



INDIAN CULTURE: A STUDY OF INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

The study of this paper related to culture and the main concerns on Indian culture in the 21st century relevant to Indian contemporary English writing. The paper attempts to throw some light on the aspects of youth culture, multiculturalism, cultural contradictions, cultural dilemmas, and popular culture regarding Indian English novelists of the 21st century including, Chetan Bhagat, Kiran Desai, Aravind Adiga, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni etc. The main aim of my research paper is highlight the various types of culture through the works of great eminent authors such as *2 States*, *Five Point Someone*, *The Mistress of Spices*, *Sister of My Heart*, *The Inheritance of Loss*, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* and *The White Tiger*. Along with it, there are many aspects in this research paper including the description of Indian society through literature, Indian English literature related to culture and see types of culture in their fiction and attempts to show how Indian culture can contribute to Indian English literature in the 21st century to depict Indian society in the age of Globalization. Thus, this paper finds out the real condition of Indian people in our society through Indian English literature in the 21st century.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, Indian culture, Counter culture, Cultural dilemma.

**INTRODUCTION**

It was Mulkraj Anand who repeated Dr. Radhakrishana's words in his essay 'Many Language but One Literature: A Retrospective on Indian Writing' "there are many languages in India but one literature." India is known for multiculturalism and multi-languages which are rooted in thousands of years. According to Indian Constitution, India has 22 languages and the Sahitya Academy award gives into 24 languages for literature. Indian literature is the oldest literature in the world; many works belong to this period such as the Vedas, the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, and the Geeta etc. In Indian literature; many writers belong to Indian Hindi Literature namely Kalidas, Surdas, Jay Shankar Prasad, Bihari Lal, Kabirdas Bhushan etc. But Indian devoted to English literature, after the first novel publication *Raj Mohan's Wife* by Bikram Chandra Chatterjee. In 1913, Rabindranath Tagore who won the first time the Noble Prize for his momentum works *The Getangali* (1912) After the Independence, Indian English literature is played a significant role in English literature There are a lot of writers who wrote about Indian culture namely Toru Dutt, Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgonkar, Nissim Ezekiel, Arun Kolatkar etc. Indian English literature, feminism, casteism, culturalism, social and political issue are the eminent themes. But now Indian culture is known all over the world. Through the Indian language, religious architecture, food, customs, rituals, music, dance. Literature is an element in culture and Indian has been adopting for thousands of years. In the 21st Century, Indian English literature is known all over the world because it is reached its peak by Arvind Adiga, Vikram Chandra, Arundhati Roy, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Amitav Ghost etc.

Culture is one of the most elusive words to define like as language or life. Culture is a particular way of life and there are various aspects including the clothes you wear, the language you speak in, the food you eat, and the God you worship. All the

achievements of humanity as a member of society can be called culture. The customs, traditions, festivals and one's outlook on various issues of life are included in culture and arts, music, architecture, philosophy, literature, religion and science can be seen as the aspects of culture. In the words of Edward Tyler:

"Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by (a human) as a member of society."¹

In Indian English Literature of the 21st century, Chetan Bhagat is well known as an Indian write, screenwriter, television celebrity, social media influencer and novelist who wrote five bestselling novels including *Five Point Someone*, *The 3 Mistake of My Life*, *One Night @ The Call Centre*, *2 State* and *What Young India Wants*. He entered IIT Delhi to award the degree of Bachelor of other graduates towards mechanical engineering as well as an alumnus of IIM Ahmadabad. He is an investment banker turned into a prolific writer through his writing; He also focuses on youth culture, career and issues based on national development. He holds the modern culture of the youth generation, cultural contradiction and Indian culture. *In his novel, Chetan Bhagat focused on the problem of post- colonial's culture issues, the younger generation and youth culture in contemporary society and he portrays the Indian modern youth culture and youth dynamic*. He depicts some cultural issues like communal riots, religion, bias, misguiding the youth by politician etc. His dark subject yet embraces modern culture and uses corporate culture as a term used to describe confidence and a value system that impact on its unique taste and approach to a friendship in *Cosmo-culture* is the status of youth so pathetic. Today youth in India can ignore their family, greetings, drink excessive cocktails and date each other with casualties that scare parents. All people want a high salary, a fashionable lifestyle. In his novel *2 State*, Chetan Bhagat performs interreligious marriage in

¹ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/culture-cogsci/>



India. It is known for its diverse cultural heritage as it is vibrant and traditionally known for marriages. *2 States'* idea is the most realistic modern trend, it draws attention to cultural differences in diverse India. Culture variations for religions and languages, India needs to understand. It is often mythological, supernatural contradictory, yet fascinating journey from western culture. Infact, Chetan Bhagat captures the spirit of modern culture.

In *2 States*, he uses the multiculturalism because Krish belongs to North Indian Panjabi boy and Ananya belongs to south Indian Tamil Brahmin girl. They love each other and want to marry. Chetan Bhagat presents the cross-cultural conflict based on linguistic, food habit, dress, custom etc

"To this Krish replies about Panjabi cuisine, 'I am Panjabi, though never lived in Punjab. I grew up in Delhi. And I have no idea of my caste, but we do eat chicken. And I can digest bad sambar better than Tamil Brahmins'"²

Most over it, he has used the trans-cultural marriage between the Northern culture and Southern culture. Krish mother shows his controversial and law mentality to Ananya and gives the historical account of Indian daughters:-

"These South Indians don't know how to control their daughter. From Hema Malini to Sridevi, all of them trying to catch Panjabi men"³

In the end, the moral of the novel is stand in the fort of us that human relationships based on human emotion the search of Ananya's father conveys:-

"...Yes, the Tamilian in me is a little disappointed. But the Indian in me is quite happy. And more than anything, the human being in me is happy. After all, we've

decided to use this opportunity to create more loved ones for ourselves"⁴

Kiran Desai is an Indian diasporic author who wrote a Booker Prize (2006) novel *The Inheritance of Loss* which tells the truth behind the politics of globalization and privatization and the Betty Trask Award for her first novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998). There are many issues of Kiran Desai's novels like immigration, westernization, cultural conflict, race, colonialism, post-colonialism, globalization, multiculturalism which are explored. In her novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* shows the depiction of cultural dilemmas through her character such as Biju who dream to go west for earning money but he sacrifices his culture and social conventions. Kiran Desai explores the immigrant's pain of through Birju. When Birju was in dilemmas and thought about his own culture and says:

"Those who could see the difference between a holy cow and an unholy cow would win. Those who couldn't see it would lose----- One should not give up one's religion, the principles of one's parents and their parents before them. No, no matter what. You had to live according to something. You had to find your dignity".⁵

Laura Albritton notes:

"The cook is tremendously proud of his son, Biju, whom he imagines to be wildly successful in America. In fact, Biju suffers a series of humiliations and trials as he tries to survive in New York. In one scene, the reader eavesdrops on Biju's boss and his wife: He smells,' said the owner's wife. I think I'm allergic to his hair oil.' She had hoped for men from the poorer parts of Europe? Bulgarians perhaps or Czechoslovakians."⁶

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Desai, Kiran. *The Inheritance of Loss*. New York: Grove Press, 2005. Print

⁶ Albritton, Laura. "Harvard Review." *Harvard Review*, no. 32, 2007, pp. 169-171. JSTOR, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/27569330

² Bhagat, Chetan. *2 States - The Story of My Marriage*. Rupa Publication India Pvt. Ltd.

³ Ibid



Multiculturalism conflict is seen in this novel *The Inheritance of Loss* when Birju was in America, he heard many insulting sentences like:

“These white people shit! But at least this country is better than England”, “Go back to where you come from”, “your father came to my country and took my bread back” and “holy cow unholy cow”

Arvind Adiga is well known as an Indo-Australian writer and journalist who won the Man Booker Award for his debut novel *The White Tiger* in 2008. Arvind's *The White Tiger* is easily in the cultural séance as it is a prominent feature of this school. for example, it can be analysed as a form of isolationist cultural resistance to capitalism, as the discourse of the oppressed proletariat of dominant high culture is emphasized but the odd thing is that this class is weakened in the text to such an extent that the author has not only failed to redefine social order but would also end up as a spokesman for the traditional of the East. Between *The Assassinations* is the second book, published by Arvind and it was a writer before his first book *The White Tiger*. *Last Man In Tower* is a novel which is a writer by Arvind Adiga who tells in this story of a struggle for a slice of shining Mumbai real estate. *Selection Day* is a sports fiction by Arvind Adiga. It tells the story of Mohan Kumar, a chutney seller who trains his two sons. Manju and Radha Krishna from Mumbai.

The White Tiger is a Booker prize novel of 2008; a depiction of a society in flux, where different sections of the social system find themselves in unique and complex cultural events. Culture encounters usually refer to an encounter between people from a different nation, religion or global region. In Adiga's novel, he has presented a single nation (India) through cultural encounters and cultural hegemony of western industrialized nations, which determines the directions of the economic and social progress of the whole world. Arvind Adiga discusses the division of social groups, upper-class and lower-class cultural imperialism of the western world. Adiga's writing skills gives us not only

entertainment but also gives a pause of thought. Thus, he gives a glimpse of the pulse of Indian society through cultural counter.

“The novel gives the detailed accounts of the Indian society—rural as well as urban and its various facets. Laxamangarh, Gaya, Dhanbad, Delhi and Bangalore are generic, in fact they represent the portrait of India. Poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, caste and culture conflict, superstition, dowry practice, economic disparity, Zamindari system, and exploitation of marginal farmers and landless labourers, rise of Naxalism, corrupt education system, poor health services, tax evading racket, embittered master-servant relationship, prostitution, weakening family structure, and its fallout etc. constitute the basic structure of Indian society which largely forms the Dark image of India. Adiga left Manglore in 1991 when his father moved to Australia. After 15 years, returning to the city as a journalist with Time, he found it has changed vastly.”⁷

In his debut novel, *The White Tiger* Arvind Adiga has tried to see the counter culture through the novel, he says that there is two part of our nation one is darkness to Laxamangarh where frame Balram was Singh, Krishna born and brought up and he wants to Camus out from Darkness to light. He says-

“Please understand, Your Excellency, that India is two countries in one: an India of Light, and an India of Darkness. The ocean brings light to my country. Every place on the map of India near the ocean is well off. But the river brings darkness to India—the black river.”⁸

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is well known as an Indo- American writer and poetess who won an American book award in 1996 for her short story collection, *Arranged Marriage* and wrote two of her

⁸ Adiga, Aravind. *The White Tiger*, New Delhi, Harper Collins, 2008.



novel *The Mistress of Spices* and *Sister of my Heart* as well as a short story of the word love. Chitra Banerjee has used cultural ambivalence and multiculturalism in her debut fiction *The Mistress of Spices*.

A trans-cultural person is always be ready to cross-cultural boundaries and to accept the nuances of another culture. It is very easy to forge friendship and bonds with people of the same culture. But he needs the effort to overcome cultural buries and to create trans-cultural friendship. Tilo meets in her shop from people of different cultures. Not only Indian, who comes to her shops, but we also see a multicultural crowd who roam her shops and she falls in love with Raven. Tilo seems to be making friends with people who are from different cultures. Culturalism concerns us with crossing boundaries and having a global view of the world rather than living in familiar things. Tilo decides to travel and take life from what he has to offer. Trans-culturalism demands that individuals have a globalized view of the world. Tilo is keen to embrace new cultures; she is eager to learn about the cultural heritage of the Raven. She is a traditional Indian woman, she accepts the modern woman and operates her for all her efforts, she also mixes the Gita with 'India and American' in a new rhyme. Tilo is ready to use new cultural changes and support other cultures. In the novel, *The Mistress of Spices* Chitra Banerji shows the depiction of trans-culturalism.

CONCLUSION

Thus, it is rightly said that Indian English literature is one of the most eminent literature to use and show the significant issues like culture. Indian culture is well known all over the world. In the 21st century, many authors Chetan Bhaget, Krian Desai, Arvind Adiga who use the various aspect of culturalism such as counter culture, multiculturalism, cross-culture etc. Along with it , Indian culture is playing an important role in the field of Indian English literature. *Chetan Bhagat focused on the problem of post- colonial's culture issues, the younger generation and youth culture in contemporary society and he portrays the Indian modern youth culture and youth dynamic.* Chitra Banerjee has used cultural

ambivalence and multiculturalism in her debut fiction *The Mistress of Spices*. *The White Tiger* is a Booker prize novel of 2008; a depiction of a society in flux, where different sections of the social system find themselves in unique and complex cultural events. Culture encounters usually refer to an encounter between people from a different nation, religion or global region. There are many issues of Kiran Desai's novels like immigration, westernization, cultural conflict, race, colonialism, post-colonialism.

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