

# Impact Narratives in Indian English Diaspora

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## 1. Introduction

Diaspora a word derived from Greek, meaning "scattering, dispersion" is the movement or migration of a group of people, such as those sharing a national and/or ethnic identity, away from an established or ancestral homeland. The first recorded usage of the word Diaspora in the English language was in 1876, later it became more widely assimilated into English by the mid 1950s, with long-term expatriates in significant numbers from other particular countries or regions also being referred to as a Diaspora. An academic field, Diaspora studies, has become established relating to this sense of the word. Most of the traditional values and cross-cultural arts, literature is being incorporated in the writings.

## 2. Indian writers in English

In the previous century, several Indian writers have distinguished themselves not only in traditional Indian languages but also in English language. India's Nobel laureate in literature was the Bengali writer Rabindranath Tagore. Other major writers who are either Indian or of Indian origin and derive much inspiration from Indian themes are R K Narayan, Vikram Seth, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Raja Rao, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Chandra, Mukul Kesavan, Shashi Tharoor. Indian Women writers and poets like Kamala Das, in the feminist era in India by her bold and confessional writings. In recent years, English-language writers of Indian origin are being published in the West at an astonishing rate. In June 1997, a special fiction issue of The New Yorker magazine devoted much space to essays by Amitav Ghosh and Abraham Verghese, a short story by Vikram Chandra, and poems by Jayanta Mahapatra and Ramanujan. John Updike profiled RK Narayan and Arundhati Roy's God Of Small Things.

The Indian writers in English do expect and look forward to achieve the Jnanpith Award and Sahitya Akademi Award, as these are among the most prestigious Indian literary awards for the native writers.

Indian English Literature (IEL) refers to the body of work by writers in India who write in the English language and whose mother tongue is usually one of the numerous languages of India. It is also associated with the works of members of the Indian Diaspora, especially people like Salman Rushdie and Kumar Kaushik who were born in India. As a category, this production comes under the broader realm of post-independence literature the production from previously colonized countries such as India.

## 3. Diaspora writing by Indian Writers in English

Among the later writers, the most notable is Salman Rushdie, born in India, now living in the United States. Rushdie with his famous work *Midnight's Children* (Booker Prize 1981, Booker of Bookers 1992). He used a hybrid language – English generously peppered with Indian terms – to convey a theme that could be seen as representing the vast canvas of India. He is usually categorized under the magic realism mode of writing most famously associated with Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

Shashi Tharoor, in his *The Great Indian Novel* (1989), follows a story-telling (though in a satirical) mode as in the Mahabharata drawing his ideas by going back and forth in time. His work as UN official living outside India has given him a vantage point that helps construct an objective Indian-ness. Diasporic women writers like Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Jhumpa Lahiri, Chitra Banerjee, and Bharati Mukherjee, and even young writers like Kiran Desai, express the feelings of double segregation, alienation and nostalgia in their writings.

One of the key issues raised in this context is the superiority and inferiority of IWE as opposed to the literary production in the various languages of India. Key polar concepts in this context are superficial and authentic, imitative and creative, shallow and deep, critical and uncritical, elitist or parochial and so on style can be seen in their writings.

Amit Chaudhuri questions – "Can it be true that Indian writing, that endlessly rich, complex and problematic entity, is to be represented by a handful of writers who write in English, who live in England or America and whom one might have met at a party?" Chaudhuri feels that after Rushdie, Indian writing in English (IWE) started employing magical realism, non-linear narrative and hybrid language to sustain themes seen as microcosms of India and supposedly reflecting Indian conditions. He contrasts this with the works of earlier writers such as Narayan where the use of English is pure, but the deciphering of meaning needs cultural familiarity. He also feels that Indian-ness is a theme constructed only in IWE and does not articulate itself in the vernacular literatures. (It is probable that the level of Indian-ness constructed is directly proportional to the distance between the writer and India.) He further adds "the post-colonial novel becomes for an ideal hybridity by which the West celebrates not so much Indian-ness, whatever that infinitely complex thing is, but its own historical quest, its reinterpretation of itself".

The renowned writer V S Naipaul, a third generation Indian from Trinidad and Tobago and a Nobel Prize laureate, is a person who belongs to the world and usually not classified under Indian writings in English (IWE). Naipaul evokes ideas of homeland, rootless-ness and his own personal feelings towards India in many of his writings.

Bharati Mukherjee, author of *Jasmine*, 1989, has spent much of her career exploring issues involving immigration and identity with a particular focus upon the United States and Canada. Vikram Seth, author of *A Suitable Boy* (1994) is a writer who uses more realistic themes. Being a self-confessed fan of Jane Austen, his attention is on the story, its details and its twists and turns. Writers in India such as Arundhati Roy, show a direction towards contextually and rooted-ness in her works, the 1997 Booker prize winner for "*the God of Small Things*", calls herself a "home grown" writer.

#### **4. Indian Diaspora in poetry:**

A much over-looked category of Indian writing in English is poetry. In modern times, Indian poetry in English was typified by two very different poets. Dom Moraes, winner of the Hawthorn den Prize at the precocious age of 19 for his first book of poems *A Beginning* went on to occupy a pre-eminent position among Indian poets writing in English. Nissim Ezekiel, who came from India's tiny Jewish community, created a voice and place for Indian poets writing in English and championed their work. Their contemporaries in English poetry in India were Arvind Mehrotra, Gieve Patel, A K Ramanujan, Parthasarathy, Keki Daruwala, Adil Jussawala, Arun Kolatkar, Dilip Chitre, Eunice De Souza, and Kamala Das.

#### **5. Indian diaspora in Cinema**

The Indian diaspora consists of millions of Indians overseas for which films are made available both through mediums such as DVDs and by screening of films in their country of residence wherever commercially feasible. These earnings, accounting for some 12% of the revenue generated by a mainstream film, contribute substantially to the overall revenue of Indian cinema, the net worth of which was found to be US\$1.3 billion in 2000. Music in Indian cinema is another substantial revenue generator, with the music rights alone accounting for 4–5% of the net revenues generated by a film in India. India is the world's largest producer of films. In 2009, India produced a total of 2961 films on celluloid, that include a staggering figure of 1288 feature films. The provision of 100% foreign direct investment has made the Indian film market attractive for foreign enterprises such as 20th Century Fox, Sony Pictures, Walt Disney Pictures and Warner Bros. Indian enterprises such as Zee, UTV, Suresh

Productions, Adlabs and Sun Network's Sun Pictures also participated in producing and distributing films. Tax incentives to multiplexes have aided the multiplex boom in India. By 2003 as many as 30 film production companies had been listed in the National Stock Exchange of India, making the commercial presence of the medium felt.

The first full-length motion picture in India was produced by Dadasaheb Phalke, a scholar on India's languages and culture, who brought together elements from Sanskrit epics to produce his *Raja Harishchandra* (1913), a silent film in Marathi. The female roles in the film were played by male actors. The first Indian chain of cinema theaters was owned by the Calcutta entrepreneur Jamshedji Framji Madan, who oversaw production of 10 films annually and distributed them throughout the Indian subcontinent. In the 20th century, Indian cinema, along with the Hollywood and Chinese film industries, became a global enterprise. At the end of 2010 it was reported that in terms of annual film output, India ranks first, followed by Hollywood and China. Enhanced technology paved the way for upgrading from established cinematic norms of delivering product, altering the manner in which content reached the target audience, as per regional tastes. Indian cinema found markets in over 90 countries where films from India are screened.

During the early twentieth century cinema as a medium gained popularity across India's population and its many economic sections. Tickets were made affordable to the common man at a low price and for the financially capable additional comforts meant additional admission ticket price. Audiences thronged to cinema halls as this affordable medium of entertainment was available for as low as an *anna* (4 *paisa*) in Bombay. The content of Indian commercial cinema was increasingly tailored to appeal to these masses. Young Indian producers began to incorporate elements of India's social life and culture into cinema. Others brought with them ideas from across the world. This was also the time when global audiences and markets became aware of India's film industry.

## **6. Indian Diaspora in Indian Music**

Music in Indian cinema is a substantial revenue generator, with the music rights alone accounting for 4–5% of the net revenues generated by a film in India. The major film music companies of India are Saregama, Sony Music etc. Commercially, film music accounts for 48% India's net music sales. A film in India may have many choreographed songs spread throughout its length.

The demands of a multicultural, increasingly globalized Indian audience often led to a mixing of various local and international musical traditions. Local dance and music nevertheless remain a time tested and recurring theme in India and have made their way outside of India's borders with its diaspora. Playback singers such as Lata Mangeshkar drew large crowds with national and international film music stage shows. The end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 21st saw extensive interaction between artists from India and the western world. Artists from Indian diaspora blended the traditions of their heritage to those of their country to give rise to popular contemporary music in all over the world.

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