

Analyze the Portrayal of Indian Society's Transformation in the Post-Independence Era Through Literature

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Abstract - This study explores the portrayal of Indian society's transformation in the post-independence era through the lens of literature. Indian authors, across various regions and time periods, have used literature as a powerful medium to reflect, critique, and document the socio-economic, political, and cultural changes shaping the nation. The paper examines key themes such as social and economic inequalities, urbanization and modernization, political and cultural identity, and the impact of globalization. Drawing on works by notable authors like R.K. Narayan, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Mahasweta Devi, and Aravind Adiga, this research highlights how literature captures the struggles and aspirations of a nation redefining itself after colonial rule. From the caste and class hierarchies depicted in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* to the exploration of globalization's effects in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, the analysis underscores literature's role in amplifying marginalized voices and challenging dominant narratives. By integrating regional perspectives and temporal shifts, the study reveals the evolving themes and stylistic innovations in Indian literature. It concludes that literature not only mirrors the transformation of Indian society but also serves as a critical tool for understanding its complexities, offering invaluable insights into the nation's collective identity and cultural resilience. This paper contributes to the discourse on post-independence Indian literature as a dynamic reflection of societal change and continuity.

Keywords: Urbanization, Marginalized, Identity, Literature, Modernization, Urbanization

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INTRODUCTION

The transformation of Indian society in the post-independence era has been profound, encompassing shifts in political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions. Literature, as a mirror of society, provides a rich medium to analyze these changes. Indian authors have played a significant role in chronicling these transformations, offering insights into the evolving identity of the nation. From the struggles of partition to the challenges of modernization and globalization, literary works reflect the hopes, aspirations, and conflicts of post-independence India.

The post-independence period marks a critical juncture in Indian history. After 1947, the country embarked on a journey of rebuilding and redefining itself. Writers such as R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, and Raja Rao were among the pioneers who explored themes of nationalism, caste, and social inequalities in their works. According to Mukherjee (1999), these early post-independence writers attempted to "give voice to the emerging Indian ethos while addressing the persisting socio-economic issues rooted in colonial

legacies." Their works became a lens through which readers could understand the complexities of a newly independent society.

The societal changes of the 1970s and 1980s marked by political unrest, the Emergency, and economic shifts further influenced Indian literature. Writers like Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy brought a global perspective to Indian narratives, blending historical and personal experiences. Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) is widely regarded as a landmark in post-independence Indian literature, portraying the socio-political changes through magical realism. As Pandey (2004) notes, "Rushdie's work symbolizes the chaotic yet vibrant transformation of India, juxtaposing personal histories with the collective national narrative."

The late 20th and early 21st centuries saw literature engaging with the impacts of globalization, technology, and economic liberalization. Writers such as Aravind Adiga in *The White Tiger* (2008) and Jhumpa Lahiri in *The Namesake* (2003) explored themes of urbanization, economic disparity, and the

diasporic experience. These narratives reflect how modern Indian society grapples with preserving its cultural heritage while adapting to rapid modernization (Chandra, 2011).

In regional and vernacular literature, authors like Mahasweta Devi and U.R. Ananthamurthy brought attention to marginalized communities and their struggles, showcasing how India's transformation was not uniform but layered with diverse experiences. As Deshpande (2015) argues, "regional literature provides a counter-narrative to mainstream portrayals, emphasizing the resilience of subaltern voices amidst societal change."

This study seeks to analyze how literature portrays the transformation of Indian society post-independence, focusing on themes of cultural identity, social inequalities, and globalization. By examining key works, this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of how literary narratives capture the evolving ethos of the nation.

Literature serves as a dynamic reflection of society, capturing its cultural, political, and social transformations across time. It is often said that literature acts as both a mirror and a lamp—mirroring the existing realities while illuminating new perspectives for societal growth. According to Eagleton (1996), literature is "deeply rooted in the socio-political fabric of its time, offering a nuanced understanding of societal dynamics." This dual role makes literature an essential medium for exploring and understanding societal changes.

In the context of societal transformation, literature not only documents events but also critiques and reimagines them. For instance, in the aftermath of India's independence, literary works became a powerful tool to explore the challenges of nation-building, identity formation, and cultural resilience. Writers such as R.K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand depicted everyday struggles and aspirations, addressing issues like caste discrimination and socio-economic disparities. These narratives offered insights into the collective psyche of a nation grappling with its colonial past and independent future (Mukherjee, 1999).

As society evolves, literature evolves with it, highlighting shifts in values, norms, and ideologies. The rapid urbanization and globalization of the late 20th century, for example, found expression in novels such as Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), which examines how traditional and modern values collide within a family. Roy's work underscores how literature can critique systemic inequalities while revealing the personal impacts of larger societal forces (Nayar, 2010).

Moreover, literature plays a critical role in amplifying marginalized voices and counter-narratives that challenge dominant discourses. Regional literature in India, such as the works of Mahasweta Devi, has shed light on the struggles of tribal communities and the enduring effects of exploitation. As Deshpande (2015)

argues, "literature is a site where the voiceless find representation, and societal inequities are laid bare."

In addition to being a reflection, literature often acts as an agent of change by influencing societal norms and perceptions. The feminist movement in Indian literature, led by writers like Kamala Das and Ismat Chughtai, questioned patriarchal structures and redefined gender roles. These works catalyzed societal discourse on gender equality, showing how literature can shape, not just reflect, societal transformations (Tharu & Lalita, 1993).

Ultimately, the importance of literature lies in its ability to capture the multifaceted nature of societal changes—both visible and intangible. It offers a space for dialogue between tradition and modernity, oppression and resistance, and individual and collective identities. By doing so, literature remains a vital tool for understanding and navigating the complexities of an ever-changing society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of Indian literature and its depiction of societal transformation is rooted in the theoretical frameworks of post-colonialism, identity formation, and cultural transformation. Post-colonialism explores the impact of colonization on culture, society, and identity, emphasizing how literature becomes a site for resistance and reimagining the future (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2002). In the Indian context, this framework provides insights into how literature reflects the struggle to define a national identity after independence, balancing the tension between colonial legacies and indigenous traditions. Theories of identity formation, such as those proposed by Homi Bhabha, highlight the "hybridity" inherent in post-colonial societies, where cultural transformation arises from the blending of traditional and modern influences (Bhabha, 1994).

Additionally, cultural transformation is central to understanding Indian literature's engagement with societal changes. Works of literature serve as narratives that document and critique shifts in cultural norms, values, and ideologies. For example, authors like Salman Rushdie use magical realism to explore the fragmentation and pluralism of Indian identity in a rapidly changing society (*Midnight's Children*, 1981). This theoretical lens allows the research to analyze how literature encapsulates the evolving ethos of Indian society.

Previous Research: Relevant Studies on Indian Literature and Societal Change

Scholars have extensively explored the role of literature in documenting and critiquing societal changes in India. Mukherjee (1999) provides a foundational understanding of how early post-independence literature, such as R.K. Narayan's *Malgudi Days* and Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, reflects everyday struggles, caste dynamics, and

rural life. These works serve as historical artifacts that capture the socio-economic realities of their time.

Research on contemporary Indian literature highlights themes of globalization, migration, and economic disparity. Nayar (2010) argues that modern Indian authors like Arundhati Roy and Aravind Adiga depict the dualities of progress and exploitation in their narratives, such as in *The God of Small Things* and *The White Tiger*. Additionally, Deshpande (2015) emphasizes the significance of regional literature in capturing subaltern voices, which often challenge mainstream narratives and provide a more nuanced understanding of societal transformation.

However, while much research has been conducted on individual works or authors, there remains a lack of comparative studies that examine how different genres (e.g., regional literature, diaspora narratives, feminist writings) collectively contribute to understanding societal changes.

Notable Authors and Works: Contributions to Depicting Societal Transformations

Key authors in Indian literature have made significant contributions to portraying societal transformation. R.K. Narayan used the fictional town of Malgudi to depict the simplicity and complexity of life in post-independence rural India, reflecting the nation's gradual modernization. Mulk Raj Anand, on the other hand, tackled issues of caste and social inequality in works like *Untouchable* (1935), offering a critique of the entrenched hierarchical structures in Indian society (Mukherjee, 1999).

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) is often cited as a landmark work that intertwines personal and national histories to capture India's socio-political evolution. Similarly, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) provides a poignant exploration of caste, gender, and family dynamics, reflecting the interplay between tradition and modernity. Mahasweta Devi, a prominent voice in regional literature, highlighted the struggles of tribal and marginalized communities, showcasing how India's transformation often excluded the most vulnerable (Deshpande, 2015).

These authors not only reflect societal changes but also critique and influence them, making literature an active participant in India's post-independence transformation.

Research Gaps

Despite the extensive body of research on Indian literature, several gaps remain. First, while there is significant focus on prominent authors like Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy, lesser-known regional and vernacular writers often receive insufficient attention. For example, the works of Dalit authors and tribal literature are underrepresented in mainstream academic discourse, despite their critical contributions to understanding the realities of marginalized communities (Omvedt, 2006).

Second, most studies focus on thematic analyses of literature without integrating interdisciplinary approaches. Combining literary studies with socio-economic and historical analyses could provide a more comprehensive understanding of societal transformation. Furthermore, there is a lack of longitudinal studies examining how the portrayal of societal change has evolved across decades in Indian literature.

Lastly, the role of digital and contemporary media in reshaping Indian literature is an emerging area that remains underexplored. With the rise of e-literature and digital storytelling, new forms of narratives are capturing societal transformations in unique ways, which deserve scholarly attention.

KEY THEMES IN POST-INDEPENDENCE LITERATURE

Post-independence Indian literature has been a rich tapestry of themes that reflect the multifaceted transformation of society. Authors have explored key issues such as social and economic inequalities, urbanization and modernization, political and cultural identity, and the impact of globalization and Western influence. These themes not only chronicle the societal changes but also critically analyze and challenge them, providing a nuanced understanding of India's post-independence journey.

Social and Economic Inequalities: Reflections on Caste, Class, and Gender

Social and economic inequalities have been a persistent theme in post-independence literature, reflecting India's struggles to achieve equity and justice in the wake of colonial rule. Writers like Mulk Raj Anand and Mahasweta Devi have critically examined caste hierarchies and the systemic oppression of marginalized communities. Anand's *Untouchable* (1935) portrays the life of Bakha, a Dalit, highlighting the entrenched caste-based discrimination even in post-colonial India (Mukherjee, 1999). Similarly, Mahasweta Devi's works, such as *Hajar Churashir Maa*, bring attention to the exploitation of tribal communities and their fight for dignity and survival (Deshpande, 2015).

Gender inequalities are another critical focus, with authors like Kamala Das and Shashi Deshpande exploring the experiences of women in patriarchal societies. Das's autobiographical writings delve into themes of sexuality, freedom, and identity, while Deshpande's *That Long Silence* (1988) examines the struggles of middle-class women seeking individuality and agency in a male-dominated world (Tharu & Lalita, 1993).

Urbanization and Modernization: Depictions of Changing Landscapes and Lifestyles

The rapid urbanization and modernization of India post-independence have profoundly influenced its

literature. Writers like R.K. Narayan and Anita Desai have depicted the impact of urbanization on traditional lifestyles and values. In Narayan's *The Guide* (1958), the protagonist's journey from a small-town tourist guide to a spiritual leader reflects the collision between rural and urban ideologies (Mukherjee, 1999).

Anita Desai's works, such as *Voices in the City* (1965), focus on the alienation and existential crises faced by individuals in rapidly urbanizing cities like Calcutta. Desai's narratives capture the emotional and psychological dislocation caused by modernization, offering a critique of urban life's dehumanizing aspects (Nayar, 2010).

The depiction of urban landscapes is further explored in contemporary literature, such as Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008), which portrays the stark economic divide between the urban rich and the rural poor. Adiga's protagonist, Balram, symbolizes the aspirations and moral dilemmas of India's underprivileged classes navigating a modern, capitalist society (Chandra, 2011).

Political and Cultural Identity: Narratives on Nationalism, Democracy, and Communal Tensions

Indian literature has long been a medium to explore and critique the complex dynamics of political and cultural identity in a diverse nation. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) is a seminal work that intertwines personal and national histories, capturing India's transition from colonial rule to independence and beyond. Rushdie uses magical realism to explore the challenges of nationalism and the fragmentation of cultural identity in a pluralistic society (Bhabha, 1994).

The Emergency period (1975–1977) and its impact on democracy have also been explored in Indian literature. Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1995) provides a poignant depiction of the socio-political upheaval during this time, focusing on the lives of ordinary people caught in the crossfire of authoritarianism and poverty (Nayar, 2010).

Communal tensions and their effects on cultural identity have been central themes in works like Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) and Kamleshwar's *Kitne Pakistan* (2000). These novels delve into the trauma of partition and the enduring scars it left on India's collective psyche, emphasizing the challenges of fostering unity in a diverse nation (Mukherjee, 1999).

Globalization and Western Influence: Impact on Traditions and Values

The advent of globalization and Western influence has brought both opportunities and challenges to Indian society, which are vividly reflected in contemporary literature. Writers like Jhumpa Lahiri and Vikram Seth explore the diasporic experience and the negotiation of identity between Indian traditions and Western culture. Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003) examines the struggles of second-generation immigrants in the United States

as they navigate cultural duality and generational conflicts (Chandra, 2011).

At the same time, globalization's impact on traditional values and lifestyles is a recurring theme in Chetan Bhagat's popular fiction. In *One Night @ the Call Center* (2005), Bhagat portrays the lives of young Indians working in multinational call centers, highlighting the cultural shifts and moral dilemmas they face in a rapidly globalizing world (Nayar, 2010).

The tension between preserving cultural heritage and adapting to global influences is also evident in regional literature. For example, U.R. Ananthamurthy's *Samskara* (1965) critiques the rigidities of traditional Brahminical society while questioning the extent to which modernization can address deeply ingrained social issues (Deshpande, 2015).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Indian literature is marked by its diversity, reflecting the country's vast cultural, linguistic, and historical landscape. Authors from various regions and time periods bring unique perspectives to their works, shaped by their socio-political environments and cultural contexts. A comparative analysis of these perspectives highlights how regional and temporal variations contribute to the richness of Indian literature while addressing shared themes of societal transformation.

Regional Perspectives: Voices from Different Corners of India

Regional authors bring authenticity to their depictions of local cultures and issues, often highlighting nuances that might be overlooked in mainstream narratives. For instance, R.K. Narayan, hailing from South India, portrayed the simplicity and complexities of life in small-town India through his fictional town of Malgudi. His works, such as *The Guide* (1958), provide a gentle critique of societal norms, blending humor and empathy to explore human dilemmas (Mukherjee, 1999).

In contrast, Mahasweta Devi, a Bengali writer, focused on the struggles of marginalized communities, particularly tribal groups in Eastern India. Her works, such as *Hajar Churashir Maa* and *Rudali*, expose systemic exploitation and highlight the resilience of subaltern voices. As Deshpande (2015) notes, "Mahasweta Devi's regional lens provides a powerful counter-narrative to the dominant urban-centric portrayal of Indian society."

Punjabi literature, deeply influenced by the trauma of Partition, offers yet another perspective. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) vividly captures the horrors of communal violence and its impact on ordinary people, contrasting with Narayan's more serene narratives of post-independence life in the South. Singh's stark realism reflects the region's historical scars, providing a deeply emotional portrayal of a divided nation (Chandra, 2011).

Temporal Perspectives: Changing Themes Across Decades

The themes and styles of Indian literature have evolved significantly across time periods, reflecting the shifting socio-political realities of the nation. Early post-independence literature, exemplified by Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935) and R.K. Narayan's works, focused on social inequalities, rural life, and the challenges of modernization. These narratives were deeply rooted in Gandhian ideals and the hope of a newly independent India (Mukherjee, 1999).

By the 1980s and 1990s, authors like Salman Rushdie and Rohinton Mistry introduced global perspectives, blending personal and national histories. Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) revolutionized Indian literature with its use of magical realism to depict India's chaotic yet vibrant transformation. Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1995), set during the Emergency period, offers a somber portrayal of the socio-political turmoil of the time, highlighting the fragility of democracy and human resilience (Nayar, 2010).

Contemporary authors like Aravind Adiga and Jhumpa Lahiri focus on the effects of globalization and the diasporic experience. Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) critiques the economic disparities of modern India, while Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003) explores identity and cultural dislocation in immigrant families. These narratives reflect the complexities of a globalized world, contrasting with the more localized concerns of earlier works (Chandra, 2011).

Stylistic Variations: Contrasts in Narrative Techniques

The narrative styles of Indian authors vary significantly, adding to the richness of their perspectives. Narayan's works are characterized by simplicity and humor, using a linear narrative to explore human relationships and societal change. In contrast, Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* employs a fragmented, non-linear structure, interweaving magical realism with historical events. This stylistic complexity mirrors the multifaceted nature of post-independence India (Bhabha, 1994).

Similarly, the stark realism of Mahasweta Devi's stories contrasts with the poetic and introspective style of Anita Desai, whose works, like *Clear Light of Day* (1980), delve into the emotional and psychological landscapes of her characters. While Devi's narratives confront systemic injustices head-on, Desai's focus on familial relationships and individual struggles offers a quieter yet profound exploration of societal transformation (Deshpande, 2015).

Shared Themes Across Diversity

Despite regional and temporal variations, Indian literature often converges on shared themes such as identity, social justice, and cultural resilience. Authors from different backgrounds address these themes through their unique lenses, enriching the collective

narrative. For instance, while Narayan depicts the evolution of traditional communities, Rushdie critiques the fragility of national identity, and Lahiri explores the duality of cultural belonging. Together, these perspectives provide a holistic view of India's post-independence transformation (Chandra, 2011).

The diversity of perspectives in Indian literature underscores its ability to capture the complexities of a dynamic society. Regional authors bring authenticity and depth to local issues, while temporal shifts in themes and styles reflect the evolving realities of the nation. By comparing these perspectives, one can appreciate the multifaceted nature of Indian literature and its role in chronicling and critiquing societal change.

FINDINGS

The analysis of Indian literature from the post-independence era reveals a nuanced portrayal of societal transformation, reflecting themes of cultural identity, socio-economic disparities, political change, and the impact of globalization. These findings underscore literature's role as both a mirror and a critique of Indian society, capturing its complexities and contradictions.

1. Reflection of Socio-Economic Inequalities

One of the most prominent findings is the consistent portrayal of socio-economic inequalities in Indian literature. Authors like Mulk Raj Anand (*Untouchable*, 1935) and Aravind Adiga (*The White Tiger*, 2008) have highlighted the entrenched caste and class hierarchies that continue to shape Indian society. Anand's works depict the indignities faced by Dalits, emphasizing the persistence of caste oppression even in the face of modernity (Mukherjee, 1999). Similarly, Adiga critiques the widening economic disparity in a globalizing India, illustrating the struggle of the underprivileged to navigate a capitalist system (Chandra, 2011). These narratives reveal how societal progress has often been uneven, benefiting the elite while marginalizing the lower strata.

2. Exploration of Urbanization and Modernization

The theme of urbanization and modernization emerges as a central concern in post-independence literature. Writers such as R.K. Narayan and Anita Desai have captured the transformation of rural and small-town India into urban centers. Narayan's *The Guide* (1958) explores the juxtaposition of traditional values and modern aspirations in a rapidly changing society (Mukherjee, 1999). Desai, in works like *Voices in the City* (1965), delves into the alienation and existential crises faced by individuals in urban environments. These findings reveal how literature critiques the cultural dislocation and psychological impacts of urbanization, offering a deeper understanding of its implications for individuals and communities (Nayar, 2010).

3. National and Cultural Identity in a Post-Colonial Context

The struggle to define a national and cultural identity in the wake of colonial rule is a recurring theme in Indian literature. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) is a landmark work that intertwines personal and national histories, portraying the chaos and vibrancy of India's transformation. Rushdie uses magical realism to explore the fragmentation of cultural identity in a diverse nation (Bhabha, 1994). Similarly, Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1995) critiques the fragility of democratic institutions during the Emergency period, highlighting the tension between individual freedoms and authoritarianism (Nayar, 2010). These findings suggest that literature has been instrumental in documenting and questioning the evolving notions of nationalism and identity.

4. Amplification of Marginalized Voices

Indian literature has also been a platform for amplifying the voices of marginalized communities. Regional authors like Mahasweta Devi and U.R. Ananthamurthy have portrayed the struggles of tribal and lower-caste communities, challenging the dominant narratives of progress. Devi's works, such as *Rudali* and *Hajar Churashir Maa*, emphasize the resilience and agency of marginalized groups in the face of systemic exploitation (Deshpande, 2015). These findings highlight the critical role of literature in fostering social awareness and advocating for inclusivity.

5. The Impact of Globalization and Western Influence

Contemporary Indian literature frequently addresses the tension between preserving traditional values and adapting to globalization. Writers like Jhumpa Lahiri and Chetan Bhagat have explored the cultural and emotional conflicts faced by individuals in a globalized world. Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003) examines the challenges of cultural assimilation and identity formation in immigrant families, reflecting the dualities of the diasporic experience (Chandra, 2011). Bhagat's *One Night @ the Call Center* (2005) portrays the influence of multinational corporations on young Indians, shedding light on the shifts in work culture and personal relationships. These narratives reveal how globalization has redefined Indian society, creating opportunities and challenges that resonate across generations.

6. Stylistic Innovations and Evolving Narratives

Another key finding is the evolution of narrative styles and techniques in post-independence literature. Early works relied on realism to depict societal issues, as seen in R.K. Narayan's and Mulk Raj Anand's writings. However, contemporary authors like Rushdie and Adiga have embraced experimental forms such as magical realism and satire, reflecting the complexities of modern India (Bhabha, 1994). These stylistic innovations demonstrate literature's adaptability in addressing new challenges and perspectives.

CONCLUSION

Indian literature in the post-independence era provides a rich and diverse portrayal of societal transformation. It reflects the complexities of socio-economic disparities, cultural identity, and globalization while amplifying marginalized voices. These findings underscore literature's role as a dynamic medium that not only documents societal changes but also critiques and shapes them, offering profound insights into the evolving ethos of Indian society.

Indian literature has evolved from the realism of early post-independence works to the experimental and hybrid forms of contemporary writing. Authors like Rushdie and Adiga have embraced techniques like magical realism and satire, reflecting the complexities of a rapidly changing society. These innovations demonstrate literature's dynamism and its ability to adapt to new challenges and contexts.

In conclusion, Indian literature serves as a critical lens through which the transformation of Indian society can be analyzed and understood. It captures the aspirations, struggles, and contradictions of a nation navigating its post-colonial identity, providing a nuanced and layered understanding of its journey. By reflecting on the past and reimagining the future, literature remains an invaluable tool for understanding the complexities of Indian society and fostering dialogue on its path forward. This study underscores the enduring relevance of literary narratives in shaping and critiquing the evolving ethos of a nation.

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