

THE ROLE OF REGIONAL CULTURE IN SHAPING INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

India has always been diverse in terms of land, culture, language, tradition, and more. It constitutes multiple religions, regions, societies as well as people. The diversity in these multitudinal aspects have contributed to India's linguistic range as well. The Indian literature brings about the peculiarities emerging from these diversities. The regional literature therefore becomes a document containing records of many respective and specific details. Indian English literature, a dynamic and diverse field, is deeply influenced by the country's rich tapestry of regional cultures. India, with its myriad languages, traditions, customs, and histories, provides a fertile ground for writers to blend indigenous cultural elements with the English language. Regional culture shapes Indian English literature by introducing unique narrative voices, local idioms, folklore, religious practices, and social norms, enriching the literary landscape. The interaction between the global and the local in this literary tradition allows for the exploration of identity, colonial legacy, and postcolonial realities. From the rural landscapes of the South to the bustling cities of the North, the infusion of regional culture in Indian English literature not only highlights the diversity of India but also contributes to a deeper understanding of its socio-cultural complexities

This paper attempts to look at those peculiar aspects that constitute regional literature and impact Indian English Literature. The research is done through looking at the depiction of the local traditions, rituals and influence of folklore on themes and narratives in Indian English Literature. The paper follows the methodology of literary analysis, where works of major authors are analyzed closely to identify regional influence on language, theme and structure.

Keywords: Regional literature, Indian English literature, language, exchange, influence

1. INTRODUCTION

To be depicted as the country of snake charmers from the first world perspective to finally being represented in its true, diverse and vibrant forms, India has voyaged long to be taken seriously by the world, in the narrative. The diverse influences in terms of land, language, religion or region, always come to play their part in impacting the literary landscape emerging inside the country. English, which was the coloniser's language, in the deep past, has now taken a front seat in the Indian linguistic discourse. From being perceived through the lens of colonial influence and simplistic stereotypes, India's literary and linguistic identity has evolved significantly over time. As the country's rich tapestry of languages, cultures, and traditions began to assert themselves, English, once a symbol of colonial dominance, gradually found its place as a bridge between the diverse regions and communities within India. The growing prominence of Indian languages in global discourse reflects this shift, highlighting India's capacity to shape its own narrative. Today, the recognition of regional Indian words in international platforms, like the inclusion of many Indian words in the Oxford English Dictionary, stands as a testament to the country's linguistic influence and its journey towards cultural autonomy. Regional Literature takes charge in recording the authentic experience of a respective culture, tradition, people, or society. It slithers into the real life of people and brings about the accumulated knowledge over time. It also helps building an exclusive narrative that includes age old customs, rituals and what not. Also, it does not limit itself to be a static record of history. It keeps a track on the changes that occur in a society. (Agrawal) Hence, the regional literature record is dynamic document of history and people. The famous Jataka Tales, Panchtantra stories, are a living example of how they preserve Indian values and culture which are still seen as well as followed in our communities or societies.

Inter-connection of the Literatures

Shashi Tharoor in his book, "The Great Indian Novel", gives a hasty note reasoning the title. The title takes its inspiration from the celebrated Indian epic, Mahabharat, where Maha in Sanskrit translates to Great and Bharat means India, which he puts in the title of his book. (Tharoor, 1969) Through the title itself, Tharoor gives us an insight about the possible contents of his book. Throughout the book, Tharoor keeps bringing several characters from the epic to progress with the plot of his book. He takes the character of Dhritarashtra, the ruler of ancient Kuru kingdom to compare with Nehru in the Indian political setup. Dhritarashtra had a physical disability; he suffered from blindness since birth. His physical blindness transcended to his moral as well as mental blindness when it came to taking decisions involving his son and his rule. His blind faith and blind love towards his favorite son, Duryodhana, his ambition to see his son as the next ruler of the entire kingdom despite having a more eligible candidate in Yudhishthir, frames the whole plot of the Great War

that happens at the end. Dhritarashtra's physical blindness is seen in Nehru's metaphorical blindness towards Indira Gandhi's highhandedness. (Jamuna, 2021) This parallel is also brought up by Jamuna in her article titled, "Blindness as Metaphor in Tharoor's "The Great Indian Novel". She brings the blindness as a significant trait that binds the two characters (Dhritarashtra and Nehru, the modern Dhritarashtra) together. Where Dhritarashtra ignores the falsehood of his son, Duryodhana, Nehru also tends to turn a blind eye towards the rural parts of India. Nehru's view of India as a modern state is equally paralleled with Dhritarashtra's view of the Kuru rule under the reign of his son. Through this comparison, one can see the thematic influence of ancient Indian literature on the Indian English literature.

A popular work that can help describe how regional literature influences the structure of Indian English Literature is *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy. This novel is an excellent example of how the interplay between regional language, culture, and English can create a unique literary style.

Set in Kerala, the novel is deeply influenced by the local Malayalam language and the rich cultural heritage of the region. Roy seamlessly weaves in Malayalam words, phrases, and idiomatic expressions, grounding the English text in the regional context. The rhythm of the language, the use of local customs and traditions, and the depiction of social structures from the Malayalam-speaking world are central to the story.

Additionally, the narrative style itself, with its nonlinear structure and frequent use of local storytelling methods, showcases how regional literary forms can influence the broader narrative in Indian English. Through this fusion of regional influence and English, Roy captures the complexities of post-colonial Indian identity, making the novel a powerful example of how regional literature is transforming and enriching Indian English Literature.

This work highlights the shift from English as a colonial tool to a medium for expressing the diverse, multifaceted realities of Indian society.

The golden trio of Indian English Literature, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand, can not remain untouched when one talks about bringing regional Indian motifs into mainstream Indian English Literature. R.K. Narayan, through his works, like *Malgudi Days*, *The Bachelor of Arts*, *Swami and Friends*, and most of his stories, has built a village *Malgudi* like Wordsworth had created *Lake District*, Arnold Bennet, *The Five Towns* and Hardy, *Wessex*. Narayan through the village *Malgudi*, has tried to bring forth the very essence of village life, where people live in a simple-rustic way. Their beliefs, customs, or traditions remain tied to the life they are set in. They believe in their little superstitions and try to follow them with much obedience. Their beliefs are set quite inherently in their way of life. For example, in *The Bachelor of Arts*, the concept of caste comes into play, where Chandran is opposed by his mother on his inclination towards a girl of a different caste. (Rana, 2023) The village life is not disfigured in Narayan's work. He presents the realities in their authentic form. Anand too brings out the regional Indian flavor through his celebrated work, *Untouchable*. The protagonist, Bakha, belongs to a lower caste and has to clean off the toilets, as his caste duties dictate him to do. But along this, he doesn't welcome his job. His contempt from his own caste can be seen when he tries to speak against the Brahmin who offends his sister. Also, in another scene, his efforts to step out from his caste by imitating the Englishman through his attire and mannerisms, are quite direct and speak of the rootedness of caste system in the then Indian society. The third from the trio, Raja Rao also brings Indian touch in his works. His work *Kanthapura* revolves around the village life and village motifs throughout the story. The work also deals with the Independence struggle and arrival of Gandhi. Where Gandhi is treated with utmost respect and is hugely waited among the people who think that his arrival would solve their problems, magically. His arrival is somehow portrayed as the divine intervention for the entire village which would free them of their issues and struggles. Rao builds the character of Kenchamma, the village deity, who protects the village from evil. Her presence is constant which also points to the belief system in the village population. (AN ANALYSIS OF KANTHAPURA AS A REGIONAL NOVEL, 2021-22) If we go on to explore more works and authors, we keep finding that regional literature does impact the Indian English Literature in its myriad own ways. Poems like *Night of the Scorpion* by Nissim Ezekiel, show us various themes like village life, traditionalism vs modernity, superstitions vs scientific temper and more. In the poem, when the scorpion stings on the mother's toe, the entire village gathers at the little boy's house to pray and give strength for his mother. The villagers sing God's name thinking that it would stop the evil from moving and would paralyze it. Whereas, the father is shown as rationalistic. His efforts to cure his wife were based on medicine, unlike those of villagers. However, both of these belief systems had their own space to be acted out. Through the mentioned works, it can be very well deduced that Indian English Literature and Regional Literature work hand-in-hand. The regional literature weaves the very fabric for Indian literature. It brings the soul into any piece of literature. Indian English literature cannot work in alienation to its own roots. It cannot exist as an independent entity. It has taken its strength from Indian references and will continue to do so. Regional literature would continue to provide the mainstream Indian English literature its distinct style and attitude. It will keep on adding the authentic Indian flavor to any given piece of work.

2. CONCLUSION

Regional literature plays a pivotal role in shaping Indian English Literature by infusing it with the vibrancy and diversity of India's myriad cultures, languages, and traditions. As writers from various linguistic backgrounds engage with English, they bring the distinct idioms, narrative structures, and worldviews of their regional heritages into the global literary sphere. This cross-pollination enriches Indian English Literature, imbuing it with local flavor, while simultaneously making it accessible to a wider audience. Through this dynamic fusion, regional literature not only broadens the thematic scope of Indian English writing but also transforms its form, creating a unique literary tradition that reflects the complexities of post-colonial identity, social realities, and cultural expressions. In doing so, regional literature continues to be a crucial force in the evolution of Indian English Literature, ensuring its relevance and resonance in an increasingly globalized world.

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