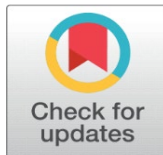


# THE ROLE OF ENGLISH IN INDIA'S LITERARY FESTIVALS AND CULTURAL DIALOGUES

Himadri Sarkar <sup>1</sup>✉

<sup>1</sup>Independent Scholar Department of English



## Corresponding Author

Himadri Sarkar,  
[himadrisarkar1997@gmail.com](mailto:himadrisarkar1997@gmail.com)

DOI  
[10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.4166](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.4166)

**Funding:** This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

**Copyright:** © 2024 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.



## ABSTRACT

Language is one of the most important components of identity and power, which plays diverse roles, especially in postcolonial countries, because people's language use divulges historical, cultural, and even political contexts. Indian English literature is a good example of this; writers recreate themselves and the postcolonial world through the English language, which they were oppressed with. Hence, instead of perceiving the use of English as a colonial imposition, Indian English writers have made it very vibrant and resonant for cultural representation and Indian identity construction in today's globalised world. Indian English literature is known for using code-mixing, code-switching and incorporating the local dialects, as India is a multilingual and socially diverse nation. This way, it is possible to achieve the representation of Indian ethos in literary works and mould tradition and modernity. Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Vikram Seth, as well as Jhumpa Lahiri also use language not only as narration as a linguistic means for imparting narrative but also as a platform to create further messages concerning displacement, biculturalism, the marginalisation of the Indian society and the possible modes of fighting it, respectively. In this paper, I am going to analyse how these Indian English writers employ language to claim their ethnic alterity to the English language, as well as to resist social hierarchy systems from local and global perspectives and represent the diversification of Indian regions. This creed of cultural intertwining and the role of language as a mediator between the spiritual and the material, the people's past and present, and regional and global tendencies become evident in the selected literary works. By making their English an English, Kureishi and others seek to revitalise the language in Indian writing in English, which, in response, writes back to the imperialist language and successfully makes it a democratic language of the oppressed.

**Keywords:** Indian English Literature, Postcolonial Identity, Linguistic Hybridity, Code-Switching, Cultural Negotiation, Colonial Legacy, Language Appropriation

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Indian English literature is a kind of literature that regards the sociopolitical, historical, and cultural circumstances of post-colonial India. The decision to write in English, the language forced on the context through colonialism, opens questions regarding authenticity, identity and ownership of the language. Thus, many Indian writers have adapted with the help of English and translated the essence of Indian culture, idioms, and many more to develop a new English writing style.

The use of language and the construction of individual persona repeatedly underline the topic of Indian English Writing as authors strive to endorse Indian culture and make their works comprehensible to international readers with the help of good old English. Rushdie and Roy to the migrant identity described by Lahiri, Indian English writers try various modes of expression to convey their identities. Thus, over the years, there was its adaptation, hybridisation, and cultural negotiation in India, and English became part of India's literature and intellectual life.

This paper looks into how the writers of Indian origin employ language in a combinative integration and how it works in voicing out the producers' sentiments and social and cultural reservations. The following subtopics will include elements of language and identity in terms of transculturation, code-switching, dialectal variations, postcolonial subversion, the role of gender and multilingualism.

## 2. LINGUISTIC HYBRIDITY IN INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE

The use of Interlingualisms and Bilingualism characterises Indian English literature and has put a seal of Anglocentricity on its regional languages or first languages to produce a new style which is an admixture of India's linguistic acuity and global diversity. This hybridity resists the imposition of globalised English language norms and ensures that Indian literature continues bonding with the native cultures, context and historical memory. Thus, utilising features of indigenous languages in English, Indian writers develop a polyphonic and open type of writing that reflects the nature of India's multilingualism and has features of oral tradition narratives mixed with modernity.

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is a perfect case as he uses English freely and spices it up with Hindi, Urdu and other Indian colloquialisms. He has adopted a very creative style of writing that imitates traditional oral storytelling common in India, thus making his narrative richer. Likewise, Arundhati Roy uses unstandardised English, spelling and even some Malayalam terms throughout *The God of Small Things* to portray the tones of the people inhabiting the region and the culture. Thus, through such interventions, both writers destabilise linguistic boundaries to produce an Indicized form of English that defines the two nations.

However, there are many other writers among the authors of contemporary Indian English who use code-switching and indigenous proverbs in their writing to describe the society that has a plural language System: Amitav Ghosh, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Vikram Seth. Including Hindi, Tamil, Bengali and other dialects in the episodes allows them to explain the texture of Indian existence as being infallibly plural, but with appeals to an international audience. In this way, these writers attempt to appeal to the readers using linguistic features that embody difference and express the notion of communities' cultures, preserved in globalisation, thus displaying Indian English as a permanently developing and vital language.

## 3. CODE-SWITCHING AND MULTILINGUALISM IN INDIAN ENGLISH WRITING

Mixed language in a particular text, mainly when the first language is used and then the second is used in the following line, is common in Indian English literature. This technique helps writers elaborate on India's multilingual identity and depict how people in multilingual societies communicate daily. Thus, using elements from the regional languages, Indian English writers come closer to real speech performances while emphasising cultural peculiarities.

Ghosh and Lahiri are among the many authors who use code-switching to characterise cultural Otherness, identity crises and the issue of bilingualism or bilingualism in the novels with a special focus on the writers of the diaspora. Said in *The Shadow Lines*: The characters often use both Bengali and English to portray how they engage with history, memory, and identity. In the same manner, in *The Namesake*, Lahiri sheds light on the first- and second-generation immigrants who attempt to live between two cultures, two languages, and value systems: speaking first their heart in their first language and communicating with the outer world in English. This brings to the fore the degree of broken but integrated nature of the individual identity of the diaspora subjects.

As for the case of code-switching, they go further than the representation: it helps to build up characters and plot while underlining linguistic inequality and resisting the hegemony of standard English. Consciously incorporating non-translated words and native intonation violates cultural adoption and ensures the innovation of Indian English as a new cultural property. Rushdie, Seth, Roy, and other writers expand this phenomenon by including regional dialects, proverbs, and oral traditions into the literary vein of Indian English.

In conclusion, code-switching in IEW is not just an ornamental feature or a flair but a critical, radical survival technique and cultural practice. The use of multiple languages in the writing of Indian writers makes English India's own and an artistic language that accommodates the linguistic plurality of the Indian context.

#### 4. REGIONAL VARIATIONS AND CULTURAL IDENTITY IN INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE

Indian English literature also contains a strong element of linguistic variation since the writers include language variation as a tool in their writing; to depict the disparity of culture of different regions of India. These regional differences make the tales colourful and reveal that Indian English may not be a single and integrated literary system. Through language interlingualism, writers have introduced into English some features of the phonology, lexis, and syntax of their home languages, which is reflective of India, which has a plurality of languages.

In the Malgudi stories, this regional orientation links to the pattern of the English language, fully capturing the way Tamil people speak. His language is blunt and yet rather poetic. Because of this, his depiction of the lifestyle of the people in South India makes the imaginary town of Malgudi familiar yet unique. On the other hand, Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* uses a language that imitates the Punjabi people and presents the sociopolitical and emotional perspective of the Punjab at the time of partition. By using regional expressions tuned to the particular society, Singh can create a flavour for the regional culture without sacrificing the comprehensibility of English.

Building on what the Two groups of poets have done, writers from North East India, like Tamsüla Ao and Easterine Kire, expand the tenor of Indian English writing and write regarding indigenous folk culture, history, and language in circulation in the region. Their works subvert mainstream European — and often male — points of view and bring to the Western literature readers' attention many non-Western cultures. Similarly, authors of Bengal, Kerala and Maharashtra include regional languages and local myths and legends in English fiction because the British did not wipe out the Indian linguistic versatility.

These variations hint at the flexibility of the language, especially in India, again making it a good point for it to be embraced as a connector between tradition and the new age. In writing their novels, Indian writers continue to allow the English language to project its linguistic legacy, hence making the language capable of containing Indian culture.

#### 5. POSTCOLONIAL RESISTANCE AND THE POLITICS OF LANGUAGE

Most prominently, postcolonial consciousness in Indian English literature involves a degree of rejection of dominant Anglo-American cultural imperialism. In this status, English is used as a tool of 'Resistance'. This is a very delicate theme of English in India—whether it is to be rejected as an imperial imposition or embraced as a tool for self-assertion, snapped up by India for its own purpose. This linguistic negotiation process aligns with postcolonial concerns and tensions regarding power and self-identification, cultural independence, and rights.

Indian in its themes, Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* was one of the first to advocate the need for an India-made English based on the structure of the Hindu mind and not the English traditions. His prose is variations of Indian folk oratory with relativities, phrasings, and prosodic patterns of the Indian subcontinent with an attempt to ignore synthesised standard English. The incorporation of Indian cultural values in the language suppresses the colonialism notion that English is an exercise of dominance over people of colour and, therefore, the birth of post-colonial literature.

Shashi Tharoor, with special reference to the Inglorious Empire, explains the effects of colonialism on how English has been used in India. Tharoor also addresses one of the historical facts about English being a language that used to impose British domination while simultaneously emphasising its modern role as a key means of communication and political debate. In his writings, it is easier to see the double-folded identity of the English language as a colonised language and an assimilation language that can open India to the world.

Some other writers of postcolonial writings, such as Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy, also use linguistic hybridity to make a speech that challenges the postcolonial position. English may have been thrust upon the Indians by their colonial masters. Still, when the Indian authors and intellectuals make similar separations and distortions, it is made to show that language belongs to them on equal terms, that it is growing and living and has space for post-colonial input. This constant to and fro in Indian English literature indicates that the politics of the language continues to be an area of recurrent struggle and negotiation of the English language as an ex-colonial language and as a creative forum for the postcolonial subject.

### Gender, Identity, and Language in Indian English Literature

Sex and gender, as well as identity, is one of the key concepts in Indian English literature, with emphasis on female writers and language as a resistance. They continue the show, the subversive narration of English and the struggle for women's power by women writers from black, Asian and other postcolonial Anglophone countries. It will show how, through playing with the form, syntax and language, They devise literary places where such women may speak and have their say.

This is where Kamala Das's poetry is the most provocative of the three poets under discussion. Here, Banks gives the audience a raw portrayal of female sexuality, independence, and independence disrupting the hegemonic norms projected onto women. She also uses the English language with assertiveness as her language, throwing away all manners and following racial and male-oriented literature. In her books *My Story* and *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems*, she challenges traditional A Woman's Place through literary revolt where language is a signifying resistance.

Likewise, Arundhati Roy also tries to break with bestial reality in *The God of Small Things*, where the key characters are two females, and the narrative is disjointed and episodic as the state of their mind. Her style consists of using regionalisms and English language, inventions, and creations, as well as poetic language that distorts the linear narrative in the same way that women are oppressed and rebel against a profoundly patriarchal society. Thus, through violation of the language conventions, Roy underscores the fact that language is the tool that can entrap and liberate.

For further discussion, other appropriate Indian writers like Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai have not only employed the use of the English language but narrated the specific themes related to the emotional and psychological aspects of Indian women. Their novels cover topics of silence, exclusion, and identity, which brings language into the foreground as an instrument through which women, as well as a venue for the manifestation of patriarchal relations.

However, the study of Indian English literature makes clear that language is not only a means of telling a story but also an important weapon, which plays an important role in the war of words on issues concerning gender and identity. By changing the representation of English to suit women's conditions, these female writers assume their positions, subverting social standards and re-envisioning literary practices.

## 6. THE FUTURE OF INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE: GLOBALIZATION AND IDENTITY

In this paper, the current issues in the development of Indian English literature in the twenty first century will be discussed briefly as follows. The growing role of English in India, along with the proliferation of virtual forums and openness in global markets for publishing, has defined new forms of interactions by Indian writers with language, subjectivity and narrative. English as a language of literature was once viewed as compulsory, and English as a medium of literature also once affirmed a strict upper-class position in India, which is not the case today as the literature in English is a changing phenomenon that responds to the socio-political and cultural changes of modern India.

Chetan Bhagat and Amish Tripathy have helped make Indian English fiction by bringing it to the masses. Their works filled with slang, myths, and contemporary social issues fall within the category of both novel and literature. This new experience is a clear departure from the earlier prejudice of Indian English literature and is now making it liberal and **보기** commercial. On the same note, various Indian English writers, including Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri and Amitav Ghosh, keep putting Indian English writing on the global map and giving it a rightful place in today's international platform.

To some extent, the digital format of literature, such as through e-books, minimised audiobooks, and online lit forums, has also contributed to the extent of Indian English literature. Social networking sites and self-publishing services sources have opened new opportunities for new authors subsequently reducing the dominance of traditional publishing companies and globalisation of new ideas in both Indian and global areas. That being said, this process also prompts some questions concerning the position of the regional languages in literature. Despite English enjoying sophisticated reign, the regional languages have been given their due share in the translation projects and the internet kingdom to prevent ethnic own from being washed by this global tender.

The formulated hypothesis, thus, is that the future of Indian English literature will be a continuous dynamic process of negotiating between the global and the local. It is still unclear whether English will stay the dominant literary language or whether regional languages will get the right to take a more significant part in literary works. What is indisputable,

though, is that literature in any language in India will remain inclusive of its pluralism and capable of embracing changes while staying true to its roots in the future, too.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Thus, Indian English literature is constantly constructing identity, language and culture. From incorporating the local flavour, code-switching, and regionalisms, the writers have turned English into a powerful weapon that suits the Indian context in a storytelling and social commentarial sense. The colonial/ postcolonial fiction provides many examples of how the colonial legacy and postcolonial resistance operate and the posterity of colonialism, that is, how language is a contested territory.

Lastly, gender and culture, regional variations, and the invasion of globalisation remain significant for the further development of Indian English writing. Thus, the controversy over Indianness in Indian English literature is alive. However, the one evident point is that language defines communication and is an integral part of people's personalities that fashions the way stories are narrated and histories are written.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

## REFERENCES

- Asnani, S. M. (1979). Indian Writing in English. *Indian Literature*, 22(1), 5-12.
- Puchner, M. (2014, March 24). World Literature, Indian-Style. Inside Higher Ed. [insidehighered.com](http://insidehighered.com)
- Chowdhary, R. (2024). Shifting Paradigms of Multilingual Publishing and Scholarship in India. *The Journal of Electronic Publishing*, 27(1). [journals.publishing.umich.edu](http://journals.publishing.umich.edu)
- Søndergaard, C. S. (2019). From Independent Publishers to Literary Festivals: Exploring the Danish Literary Field. *Leviathan: Interdisciplinary Journal in English*, 5(1), 111-126. [tidsskrift.dk](http://tidsskrift.dk)
- University of Washington Bothell. (2024, September 12). The gem of literary festivals. UW Bothell News. [uwb.edu](http://uwb.edu)
- Carolina Performing Arts. (2024). Jaipur Literature Festival-North Carolina. [carolinaperformingarts.org](http://carolinaperformingarts.org)
- Iyer, P. (2024, January 27). The Mahabharata of Literary Festivals. Air Mail. [airmail.news](http://airmail.news)
- Al Jazeera. (2014, January 16). Literary festivals flourish in India. Al Jazeera. [aljazeera.com](http://aljazeera.com)
- Mehrotra, A. K. (2003). *A History of Indian Literature in English*. Columbia University Press.
- Gokhale, N. (2016). *The Jaipur Literature Festival: The Greatest Literary Show on Earth*. Penguin India.
- Devy, G. N. (2024, November 25). Should a Country Speak a Single Language? *The New Yorker*. [newyorker.com](http://newyorker.com)
- Tharoor, S. (2017). *Inglorious Empire: What the British Did to India*. Penguin Books.
- Kapur, S. (1998). *Elizabeth* [Film]. PolyGram Filmed Entertainment.
- Dalrymple, W. (2019). *The Anarchy: The East India Company, Corporate Violence, and the Pillage of an Empire*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Gokhale, N. (2021). *The Blind Matriarch*. Penguin Random House India.
- Rushdie, S. (2012). *Joseph Anton: A Memoir*. Random House.
- Roy, A. (2017). *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Knopf.
- Sahgal, N. (2015). *The Fate of Butterflies*. Speaking Tiger Books.
- Sinha, M. (2016). *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*. Penguin Books.
- Seth, V. (2005). *Two Lives*. HarperCollins.
- Desai, K. (2006). *The Inheritance of Loss*. Atlantic Monthly Press.

Adiga, A. (2008). *The White Tiger*. Free Press.  
Ghosh, A. (2005). *The Hungry Tide*. HarperCollins.