

## Children and Society: Perspectives from Indian English Writers

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### ABSTRACT

Identifying the works of Indian English writing produced in this new millennium, many critics have come to see a significance attached not only to the map joining world-local as trigger but also about depictions and representations specially those children-centred more acutely because they are usually considered microcosmic indices or measure equally available for observations-social dynamics/cultural bearings. It takes on the following research questions: What representations of childhood do contemporary Indian English writers offer, and in reference to what themes or issues? Works described include "Malgudi Days," and authors analysed range from Russin Bond, R.K. Narayan to Jhumpa Lahiri aside fresh works like "The Room on the Roof," "The God of Small Things," "Village by the Sea", "Inheritance of loss", and Interpreter of Maladies". These authors use childhood as a frame to explore cultural heritage, family life, education schools and larger issues underpinning social challenges in the forms of poverty or gender. Explore how these narratives educate, provoke empathy and raise consciousness in the aforementioned Brettman article. However, the study also raises issues such as authenticity, cultural representation and merchandise that results in children's literature. The Afterword draws upon these narratives to offer reflective and evaluative insights about the significance of childhood in present-day India, point out potential areas for research.

**Keywords:** *Caribbean Poetry, Nature, Imagery, Landscape Representation, Ecocriticism.*

### Introduction

In recent Indian English writing, children perform complex functions that mirror the changing face of contemporary India. This bibliography not only allows for a detailed view on the lives, conflicts and achievements of young characters but also offers an arena in which wider societal, cultural and political matters are scrutinized. These works depict children beyond storytelling but also questions societal norms, educates them about issues like education, gender and identity while also bridging the gulf between traditional values and modern aspirations. This article examines how these narratives offer an understanding of the

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Received 24 Jan 2021; Accepted 18 Aug. 2021. Available online: 25 Aug 2021.

Published by SAFE. (Society for Academic Facilitation and Extension)

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representations about childhood in this genre, and what do they reveal or illuminate about Indian culture as regards to children. T. S. Eliot said:

“We can, if we choose to relax to that extent, indulge in the luxury of the reminiscence of childhood; but if we are at all mature or conscious, we refuse to indulge in this weakness to the point of writing or poetizing about it. We know that it is something to be buried and done with, though its corpse will come from time to time to find its way up to the surface.” (Reynolds 32)

### **Historical Context of Children in Indian Literature**

Children in literature have a cultural and literary tradition rooted deep enough to make it historical. In Indian mythology and religious narratives we find children in ancient texts. The Mahabharata and the Ramayana, two great epics of India were centred around young characters in possible their teens (below twenty) who reinforced very significant virtues for which Indian culture is known for. In the Middle Ages, children in literature appear only on occasion and usually as an adjunct to larger, adult-centered narratives. Folklore, fairy tales and oral storytelling traditions often featured children (see Children in literature) as protagonists or characters, providing moral lessons to preserve the culture. These stories travelled through the generations, making sure that our children continued to be an important part of India's story tapestry. Indian literature was heavily marked by the colonial period, when English became the dominant language of education and literary expression. Now, Indian writers began to import Western literary forms and ideas as if their children were used for the first time. We also began to see the rise of children's literature as a clearly defined genre, inspired by British writers - such as Rudyard Kipling who frequently featured Indian youngsters in his books.

Post-independence Indian writers in English began to establish a distinctive voice, and the roles of children characters started to mirror ideas shaping both nation aspirations as well as anxieties. It was an era of nationalist fervor, raising children for culture and social change -- kids served as the icons labelling family values. Novels of authors like R.K. Narayan and Ruskin Bond, on the other hand centred around Indian children as well but had their young lives at core of narratives in conjunction with general day-to-day life experiences unique to them-one that were home-grown-but detailing stories riddled by problems so gigantic that they grew up into adulthood surprisingly challenged! The depiction of children in the English writing of contemporary India grew to become far more sophisticated and detailed. They are not only writing stories about globalization, technology and multiculturalism but also trying to mold the faces of common social evils through their paintings such as poverty, education

outreach programs or even child sex in relation with gender inequality. Contemporary narratives are predicated on the historical context of children in Indian literature, and they represent the mutable nature of childhood experienced by several generations within India. Mohini Rao observes, “Post-Independence, the development of an Indian identity made it imperative that this identity be communicated in children’s literature to instil in them a sense of national pride.” (Hall)

### **Representation of Childhood in Contemporary Indian English Writing**

The representation of childhood in Indian English fiction has become a varied one and depicts the nuances that characterize contemporary Indian society. The authors discuss a variety of themes and issues, depicting childhood that is universal but also uniquely Indian. An important and consistent theme is contrasting traditional values with modern ones. Narratives of the day tend to paint a picture of children and their struggles with what you are required, verse who they truly wish to be. Especially when written as part of the storyline in which young characters grow up to a particular cultural heritage but are also considered simultaneously contemporary sets forth double experiences. Education stands as another crucial theme in the literary corpus on childhood, from India in English writing of our time. Several discussions by authors at large is done with addressing the challenges and opportunities for Indian education system. Two eye-opening tales of children and this arena are those about academic pressure/achievement, plus disparities in education. Cable and broadcast shows reflect this messaging in plots that show how vicious school can really be, on the front lines of the battle for impressionable minds.

Issues such as poverty, social injustice and child labor are closely related to representations of childhood. These harsh realities are all exposed in the stories written by Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai. They give a voice to the disenfranchised by focusing on the strength and ingenuity of their young characters as they face adversity. While hurdles abound, the dedicated young heroes prevail. But there are happy moments too: authors of these new books focus on children's resilience. While family ties are frequently stretched and reshaped over time, they remain the grounding element in most stories of youth. Clashes within homes are sensitively examined, and the gender-roles of mothers and fathers -- sons and daughters remain fluid. They often reinforce bonds of sentiment that bind and test minor links to reflect family in Indian life. Interspersed are paragraphs drawn out and brief, exploring relationships both muddling and mollifying life at a trot.

The second motif of childhood that is represented in the movie, realizing identity and self-discovery. Children are more on a voyage of self-discovery as they meet you knew people and experiences. Coming-of-age tales with young characters who dare to question social constructs, discover their inner potential and strive for some semblances of freedom are not just landmark narratives but a reminder about the times we live in India today. Also, modern Indian English writers too are incorporating global tastes in their stories. These themes run parallel to the migrations, diasporas and multiculturalism that have been transforming how childhood is pictured worldwide in an era of global crossings. Bringing this global perspective to bear, however, disentangles complex nodes of experience that blur local and international identities together. DeepthaAchar is of the view, “The transformation of the status of the child as Foucault suggests was a part of the massive epistemological shift of the Classical age. The child was now located in a series of material practices, in a set of relations and discourses which effectively constituted it as distinct from the adult.” (Nieuwenhuys) Therefore, childhood is well represented in contemporary Indian English writing as rich and diverse taking on the nature of a maturing society. Spanning the breadth of themes and issues concerning childhood, authors give to life a rich portrait that is striking in its authenticity - one which resonates with us as readers both within India as well persons abroad.

## **Themes and Issues in Children's Literature**

### **Identity and Self-Discovery**

The current times also witness the important themes of identity and self-discovery being addressed in Indian English children's fiction. Young protagonists-common in literature as young people embark on quests to find themselves, what they mean; where they are-they can be characterized by their own and within societies. His stories delve into the nuances of experiencing adolescence, seeking conformity against societal expectations and finding the courage to grow true to oneself. Issues of race, gender and expectations tied to identity are always brought up in a way that you can see traces of them or their resolution within yourself as the reader! In reading these narratives, children learn about triumph and becoming who one is meant to be. “Identity and self-exploration are recurring themes in the novels of Kiran Desai and Arundhati Roy. Through their intricate storytelling, they invite readers to contemplate the complexity of human identity and the transformative power of self-discovery.” (Singh 658)

### **Family and Relationships**

These days, family and relationships are the foundation of many stories in Indian English children's literature. It is a deep and compassionate exploration of the dynamics with families, including parent-child relationships - birth parents versus foster or adoptive ones; sibling rivalries; extended family member influence. These illustrate how they share their love, support and conflicts among themselves as family members. Through thematic units, authors depict families as navigating through problems such as divorce and loss to intergenerational differences showing but a few examples of the way that they can cope with them. These stories can help children to understand and accept the nuances in their own family relationships.

### **Education and Social Issues**

Education and social issues are popular themes in contemporary Indian English writing for children. One of the themes is a portrayal, strengths and warts-and-all version, as it were, of Indian education. It has been difficult not to hear a story that pertains to the academic stress students feel, or the all obsessing competition for success (be it in academia, junior olympics etc), and how educational opportunities differ so much depending on one's socio-economic background. They also have a social thrust, which interweaves child labour, poverty and gender injustice coupled with environmental concerns in most of their narrations. However, in dealing with these themes authors do not only create awareness but also forces young readers to consider they own place in the world sense-making so as to shape a fairer and more inclusive society. "the Indian tradition subscribes to an ideology that downgrades the role of the environment and nurture in the development of a child, and instead emphasises a deterministic conception of mystical heredity." (Sarland)

### **Cultural Heritage and Tradition**

Childhood in the conglomerate of contemporary Indian English literature and its varied portrayal has quite a bit to do with one's cultural heritage. Subcontinental authors fold Indian culture, history and folklore into their stories that breathes life to tales infamous for the richness of its cultural heritage. These narratives often explore the tension between tradition and progress but also speak to children straddling the past (old world) with their present-day counterparts. We see festivals, rituals and traditional customs being presented in a fashion that appeals to contemporary readers so they can reconnect with their roots. It is a means

through which children can grow to understand and value their heritage as they themselves are exposed to an increasingly complex world. Together, these themes and issues have evolved into a rich tradition of literature that has not only entertained but also encouraged and informed young readers. Through these narratives there is opportunity for the children to delve into their own identities, relationships with others and deal with societal issues all while learning more about their culture which aids in creating empathetic global citizens. Suruchi Kalra Choudhary states:

“Indian Writing in English continues to evolve, and contemporary writers actively incorporate Indian cultural elements, leading to new themes, adaptations, and interpretations. Contemporary Indian authors draw inspiration from Indian mythology, folklore, traditions, and social issues, infusing their works with cultural depth and resonance.” (Choudhary 5180)

### **Major Authors and Works**

**R.K. Narayan:** Much lauded for telling the simplest of stories so beautifully, most works by RKN draw from the lives of children and adolescents in Malgudi (a make-believe town). Stories of innocence, pursuit and healing that only a child could tell in the language of their dreams... timeless stories...and now all at once- relatable.

**Ruskin Bond:** Known for his beautiful portrayal of life in Indian hills, Ruskin Bond typically writes young fiction and much like this book the setting mostly remain children with their wild imaginations. His works celebrate the innocence and charm of childhood, often in unison with nature.

**Arundhati Roy:** In *The God of Small Things*, Roy provides a poignant and intricate depiction of childhood, exploring themes of innocence, trauma, and family dynamics. Her narrative delves into the lives of twins Rahel and Estha, capturing their perspectives and experiences.

**Anita Desai:** One of the prominent themes in this novelist's works is a concern for inner lives and often particularly children. Set in rural India, her novel *The Village by the Sea* powerfully illustrates the challenges and triumphs confronting a young brother and sister.

**Kiran Desai:** *The Inheritance of Loss* A young girl named Sai and her family are among the entire cast whose lives Desai characterizes with meticulous detail. Through themes of displacement, identity and the effects that global forces have on agency in personal lives, the novel unfurls.

**Jhumpa Lahiri:** While her best-known characters are part of the Indian diaspora, Lahiri frequently turns to fresher storytelling voices and explores young people grappling with cultural identity and alienation. The themes in her stories focus on family, migration, and self-discovery.

### Significant Works

***Malgudi Days* by R.K. Narayan:** A series of stories that paints an animated picture of the fictional town in which these events occur later known as Malgudi, featuring children within most physical tales. These stories encapsulate the life of a youngster living in some unknown little Indian town.

***The Room on the Roof* by Ruskin Bond:** The first novel of Bond, written when seventeen years old in nineteen fifty-six is the story about Rusty a sixteen-year-old boy and his search for freedom and identity. The book really gets the feeling of being an adolescent right.

***The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy:** This Booker Prize winning novel examines childhood with precision through the eyes of twins Rahel and Estha. We follow their journey through love, loss and trauma against a backdrop of complex family history.

***The Village by the Sea* by Anita Desai:** Hari and Lila, a young brother-sister duo fight to keep their family together in the fishing village of Dwarka. A novel about poverty, responsibility and hope.

***The Inheritance of Loss* by Kiran Desai:** This book is about the Man Booker Prize-winning story of a young girl sort Sai and various lives in at some point not so durable northeastern India. The show deals with the concepts of loss, outsider status and identity.

***Interpreter of Maladies* by Jhumpa Lahiri:** A collection of short stories that won a Pulitzer Prize, and some with young protagonists dealing with cultural identity, familial relationships and the immigrant experience.

This paper owes much to these authors and their magnum opuses in the shaping of representation of childhood by Indian English writing. They present the world what is fictionally true, paint vibrant themes and truths through their wholesome portrayals - immortalizing youth in another way adding more depth to readings across the globe.

## Impact on Readers and Society

The representation of children in contemporary Indian English writing landscape does not only impact and reframes their image, but also has social consequences. Through these stories, reflecting the various joys and trials of growing up in India across different generations - they seed empathy, awareness, creating a more nuanced perception on what it means to come-of-age for young people today. Empathy and Understanding: Contemporary Indian English literature lead readers to understand the perspectives of children from different cultures as if they are living it by themselves. This evokes empathy and compassion among readers, who understand the innocence, limitations and aspirations of children. These narratives facilitate generational connection leading to an empathetic and understanding society.

**Social Awareness and Advocacy:** Some of the other stories that are aimed at creating awareness regarding poverty, gender inequality and issues related to child labor and education have become great tools. They use both non-white characters and unfamiliar cultural practices to force children (and adults) reading the stories then or now, to question their preconceived prejudices that they hold about anyone designated Other....racism; sexism... you get my point. This will drive momentum for public investments in policies and programs that benefit children. Anshu Kaushal says:

“Narayan’s first novel *Swami and Friends* is a delightful account of a childhood embedded in a network of social relationships. It is an insightful depiction of juvenile incidents and experiences of the ten year old Swaminathan and his friends in the fictional town of Malgudi. Set in pre- independent India, the novel traces the pain and pleasure of growing up in a world full of exciting adventures, challenges, friendship, tears, fears, wonders, innocence and experience. The various childhood experiences like the fear of examination, the oppressive teaching system and the easy camaraderie of young boys described in the novel, carry a universal appeal.” (Kaushal 115)

**Cultural Preservation and Identity:** Through its depiction of Indian traditions and values, often in the context of a wider theme regarding cultural heritage and identity, contemporary Indian English writing is full-bodied. These narratives serve to sustain cultural beliefs, at the same time developing identity among young readers, as it is rendered from other community by showing kids who are growing up and, on their way, back home. Meaning that they remind us of why our cultural roots matter in an ever-globalized world.

**Educational Value:** Kids and YA books are of inestimable value for education. The schoolroom, in turn fostering narratives to which students are introduced that familiarize



them either with new concepts or reflections of their own reality. This kind of literature can contribute towards encouraging critical thinking, creativity and interest in reading as well as the starting important dialogues concerning certain issues within society also.

**Representation and Diversity:** Indian English literature catches and carries the idle "multiplicity," and nonstop variation of these somewhat redressed issues as it only contains one such display at a time even with more nuanced acknowledgment - representation, diversity. With so much diversity in representation, readers of these stories recognise themselves and more importantly can relate with the actions and thus justify them. Further, it helps readers see the perspectives of others and their issues or lives to be more tolerant which in turn broadens their horizons.

**Method for Change:** Their inner potential, agency and resiliency is a lethal tool of transformation in the context of present-day Indian English Literature. Here are some heartening examples to remind us that it is possible for young people to come face-to-face with adversity and respond by making their communities a better place. Even inciting readers to exert a catalyst of change in their own lives and communities, serving ultimately as seeds for meaningful social growth.

Modern Indian English literature highly influences readers as well society on a whole. Capturing the nuance and complexity of childhood, these stories preserve cultural identity, promote empathy transform consciousness & inspire action. They articulate how literature can mirror and change the world around it, and offer wonderful insights into what kind of society is both more compassionate and learned, as well as inclusive.

### **Challenges and Controversies**

Although it is privileged and predominating but modern Indian English literature shows some problem related to portrayal of children. These issues are from the social dynamics, puberty and writers having responsibilities to show these subjects.

**Authenticity and Stereotypes:** To ensure that the children's experiences are fairly depicted is one of the biggest worries. It is advised that authors do not use stereotypes, as they have the potential to distort or simplify - often far too much for comfort- this complex world of Indian childhood. Clichés are found in the "perfect child" or the "struggle child" and they risk becoming an obsolete account of children's complex stories.

**Balancing Tradition and Modernity:** In this context, I think that Indian society today stands at a crossroad between tradition and modernity. This is no different in their storylines, and authors struggle to balance these elements. The representation of kids caught between these two worlds can be inherently divisive - for better or worse, it might easily come off as idealising tradition on one end and glorifying modernity at the other (and this is a whole different conversation).

**Censorship & Sensitivity:** Writing about child labor, abuse and exploitation can be a controversial point because many social groups may oppose it or restrict this type of writing. Writers will need to navigate a line between shedding light on the great atrocities of violence and cultural norms that should be changed. Conservative groups often oppose books on controversial topics of such subject matter to censorship.

**Commercialization and Market Pressures:** Sometimes the imperatives of making a profit in publishing can have an effect on how children are represented in literature. Some authors might be working with a market pressuring them to follow the fad or overstate issues in order to sell more. Needless to say, that can dilute both the original and endearing stories of these tales in addition to skewing their true intentions from poignant storytelling into bottom line profiting.

**Representation and Diversity:** Theoretically simple but practically hard representation and diversity - It is advocated that a fair representation with respect to gender, caste and religion be offered in the leadership of gurukuls without interfering on merits elsewhere. These stories could be diluted by the time they are presented as if there is tokenism, and the range of characters come through in passing.

**Impact on Young Readers:** The audience is greatly impacted by children's literature, and contentious issues can be both a challenge and a source of disagreement. Writers and teachers need to think about what subjects are suitable for younger readers. Real-world concerns must be addressed, but there must be a careful balance between teaching and overstimulating young brains. Ayşegül Bayraktar says, "Children's books are perceived as educational materials where information and knowledge can be presented to them from a wide range of topics both personal and academic." (Bayraktar 342)

**Critical Reception and Literary Merit:** The value and function of children's literature are frequently discussed in the literary community in relation to the larger field of modern Indian English writing. Some critics could contend that reading too many books with children's themes takes away from the more "serious" works. The discussion at hand may have an impact on how these works are regarded and analysed in literary circles.

**Global vs. Local Narratives:** Another difficulty is balancing local authenticity with global appeal. Writers aiming to reach a global readership can have a sense of obligation to standardize their stories, which could weaken the distinct cultural background of infancy in India. On the other hand, an excessive emphasis on regional problems may restrict the stories' ability to be understood globally. Clare Bradford is of the view:

“The effects of deregulation, diversification, individualization and “informationization” identified by Huggan can readily be mapped onto recent and contemporary trends in the production of children's texts, which is inescapably implicated in the capitalist enterprise and is subject to the internationalization of trade and markets, expressed in the global reach of corporations and the development of multinational publishing companies.” (Bradford)

So, there are a variety of issues and disagreements pertaining to how children are portrayed in modern Indian English literature. To write narratives that are compelling, sensitive, and real, authors have to work through these issues. Despite these difficulties, literature's ongoing examination of childhood is nevertheless essential for promoting understanding, empathy, and societal change.

### **Conclusion**

Thus, the way that children are portrayed in modern Indian English literature exhibits a dynamic interaction between themes, difficulties, and societal influences. The writers gracefully move between a spectrum of plotlines which touch on the complications in early life related to identity, ideas of drafting internationally now and individualistic justice vs public justice. They are these nuanced conversations of social commentary, kind of subtly layered in with all the fun and hardships that come along for a young teen. But this enquiry is not without problems and disputes. They must write for that - in the sense of refashioning and caring for it- rather than flattery, or better yet: the hard stuff. And the equally incompatible needs of different audiences, and (on a significantly less tragic scale) economic constraints from within publishing. It is also crucial to explore how to strike a balance between local authenticity and global appeal - so that the stories resonate with an audience both in India and outside of it. Despite these concerns, writing about children in contemporary Indian English

is a formidable tool to use empathy towards educating varied readers and eventually catalysing social transformation. “Today, shifting from western authors such as Enid Blyton, Roald Dahl, or R.L Stine, Indian children are looking for familiar content in line with their own surroundings with Indian settings, Indian characters and locations. Publishers like National Book Trust (NBT), Children’s Book Trust (CBT) and others have been promoting such books for years and continue to do so.” (Community) They raise the level of awareness, facilitate vital discussion on various alternatives to a particular moment and issue; they possess breadth par excellence - actually dealing with what matters. In a networked world, they help shape public opinion processes in representation and inclusion and the protection of cultural heritage. The way children's literature is emerging grows interest in future research and will encourage new imagination. These stories will be crucial to comprehending and solving the complexity of childhood in modern India and elsewhere as long as writers keep elevating the voices of children and fighting for their rights.

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