By writing in English, these authors have bridged the gap between the local and the global, providing a platform for Indian voices to be heard worldwide while simultaneously negotiating the complexities of national identity within the subcontinent.

The contribution of these authors to the construction and reflection of national consciousness lies in their ability to explore the inherent contradictions and nuances within Indian society. Their works often grapple with the tension between tradition and modernity, the individual and the collective, and the personal and the political. They have addressed themes of cultural pluralism, social injustice, and political struggle, which are central to understanding the evolving nature of Indian society. These themes are reflective of India's history as a land of diversity—linguistic, religious, ethnic, and cultural—and the ongoing efforts to reconcile these differences within the framework of a unified nation-state.

In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie not only addresses the political events surrounding India's independence but also delves into the personal and psychological impact of these events on individuals and communities. The novel explores the fragmentation of identity, the trauma of partition, and the challenges of nation-building in a newly independent country. Rushdie's use of magical realism allows him to blend historical reality with myth and imagination, creating

a narrative that captures the complexity and chaos of the post-colonial experience. In doing so, he offers a profound meditation on the nature of national consciousness, highlighting the ways in which history, memory, and identity are intertwined in the creation of a nation.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* similarly engages with themes of national identity, but through the lens of caste oppression, social inequality, and political strife. Set in the southern Indian state of Kerala, the novel tells the story of a Syrian Christian family and the tragic consequences of their transgression of social and caste boundaries. Through the lives of her characters, Roy explores the deeply entrenched hierarchies of caste and class in Indian society, exposing the violence, repression, and injustice that continue to shape the lives of the marginalized and the oppressed.

Roy's novel is not just a critique of the caste system but also an exploration of the ways in which personal lives are shaped by larger political and historical forces. The narrative moves back and forth in time, weaving together personal memories with historical events, such as the rise of communism in Kerala and the Emergency imposed by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in the 1970s. By juxtaposing the personal and the political, Roy highlights the interconnectedness of individual experience and national history, suggesting that the stories of ordinary people are inextricably linked to the larger narrative of the nation.

In both *Midnight's Children* and *The God of Small Things*, the authors use the English language to engage with the complexities of Indian society and to reflect on the nature of national consciousness. Their use of English, however, is not unproblematic. English, as the language of the colonizer, carries with it a history of domination and exclusion, and its use in Indian literature has been the subject of much debate. Some critics argue that writing in English perpetuates the dominance of a colonial language and marginalizes the voices of those who write in Indian vernacular languages. Others, however, see the use of English as a means of engaging with a global audience and asserting India's place in the world.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Indian authors writing in English have successfully used literature as a platform for shaping national consciousness. This paper concludes that through their works, authors like Narayan, Rushdie, and Roy articulated the complexities of Indian identity, resisting colonial narratives while also addressing the challenges of post-independence India. The English language, once a symbol of colonial domination, was re-appropriated to express the aspirations of a newly independent nation. The discussion will consider the ongoing relevance of Indian English literature in a globalized world and its role in continuing to shape Indian national identity.

The impact of Indian authors writing in English on academic and literary canonization is significant, shaping how Indian literature is taught and understood. English-language works by Indian authors have become staples in academic curricula, influencing literary scholarship and critical analysis. This process of canonization has elevated certain authors to iconic status while raising concerns about the marginalization of regional literatures.

The focus on Indian English literature in academic settings often results in the elevation of specific authors and texts, potentially overshadowing the rich diversity of regional literary traditions. Regional literatures, written in languages such as Hindi, Bengali, and Tamil, are sometimes underrepresented in academic discussions, reflecting broader issues of language hierarchy and cultural dominance.

English-language works often shape global perceptions of Indian literature, influencing how Indian culture is understood and interpreted on the international stage.

To fully comprehend the significance of English literary production in India, one must consider the development of print culture in the subcontinent. The advent of the printing press marked a pivotal moment in the dissemination of literature, and English emerged as a dominant language of print communication. This evolution of print culture was a gradual process influenced by a series of historical and technological developments, which not only transformed the literary landscape but also played a crucial role in shaping the contours of Indian literature.

The reverend's vision extended beyond mere education; it was a means of disseminating Christian values and moral teachings. The aim was to make English education accessible to a broader segment of the Indian population, thus facilitating the distribution of religious and moral texts. The ultimate goal was to embed Christian teachings within the social fabric of Indian society, thereby achieving a form of cultural and moral assimilation. The reverend's focus on the practical benefits of English education for the "natives" reflects a strategic approach to missionary work, one that sought to align educational advancements with the broader objectives of colonial rule.

### **Colonial scholarship and Hinduism**

The colonial administration's engagement with Indian religions, particularly Hinduism, was shaped by a set of preconceived notions and scholarly pursuits. British scholars, influenced by Orientalist perspectives, sought to understand and categorize Hinduism as a distinct and coherent religion. This intellectual endeavor was driven by the belief that Hinduism could be analyzed and interpreted through its sacred texts, much like Christianity. The British perception of Hinduism was largely constructed through interactions with Brahmin pandits, who were regarded as the custodians of Hindu religious knowledge.

The reliance on Brahmin pandits for interpreting Sanskrit texts reflects the colonial administration's approach to understanding Indian society through the lens of its religious elite. This collaboration was not merely academic but had significant implications for the administration of British India. The translation and publication of texts, such as the "Code of Gentoo Laws" by N. B. Halhed, were part of an effort to create a comprehensive legal and administrative framework based on perceived Hindu customs and laws. This approach aimed to integrate Hindu legal and social norms into the colonial governance system, thus reinforcing the role of Brahmins as key informants and interpreters of Indian society.

Indian English literature serves as a cultural bridge, facilitating dialogue between different cultures and promoting mutual understanding. By addressing universal

themes such as love, identity, and social justice through the lens of Indian experiences, authors create a space for cross-cultural conversations. This approach not only enhances the relatability of their work but also encourages readers from different backgrounds to engage with and reflect on shared human experiences.

In a globalized world where cultural exchanges are increasingly common, Indian English literature plays a crucial role in fostering dialogue and understanding. Through its exploration of issues such as post-colonial identity, cultural dislocation, and transnationalism, this literature provides a platform for discussing broader themes that resonate across cultural boundaries. It encourages readers to confront their own assumptions and engage with perspectives that may be unfamiliar or challenging.

The success of Indian English literature in bridging cultural divides is evident in its reception at international literary festivals, awards, and academic discussions. Authors from India have been recognized for their contributions to global literature, and their works are studied and celebrated in various cultural contexts. This recognition underscores the role of Indian English literature in promoting cultural dialogue and enhancing global literary discourse.

Narayan's work often depicts the Indian nation as a British Indian Empire, preserving the colonial structures while engaging with them superficially. Raja Rao's novels tend to mythologize the Indian past, presenting a retrogressive feudal-aristocratic order in a romanticized form. Anand's narratives, while critiquing social issues, often caricature European nation-states and modernization without fully addressing the bourgeois revolution or the socio-political realities of the time.

These authors, despite their significant contributions to literature, did not provide a thorough critique of the social order nor did they aspire to social change. Instead, their works often reinforced colonial and feudal ideologies under the guise of nationalism. This peculiar nature of the Indian English novel, which simultaneously upholds colonial and feudal elements while claiming nationalist sentiments, presents a challenge in understanding its place within the broader narrative of Indian literature.

Frederic Jameson's analysis of Third World literature, including Indian English novels, posits that these works represent the national struggle for liberation through allegory. Jameson argues that novels from colonized nations reflect the transition from colonialism to nationalism, with the nation often represented allegorically. This perspective suggests that Indian English novels, like those by Narayan, Rao, and Anand, embody the allegorical representation of a nation struggling to define itself in the aftermath of colonial rule. However, Jameson's analysis does not account for the complexity of Indian English literature's engagement with nationalism. While Indian English novels do reflect the historical context of nationalist movements, they often do so in ways that are limited by colonial and feudal ideologies. Unlike European and American novels, which explored class contradictions and social upheavals, Indian English novels frequently present a sanitized or mythologized view of the nation. This approach contrasts with the bhasha literatures, which often engaged more directly with social issues and offered a more nuanced critique of the prevailing social order.

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