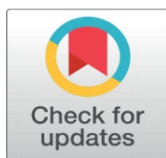
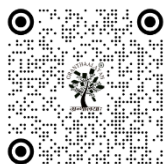


REIMAGINING FOLKLORE IN INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

The paper will discuss how oral traditions and folklore have influenced the narrative structures and thematic issues of Indian English literature. Although the literary medium of English in India developed in a colonial context, most Indian authors have used the rich oral storytelling traditions to re-pattern the language and shape of their writing. The study uses Raja Rao Kanthapura, *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie, *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy, and *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh to argue that oral traditions are not simply being preserved but are actively being changed in these texts. These changes enable authors to bargain with issues of memory, identity, and cultural continuity within a postcolonial setting. The paper illustrates how oral forms of narration challenge linear narration, reconfigure linguistic expression, and challenge the dominance of written forms linked to colonial power using theoretical insights by Walter J. Ong, Alan Dundes, and postcolonial critics like Homi K. Bhabha and Ngugi wa Thiong'o (Ong 36). Finally, the paper places Indian English literature as a locus where orality and literacy meet, producing hybrid narrative forms that mirror the intricacies of Indian cultural experience.

Keywords: Orality, Postcolonialism, Folklore Studies, Hybridity, Myth

1. INTRODUCTION

The spoken word has long influenced the literary imagination of India. Stories circulated by memory, voice, and performance before the introduction of the print culture and the institutionalization of literacy (Ong 31). As Walter J. Ong observes, "oral expression has a high level of redundancy or 'copiousness'" (Ong 40), a quality that ensures continuity through repetition and shared memory. Epics were told, folktales were passed on within communities, and histories were not written down as fixed records but as living narratives, changed a little each time they were told. With the advent of English as a literary language in India, this rich oral tradition did not fade away. Rather, it was re-expressed in it, frequently in unforeseen forms.

With the introduction of English in the colonial rule, there was a new language, new literary forms, and new expectations. The novel, especially, came as a formal, written expression that was linked to realism, linearity, and single authorship. This form seems to be in opposition to the fluid, communal, and performative character of oral storytelling

at first sight. However, the novel was not simply imported into Indian English by writers. They reshaped it. They twisted its form, disrupted its schedules, and filled it with beats that resonate with the earlier storytelling practices.

This process is particularly evident when one takes into account the functioning of narrative voice in Indian English texts. The narrator in most of the works does not address the reader with the impersonal authority that is commonly linked to the Western novel. Rather, the voice has the rhythm of one talking to an audience, stopping, going round, and sometimes going off on a tangent. This attribute implies not only a stylistic decision but the continuance of an oral sensibility in a written form. It is an indication of not allowing storytelling to be fixed or silent.

Meanwhile, folklore finds its way into these writings not only as ornamental material or a cultural source. It turns into a mode of thinking about the world. The narrative is interwoven with myths, legends, and local beliefs, which influence the way the characters perceive history, community, and themselves. By so doing, these aspects tend to undermine the superiority of official or colonial versions of reality. They provide other forms of remembering and interpreting the past, based on collective experience instead of institutional authority.

This interplay between orality and writing is especially important in a postcolonial context. English, as a language, carries the weight of colonial history. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o makes this tension explicit when he writes that "language carries culture, and culture carries... the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves" (Ngũgĩ 16).

Indian writers, therefore, have some tension in writing in English. On the one hand, it opens up to a world audience and literary tradition. On the other hand, it runs the risk of alienating the text to indigenous forms of expression. One of the ways of negotiating this tension can be regarded as the incorporation of oral traditions. Incorporating oral forms and folklore into English texts, authors transform the language internally, imbuing it with local rhythms, memories, and perceptions.

This paper contends that Indian English literature does not merely keep oral traditions as frozen relics of the past. Instead, it actively changes them and employs them as the means to investigate identity, memory, and resistance. Through a detailed analysis of Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, and Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, the study examines how oral storytelling techniques influence narrative structure, language, and thematic development. These writings, although stylistically and historically distinct, have in common their interest in the oral as a living thing in the written word.

In order to substantiate this analysis, the paper relies on theoretical frameworks of oral tradition studies and postcolonial criticism. The difference between orality and literacy, as defined by Walter J. Ong, is a good place to begin in understanding how oral thought patterns are different than written ones. The study of folklore by Alan Dundes assists in placing myths and stories within the context of shared cultural meaning (Dundes 2). In the meantime, postcolonial theorists like Homi K. Bhabha and Ngugi wa Thiong'o provide an understanding of how language and narrative become arenas of negotiation and resistance in the societies that have been colonized in the past.

The paper aims at demonstrating that the existence of orality in Indian English literature is not accidental or superficial by uniting these views. It is a conscious and purposeful interaction that transforms form and content. Storytelling in these texts does not flow in a linear fashion. It circles, stops, recalls, and reinvents. By so doing, it is perpetuating an older tradition, though in a new language.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of oral traditions and folklore has traditionally held a significant role in the study of literature and culture, but its connection to Indian English literature has frequently been addressed in bits instead of as a continuing investigation. The initial research in the area of orality, especially that of Walter J. Ong, provided a groundbreaking differentiation between oral and literate cultures. Ong claims that oral societies do not think in the same way, but instead they use repetition, formulaic expressions, and collective memory instead of linear, text-bound thinking (Ong 34). His work offers a good point of entry to the way traces of oral consciousness can be found even in written literature.

Nevertheless, the Ong framework, although powerful, is more inclined to generalize oral cultures and fails to consider the intricacies of postcolonial literary situations where orality and literacy coexist, and not substitute each other.

Folklore studies, as influenced by scholars such as Alan Dundes, in addition to Ong, focus on folklore as a dynamic and collective expression of culture. Dundes dispels the idea of folklore as something fixed or old-fashioned, and instead

introduces it as something that is dynamic and changes with the community that supports it. As Alan Dundes succinctly puts it, "folklore is not a relic of the past but a living, dynamic process" (Dundes 3). This view is especially applicable in the Indian context, where folklore is not limited to rural or pre-modern areas but rather still shapes the modern cultural production even in literature written in English (Dundes 3). However, a lot of Dundes's work is still devoted to classification and definition, which does not provide much information about the functioning of folklore in complex literary texts that are influenced by colonial and postcolonial history.

Postcolonial theory introduces a new dimension to this debate by pre-empting the connection between language, power, and identity. In *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o believes that language is not a simple means of communication but a vehicle of culture and worldview. His criticism of colonial languages implies that the use of English as a writing language may pose a threat to the alienation of literature from native ways of thinking. Simultaneously, he accepts the chance of opposition by linguistic adaptation (Ngũgĩ 15). Equally, Homi K. Bhabha presents the idea of hybridity, whereby cultural forms are created as a result of negotiation and interaction as opposed to pure preservation. These theoretical approaches are essential to the interpretation of how oral traditions may be employed by Indian English writers not merely as received content but as a strategy to transform the language in which they write.

In Indian English literature, orality and folklore have been frequently studied by critics in the context of individual authors, but seldom comparatively or integratively. An example of a text that has been often discussed as a text that is deeply rooted in the oral storytelling tradition is Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*. Scholars observe that it is similar to a '*sthala purana*' in which the story is told in a communal voice that is a mixture of myth, history, and daily life. The narrative style of the novel, with its long and flowing sentences and digressions, has been interpreted as an effort to reproduce the rhythm of oral speech. Although such readings are effective in pointing out the existence of orality, they tend to fall short in exploring how this narrative technique interacts with larger issues of language and power in a colonial setting.

Likewise, critical reviews of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* often highlight its narrative extravagance, fragmentation, and self-conscious narration. The main character, Saleem Sinai, is not only a narrator but also an actor of memory, who is always talking to an unnamed listener and rewriting his own story. Scholars have attributed this style of narration to oral storytelling, especially in the repetition, exaggeration, and digression. Simultaneously, the work by Rushdie is frequently placed in the context of postmodern literature, which occasionally obscures its interaction with oral narrative. Consequently, the oral aspect of the text is recognized but not necessarily exhaustively examined in connection with the Indian storytelling traditions.

The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy has been extensively analyzed in terms of how it addresses the themes of memory, time, and trauma, especially its non-linear plot (Roy 32). Critics have noted the way the novel breaks the chronological sequence, with the past and the present mingling in a manner that resembles the associative logic of memory. Although there are readings that point to the role of oral storytelling in this structure, the emphasis is usually on the psychological and thematic analysis as opposed to the formal implications of orality (Mukherjee 45). This opens up room for a more enduring analysis of how narrative fragmentation in the novel can resonate with oral forms of narrating experience.

Scholarship has been more directly involved in the presence of folklore, especially the legend of Bon Bibi, in the case of *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh. Critics have examined the functioning of this narrative in relation to scientific and historical discourses in the novel, providing a different way of seeing the Sundarbans. The myth and empirical knowledge coexisting in the text have been interpreted as a commentary on conflicting modes of knowing. Nevertheless, the thematic meaning of folklore is quite well understood, whereas the contribution of folklore to the narrative structure and voice is not studied in detail.

In all these studies, a trend is observable. The existence of oral traditions and folklore in Indian English literature is recognized by scholars, although their studies tend to be limited to a single text or a particular thematic issue. Relatively little work has been done to unite these elements into a larger framework that takes into account the role of oral traditions in a variety of texts, especially in terms of narrative form, linguistic adaptation, and postcolonial identity.

The paper aims to fill that gap by providing a comparative analysis of the chosen works, not only discussing the way oral traditions manifest themselves in them, but also the way they change the very form of the narrative. The study takes texts like *Kanthapura*, *Midnight's Children*, *The God of Small Things*, and *The Hungry Tide* and puts them in dialogue with each other to find out commonalities and differences. By so doing, it seeks to demonstrate that orality in Indian

English literature is not a peripheral aspect but a formative force that shapes the way stories are told, recalled, and interpreted.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The discussion of orality and folklore in Indian English literature needs a framework that can accommodate three overlapping issues: the difference between oral and written ways of thinking, the cultural role of folklore, and the postcolonial negotiation of language. This paper does not treat them as distinct areas, but as interrelated, each influencing the formation and interpretation of narrative in the chosen texts.

The point of departure is the work of Walter J. Ong, who differentiates between oral and literate cultures, which provides a convenient perspective on the analysis of narrative form. Ong proposes that oral storytelling is additive, not subordinative, and is dependent on repetition, formulaic patterns, and a strong connection between the speaker and the audience (Ong 37). Thought, in such contexts, unfolds through accumulation and association rather than strict linear progression.

This framework can be used to understand why the stories of *Kanthapura* or *Midnight's Children* do not always lend themselves to easy chronology when applied to literary works. The events are re-experienced, elaborated, and occasionally re-told differently, giving the impression that the story is being formed during the telling and not being delivered as a fixed document. Nevertheless, one should modify the model proposed by Ong to the situation in which orality and literacy co-exist. The texts being examined are not of purely oral cultures; they represent a mixture of oral sensibilities and the written form (Ong 36).

In order to comprehend the place of folklore in this mixture, the works of Alan Dundes are especially topical. Dundes does not view folklore as a thing of the past but rather as a living thing, which is expressed through stories, rituals, and common beliefs. This view enables folklore in Indian English literature to be perceived as not only thematic content but also as a structuring force. In *The Hungry Tide*, however, the legend of Bon Bibi does not merely manifest itself as a cultural allusion; it defines the way in which characters perceive the surrounding world and their role in it. Likewise, in *Kanthapura*, mythological analogies are interwoven into the story in such a manner that the local political events are related to the broader, culturally resonant narratives. The approach of Dundes allows viewing these elements as active elements of the meaning and not decorative additions.

Although Ong and Dundes offer the means of interpreting form and content, postcolonial theory assists in putting them into a wider historical and linguistic context. According to Ngugi wa Thiong'o, language bears the burden of cultural memory, and the use of colonial languages can bring a gap between literature and indigenous experience (Ngugi 13). This is of special concern to Indian English authors, who are working within a language that is not indigenous to the oral traditions that they are using. However, this tension, as Ngugi also hints, can be a place of creative resistance. Writers transform the language by imbuing it with the rhythms, forms, and idioms of oral storytelling, giving it new meanings that go beyond its colonial roots.

Another perspective that can be considered as a complement to the one of Homi K. Bhabha is his idea of hybridity, which can be used to interpret this process of change. To Bhabha, cultural expression in postcolonial situations is usually done in a middle ground whereby aspects of various traditions come into contact and create new forms (Bhabha 37). Indian English literature, in this sense, can be seen as a hybrid space where oral and written modes intersect. The narrative strategies that can be identified in the chosen texts, including non-linear development, the change of the narrative voice, and the combination of myth and lived experience, are not merely the remains of the oral tradition but the results of this hybridization. They represent a compromise between oral and inherited narrative traditions and the requirements of a written and international literature.

The combination of these views makes it possible to have a more accurate insight into the role of orality and folklore in the texts being analyzed. The focus of Ong on the narrative structure underlines the continuation of oral patterns in written texts. The perception of folklore as a living cultural force by Dundes highlights its importance in the creation of meaning and identity. The tension of writing in English is prefigured by Ngugi in his critique of language, and the concept of hybridity by Bhabha is a productive tension of transformation.

These theories are not used as strict guidelines in the context of this paper, but as a guide. They help illuminate how *Kanthapura*, *Midnight's Children*, *The God of Small Things*, and *The Hungry Tide* engage with oral traditions in ways that

are both formal and thematic. More to the point, they allow viewing these engagements as not a single stylistic decision but a larger attempt to redefine storytelling in a postcolonial literary environment.

4. ANALYSIS

4.1. ORAL NARRATIVE STRUCTURES: RE-FORMING THE FORM OF THE NOVEL

Among the most noticeable ways in which oral traditions influence Indian English literature is their impact on narrative structure. Many texts do not proceed in a strictly linear fashion. Instead, they take the form of a storytelling that is layered, recursive, and influenced by the very process of narration. This structural quality does not merely ape oral storytelling on the level of style. It transforms the way stories are told, the experience of time, and the distribution of authority in the narrative.

Raja Rao creates the story in *Kanthapura*, using the voice of an old woman, Achakka. Her narration has the rhythm of a recitation. This effect is evident in the opening cadence of the novel: "Our village—I don't think you have ever heard about it—Kanthapura is its name" (Rao 1), a beginning that immediately situates the narrative within an oral, conversational frame. The novel is not progressing in a fragmented way. Rather, it is written in long continuous lines, frequently returning to previous events or stopping to expound on what appear to be trivial details (Rao 5). This trend is indicative of an oral sensibility in which the narrative is formed by memory and emphasis instead of form. The time is not important, but the emotional and social meaning of events.

This method leaves a visible impact on the presentation of the story of the nationalist movement. Instead of being presented as a series of historical events, it is created through shared memory. The mythological allusions are not added to the story as distinct layers but as a part of the same storytelling. The political change that the village undergoes is therefore correlated with the common patterns of narratives based on epics and local legends. The outcome is a narrative form that challenges the impersonal power of written history and prefigures a more communal, participatory form of memory.

Another, but equally important, change of narrative structure is observed in *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie. In this case, the narrator Saleem Sinai introduces his life story as a story that is always being pieced together at the time of narration (Rushdie 38). The story switches back and forth in time, frequently interrupting itself to correct, revise, or elaborate on previous stories. This instability is not a vice but a characteristic of the text. It represents a form of narration where memory is dynamic and bargainable as opposed to fixed. The oral aspect of the story is further supported by the fact that Saleem often addresses an unnamed audience.

His narration is less a written document and more a conversation, influenced by the fact that there is an audience. This movement creates a feeling of immediacy and performance in the text. Meanwhile, it makes the issue of reliability more difficult. Since the story is being told and not merely presented, it is subject to exaggeration, distortion, and reinterpretation. By doing so, the narrative form resembles the fluidity of oral traditions, in which every retelling has the potential to be different.

Both *Kanthapura* and *Midnight's Children* show that the power of orality is not limited to superficial aspects like language or imagery. It penetrates the structure of the story itself. In these writings, the novel form is not lost but reformed. Linear movement is replaced by cyclical movement, and narrative authority is no longer impersonal, but situated, embodied, and involved with its audience.

There are wider implications of this change. These works disrupt the hegemony of literary conventions inherited by the colonial traditions by taking the forms related to oral storytelling. The novel, which is regarded as a creation of European literary history, is reconfigured to fit the expression modes based on Indian cultural practices. By so doing, these texts establish a place in which various narrative traditions can co-exist and interact to produce forms that are neither purely oral nor purely written.

Simultaneously, such a mixture of forms encourages readers to approach the text in a new way. Such a lack of strict linearity necessitates a more active kind of reading, a reading that is sensitive to the changes in time, tone, and point of view. The reader is sucked into a process that is more of a listening than a reading, as the narrative moves along the way it does, and not in a predetermined order of events.

These structural decisions allow *Kanthapura* and *Midnight's Children* to show that oral traditions still influence Indian English literature in the most basic ways. They demonstrate that storytelling, even in the written version of the

novel, can still have a relationship to voice, memory, and community. More to the point, they show that this relationship is not simply one of preservation but one of transformation, with the patterns of oral narratives being modified to form new possibilities in the written text.

4.2. VOICE, MEMORY, AND TIME

When the above section demonstrated how oral traditions transform the form of narrative, their effect is even more diffuse and extensive in the experience of time and memory in the text. Time is seldom a linear thing in oral storytelling. Rather, it proceeds by association, going back to moments, lingering on them, and letting the past stay alive in the process of narration. This aspect is strongly expressed in both *Midnight's Children* and *The God of Small Things*, where time is not merely depicted but is actively recreated by the use of narrative voice.

In *Midnight's Children*, Salman Rushdie builds memory as a volatile, stratified, and ever-rewritten thing. Saleem Sinai does not narrate his life in chronological order. He switches between times, frequently foreseeing what will happen in the story or revisiting previous episodes with fresh insights. This movement is indicative of a form of remembering that is more oral than written. Memory in this case is not a repository but a performance that is influenced by the current state of mind of the narrator and his consciousness of an audience. Saleem himself admits, "memory has its own special kind" (Rushdie 211), acknowledging its distortions and narrative shaping.

Of special importance is how Saleem recognizes his own fallibility. He acknowledges mistakes, exaggerations, and omissions, and focuses on the very process of telling stories. At one point, he openly confesses, "I must work fast, faster than Scheherazade" (Rushdie 39), emphasizing storytelling as urgency and performance rather than documentation. This self-consciousness does not undermine the story, but instead, it makes it consistent with oral traditions where the presence of the storyteller is always present. The narrative is not given as a factual account but as a version, which can be varied and reinterpreted (Ong 77). In this regard, the narrative voice is a place where memory and imagination meet to create a kind of truth that is experiential and not factual.

The same reconfiguration of time is found in *The God of Small Things*, but it works with a more subdued intensity. Arundhati Roy organizes the novel as a sequence of returns, in which the events of the past are revealed in a disordered manner. The narrative itself reflects this fragmentation in lines such as "Things can change in a day" (Roy 32), where time collapses into emotional immediacy. The story does not progress towards revelation in a direct manner. Rather, it revolves around major events, unveiling them in bits. This trend gives the impression that time is stratified, and the past is constantly pushing into the present.

This effect is supported by the narrative voice of Roy in his novel, which focuses on sensory detail and repetition. Some pictures, words, and memories are repeated in the text, acquiring a new meaning each time they are repeated (Roy 67). This repetition is stylistically embedded in phrases like "Little events, ordinary things, smashed and reconstituted" (Roy 33), reinforcing the cyclical nature of recollection. This repetition is reminiscent of oral storytelling, where significant details are repeated so that they are remembered and comprehended. Simultaneously, it also represents the character of memory as such, especially when it comes to trauma, where some events cannot be closed and reappear in new forms.

The voice in *The God of Small Things* is usually disjointed and suppressed in contrast to the expansive and self-conscious narration of Saleem. However, it has in common with *Midnight's Children* a rejection of linear time. The story is told not by chronology but by association, and the links are revealed as the story progresses. This style encourages the reader to be involved in the act of remembering, reassembling events out of fragmented pieces instead of being presented with them in a finished state.

The power of orality is apparent in both texts in the sense that storytelling is connected to the current moment of narration. The narrative voice is immediate even in the retelling of the past, as though the story is being created in the present. This aspect breaks the distance that written narratives tend to establish between the narrator and the events being narrated. These works do not give the past as something closed and final, but leave it open to be reinterpreted.

There are also more general implications of this treatment of time to the understanding of history. Traditional historical accounts have the events organized in a chronological order, implying a definite flow of the past to the present.

In contrast, the narrative strategies employed in *Midnight's Children* and *The God of Small Things* challenge this model. By foregrounding memory and subjective experience, they offer alternative ways of engaging with history, ones that acknowledge its complexity and instability.

These texts reveal how oral storytelling traditions still inform the experience of narrative in Indian English literature through their use of non-linear time, recursive memory, and situated narrative voice (Tickell 23). They demonstrate that time in these works is not a background on which the events take place, but a dynamic part of the storytelling, which is influenced by the rhythms of memory and the existence of the narrator. By so doing, they project the power of orality beyond structure into the very sense of reality in the text.

4.3. FOLKLORE AS IDENTITY, COMMUNITY, AND RESISTANCE

When narrative structure and time treatment can indicate how oral traditions influence the shape of Indian English literature, folklore makes visible its cultural and political power. Folklore in these writings does not emerge as a passive inheritance or a nostalgic act of the past. It serves as a means of structuring experience, forming collective identity, and, at critical points, opposing the prevailing power structures. This dynamic is especially evident in *Kanthapura* and *The Hungry Tide*, where folklore works in tandem with history, frequently questioning its power.

Raja Rao in *Kanthapura* incorporates the narrative of the Indian nationalist movement into a structure inspired by mythological and local narratives. The happenings in the village are not brought out as solitary political occurrences. Rather, they are construed in terms of common narrative schemas, with characters and events obtaining meanings that are not limited to their immediate context. An example is Gandhi, who is commonly viewed through the prism of divine or epic personalities, which enables the independence struggle to be interpreted in a manner that appeals to the cultural imagination of the community. The narrator explicitly frames him in mythic terms, noting how he appears “like a god... a Mahatma” (Rao 112), reinforcing the fusion of political reality with sacred narrative.

This folklore is more than a way of making the story approachable. It establishes a common language by which the villagers can read and engage in political change. The adaptation of the modern events to the mythic patterns makes the political opposition a continuation of a bigger, culturally rooted narrative. This process erases the distinction between history and myth, and it is possible to say that the meaning of events is not only in what happens but also in how they are remembered and told.

Meanwhile, this mixing of folklore and history undermines the power of colonial discourses (Mukherjee 48). The official narratives of the independence movement tend to conceptualize the independence movement as a political strategy and institutional change. *Kanthapura*, in contrast, gives it a lived experience, which is influenced by belief, emotion, and community involvement. Folklore is a way of reclaiming the story of external structures and letting the community take charge of their own perception of events. In this regard, storytelling in itself becomes a form of resistance, maintaining views that would otherwise be marginalized or lost.

Another, yet no less interesting, application of folklore is in *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh. In this case, the legend of Bon Bibi is a key narrative strand, as it determines how the Sundarbans residents perceive their surroundings and their role in it. The myth is narrated with reverence, describing Bon Bibi as one who “protects those who live in the forest” (Ghosh 103), establishing its ethical and ecological role. The story of Bon Bibi has a certain ecological and cultural context, unlike the mythological allusions in *Kanthapura*, which are placed in a larger religious tradition. It is a symbol of the fragile connection between nature and human existence, especially in a landscape that is uncertain and dangerous. As the text notes, “the very land was waterlogged... always shifting” (Ghosh 34), reinforcing the instability that necessitates myth-based understanding.

In the novel, the legend is not limited to the world of faith. It is proactive in informing behavior, and it directs the way characters overcome physical and moral obstacles. The existence of Bon Bibi presents a structure that is not scientific or administrative in approach to the region. Whereas official discourse tries to classify and control the environment, the Sundarbans folklore focuses on co-existence, harmony, and reverence for the forces that are beyond human control. This opposition shows the shortcomings of purely rational or external ways of knowing.

The Hungry Tide is another place where marginalized voices are expressed through folklore. The tales that accompany Bon Bibi are passed on orally and are held within communities that are frequently not formalized in terms of power. Through these stories, Ghosh introduces the issue of knowledge that is often ignored or underestimated. The text does not show folklore as an alternative that substitutes scientific knowledge, but as something that exists in parallel with it and provides another manner of perceiving reality.

In both texts, folklore is portrayed as a dynamic element that influences the way people and communities perceive themselves. It gives a feeling of continuity, connecting the current experiences with a greater cultural history. Meanwhile,

it enables adaptation, with stories being reinterpreted to fit new situations. This is what makes folklore relevant even when the contexts within which it is used evolve.

More importantly, folklore in these works serves as a means of negotiating power. The texts provide the space for alternative views by relying on the narrative forms that are not based on colonial structures. These views are not necessarily directly antagonistic to dominant narratives, but they make them more complex, adding layers of meaning that are not easily simplified. By doing this, they affirm the importance of local knowledge and shared memory and dispute the notion that power is only held in written or institutional forms (Hawley 140).

Kanthapura and *The Hungry Tide* show that storytelling is not only a cultural activity but also a form of constructing reality. It affects the way events are perceived, the way communities identify themselves, and the way they react to external forces. In this regard, folklore is not only a store of identity but also a weapon of resistance, as it keeps the culture alive and allows new expressions to be made in the changing environment of Indian English literature.

4.4. MYTH, ECOLOGY, AND ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF KNOWING

Although folklore tends to influence identity and shared memory, its influence in Indian English literature goes beyond that into the realm of knowledge itself. In some writings, myth is not merely parallel to empirical or scientific knowledge; it is a different form of perceiving reality, one based on lived experience, setting, and cultural memory. This aspect is particularly acute in *The Hungry Tide*, where Amitav Ghosh introduces the myth, ecology, and human survival into a complicated and revealing relationship.

The Sundarbans, as represented in the novel, is not just a physical location but a place of uncertainty and constant change (Ghosh 34). There is no predictability in the movements of land and water, boundaries are not fixed, and human life is in a precarious position in relation to the natural world. In such a setting, traditional structures of knowledge tend to be inadequate. Scientific mapping and administrative control find it difficult to explain the fluidity of the landscape. It is here that the legend of Bon Bibi gains specific meaning.

The Bon Bibi story is not just a religious or cultural story. It offers a means of comprehending the connection between man and the environment, focusing on coexistence and not dominance. The myth explains an ethical system where the forest is not a subject to be manipulated but a place that requires respect and bargaining (Ghosh 165). This view is in stark contrast to the outside methods that attempt to control the region by strict systems of classification and power.

The interesting aspect of this interaction is that the novel does not make myth and science mutually exclusive. Rather, it puts them in conversation. Scientifically informed characters are faced with circumstances that question their beliefs, and those who appeal to folklore operate with a different sort of consciousness. This opposition does not end in a mere hierarchy. Instead, it implies that various modes of knowing can co-exist, and each of them can provide insights that the other one might miss (Hawley 142).

This coexistence also points to the shortcomings of the perception of folklore as irrational or secondary. In the realm of the novel, myth has a practical meaning. It influences behavior, influences decision-making, and offers a system to explain events that otherwise may appear random or unintelligible. By so doing, it shows that the knowledge that is contained in oral traditions can be dynamic and adaptive to certain ecological conditions.

Simultaneously, the introduction of myth into the story begs the question of whose knowledge is accepted and appreciated. The Sundarbans tales are passed on orally and in most cases within communities that are still on the periphery of formal power structures. The novel does not merely record these stories; it recontextualizes them in a larger literary and intellectual framework by putting them into a written text. There is tension in this act because the act of writing is bound to turn the fluidity of oral tradition into a more solid form. However, the story still has an openness to it, so that the myth is not closed but active.

This myth-ecology interaction also brings the argument of this paper into a broader conceptual realm. It implies that oral traditions are not merely pertinent to issues of narrative form or cultural identity, but also to the way knowledge itself is organized and conveyed. *The Hungry Tide* makes storytelling a way of interacting with the environment, providing insights that are based on long-term interaction as opposed to abstract observation.

This dimension, when considered in conjunction with the other texts that are addressed in this paper, supports the notion that Indian English literature is a place of convergence. There is no existence of oral traditions, folklore, and

written narrative in isolation, but rather they interact to create new forms of understanding. Myth in these texts is not a disruption of rational discourse but a continuation of it, with possibilities beyond what a single perspective can offer.

The *Hungry Tide* shows that storytelling can serve as a mediator between various modes of knowledge through its interaction with ecology and myth. It challenges the readers to think not only about what is being told, but how it influences the ways in which the world itself is viewed and understood. This way, it introduces the discussion of orality and folklore to a larger consideration of knowledge, environment, and the ongoing applicability of traditional forms in modern literary expression.

5. DISCUSSION

The above discussion shows that orality and folklore in Indian English literature are not accidental or confined to the superficial aspects of style. In the texts of choice, these aspects are working on various levels, determining the narrative structure, affecting the portrayal of time and memory, and offering frameworks in which identity and knowledge are formed. Taken collectively, these trends indicate a long-standing and intentional involvement with oral traditions that goes beyond preservation to transformation.

Among the most important lessons that have been learned during this research is how oral narrative structures transform the very shape of the novel. In books like *Kanthapura* and *Midnight's Children*, narration is not linear but rather repetitive, digressive, and moving in a cyclical manner. These aspects, which are commonly regarded as oral performance, transform the anticipations of the reader and break the rules of the novel as a rigid, linear structure (Ong 36). The story turns into something that is created during the telling, and it focuses on its own creation and encourages a more participatory form of interaction. Ong notes that in oral cultures, "knowledge... is preserved in stories" (Ong 41), highlighting why narration remains fluid and evolving.

Simultaneously, the way memory and time are treated in *Midnight's Children* and *The God of Small Things* also supports this break with the traditional narrative logic. Time in both texts is not a fixed chronology but a stratified and permeable experience, which is mediated by memory and re-reading. This method is quite consistent with oral forms of storytelling, in which the past is still alive in the present and in which the process of remembering cannot be separated from the process of narration. The texts make the concept of history a problematic and objective account by pre-empting this fluidity, indicating that it is mediated by subjective experience and narrative form (Bhabha 56).

Folklore, as observed in *Kanthapura* and *The Hungry Tide*, further complicates this change by connecting the narration to the issues of identity and authority. Folklore is not used as a cultural background in these works. It is transformed into the way in which communities make sense of their situations and establish their existence in the context of bigger historical and political structures. These texts establish continuity between the past and the present by incorporating current events into well-known narrative patterns, enabling collective memory to shape present action.

It is also a process that questions dominant narratives, especially those that are informed by colonial or institutional views, by providing alternative means of comprehending reality.

The *Hungry Tide* takes this argument a step further by introducing the concept of multiple ways of knowing through the role of myth. The presence of folklore and scientific discourse in the text underscores the shortcomings of the idea of knowledge as unique or hierarchical. Rather, the novel indicates that various modes of knowing can coexist with each other, each offering insights that the other is unable to exhaust. This view expands the discussion to include oral traditions as cultural or narrative resources but also as epistemological systems that define the way the world is understood.

Collectively, these observations lead to a larger trend in Indian English literature. Using English as a medium does not lead to full assimilation into Western literary norms. Rather, it establishes an area where various narrative traditions collide (Mukherjee 45). The oral storytelling traditions based on the local cultures and shared experiences collide with the written version of the novel to create the hybrid forms that mirror the ambiguities of postcolonial identity. Homi K. Bhabha describes this space as "the in-between... where newness enters the world" (Bhabha 2), capturing the creative tension within these texts. This hybridity, as Homi K. Bhabha theorizes, is not a mere blending but a negotiation process whereby elements of various traditions are rearranged to form new meanings.

The use of orality and folklore, in this case, may be regarded as a reaction to the historical circumstances in which Indian English literature was produced. Writing in English is about interacting with a language that has the heritage of

colonial authority. Incorporating the rhythms, structures, and narrative techniques of oral traditions into this language, writers transform it internally, enabling it to convey experiences that would otherwise be unarticulated. This procedure is in line with the issues of Ngugi wa Thiong'o about the connection between language and cultural identity, as well as showing the creative potential that can be developed through linguistic adaptation (Ngugi 15).

Simultaneously, it should be noted that this change is not devoid of tension. The oral-to-written shift is bound to entail some sort of obsession, as the previously flowing and changeable stories are incorporated into a textual structure. Nevertheless, the works discussed in this paper still have an element of openness, frequently focusing on the process of telling stories and leaving it ambiguous and subject to reinterpretation. By so doing, they maintain a certain dynamism of oral traditions, despite the limitations of the written form.

Finally, the relationship between orality, folklore, and Indian English literature illustrates a literary terrain characterized by continuity rather than change. Instead of considering oral traditions as the remnants of a pre-literate past, these texts show their relevance and flexibility. They demonstrate that storytelling is a living practice, which can and has evolved across languages and forms and still influences how people and communities perceive themselves and their pasts.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper aimed to explore the role of oral traditions and folklore in Indian English literature not as remnants of a pre-literate past but as dynamic and transformative influences in the written text. The analysis of *Kanthapura*, *Midnight's Children*, *The God of Small Things*, and *The Hungry Tide* has revealed that orality functions on several levels of narrative, affecting the structure, voice, temporality, and thematic development.

On the level of form, the continuation of oral storytelling methods interferes with the linear and fixed conventions that are commonly linked to the novel. The stories are told in repetition, digression, and cyclical motion so that the sense of the story being formed in the telling process is created instead of the story being presented as a whole (Ong 77). This formal elasticity indicates the ongoing existence of oral sensibilities in a written form, which implies that the process of orality to literacy is not absolute and unilinear.

This influence is further supported by the treatment of memory and time. The past in these texts is not a remote or fixed object but one that is still alive in the present, and is constantly redefined in the act of narration. This method questions traditional conceptions of history as a linear flow of events, prefiguring its subjectivity and construction. These works tap into oral traditions to provide alternative means of experiencing by matching narrative time with the rhythms of memory.

Folklore, meanwhile, emerges as a powerful means of articulating identity and negotiating power. It offers a common ground on which communities make sense of their situations, connecting modern realities to culturally ingrained stories. By doing this, it subverts prevailing knowledge and power, especially those that are informed by colonial or institutional views (Dundes 2). The use of folklore enables these texts to claim the worth of local knowledge and collective memory and place them as central and not peripheral to literary expression.

The interaction with myth in *The Hungry Tide* is a continuation of this argument into the field of knowledge itself, showing that oral traditions are not only a source of narrative but also a different manner of understanding the world. The juxtaposition of myth and scientific and administrative discourses in the text emphasizes the co-existence of various epistemologies, which are influenced by various types of experience and knowledge. This plurality opposes the concept of one, authoritative way of knowledge, creating room for more inclusive and context-sensitive views.

Collectively, these results indicate that Indian English literature is a convergence space in which oral and written traditions are intertwined, resulting in the creation of hybrid narrative forms. This hybridity is not simply a mixing of influences but a process of change, where inherited storytelling practices are changed to new linguistic and literary conditions. Composing in English, a language characterized by its colonial past, turns into a negotiation. By introducing oral structures and folklore, the writers transform the language, allowing it to bear meanings and experiences based on the local cultures.

Simultaneously, this process is characterized by the level of tension because the transfer of oral to written form is accompanied by fluidity-fixation.

Yet, the texts examined here retain a sense of openness, often drawing attention to the act of storytelling itself and allowing for ambiguity and reinterpretation. In doing so, they preserve the dynamic qualities of oral traditions, even within the constraints of the written word.

Ultimately, the study underscores the continuing relevance of orality and folklore in contemporary literary expression. Far from being confined to the margins, these elements play a central role in shaping how stories are told and understood. They enable Indian English literature to move beyond inherited forms and create new possibilities for narrative, reflecting the complexity of cultural experience in a postcolonial context (Bhabha 38). In this sense, the relationship between orality and literature is not one of replacement but of ongoing dialogue, where the spoken and the written continue to inform and transform one another. As Ong reminds us, “writing restructures consciousness” (Ong 78), yet in these texts, that restructuring remains incomplete, allowing oral traditions to persist within literary form.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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