



## INFLUENCE OF INDIAN CULTURAL HERITAGE ON INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH

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### Abstract

The present paper focuses on exploring the influence of Indian cultural heritage on Indian Writing in English. It delves into the ways in which Indian writers in English incorporate elements of Indian culture, such as mythology, folklore, traditions, and customs into their literary works. The paper explores the various techniques and strategies used by these writers to integrate Indian cultural elements into their narratives. It also examines the impact of this incorporation on the overall themes, storytelling techniques, and readers' reception of the works. By studying how Indian cultural heritage shapes and informs Indian Writing in English, this paper attempts to shed light on the rich tapestry of Indian literature and the cultural identity.

**Key Words:** Culture, Heritage and Folklore

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## Introduction

Indian Writing in English is a vibrant and significant literary genre that has gained prominence and recognition pan India and across the globe. It represents the diverse voices and narratives of Indian authors who choose to express themselves in the English language. One captivating aspect of this genre is the profound influence of Indian cultural heritage on the works produced by these writers. The amalgamation of Indian cultural elements, such as mythology, folklore, and traditions with the English language has given rise to a distinct and enriching literary tradition.

The purpose of this paper is to explore and analyse the influence of Indian cultural heritage on Indian Writing in English and to understand the intricate interplay between language, culture, and artistic expression. The inclusion of Indian cultural heritage in English literature not only adds depth and richness to the works but also reflects the collective identity and ethos of the Indian society.

## Historical Context of Indian Writing in English

Indian Writing in English has a rich historical context that has shaped its development and influenced its themes and styles. The impact of British colonial rule on English language education in India laid the foundation for Indian Writing in English. Early pioneers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay wrote in English during the colonial period. The genre gained momentum in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with writers like Rabindranath Tagore and Sarojini Naidu making significant contributions.

Renowned for his poetry, plays, and novels, Rabindranath Tagore is considered one of the foremost figures in Indian Writing in English. *Gitanjali* earned him the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913. Known for his humorous and satirical writings, R. K. Narayan portrayed the lives of ordinary people in his fictional town of Malgudi. His novels, including *Swami and Friends* (1935) and *The Guide* (1958), brought Indian settings and characters to a global readership. Later, Mulk Raj Anand focused on social issues, caste discrimination, and the struggles of the marginalized in his works, such as *Untouchable* (1935) and *Coolie* (1936). Arundhati Roy's debut novel *The God of Small Things* won the Booker Prize in 1997 which not only showcased her lyrical prose but deft exploration of complex social and political themes also.

As more authors embraced English as a medium of expression, they began to infuse their works with Indian cultural elements. Indian mythology,

folklore, traditions, and customs found their way into the narratives, adding depth and cultural resonance. They skilfully blended Indian cultural heritage with English language techniques, creating a unique literary fusion that resonated with readers worldwide. Understanding the historical context of Indian Writing in English provides insights into the development of the genre, the contributions of key authors, and the integration of Indian cultural elements into English literature.

## Indian Cultural Heritage: Mythology, Folklore, and Traditions

Indian cultural heritage, encompassing mythology, folklore, and traditions, holds a significant place in shaping the narratives and themes of Indian Writing in English. Indian mythology is a vast and diverse collection of ancient tales, legends, and epics, including the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Puranas. Our folklore encompasses the rich oral traditions and narratives passed down through generations, encompassing folktales, legends, and regional myths. Indian traditions encompass a wide range of cultural practices, rituals, customs, and beliefs that are deeply rooted in Indian society.

While Indian mythology is imbued with symbolism and archetypal characters that represent various virtues, vices, and human experiences. Folklore reflects the collective wisdom, moral teachings, and cultural values of different regions in India. Indian traditions provide a framework for social and religious practices, offering a deeper understanding of Indian society and its customs. Indian authors often draw upon Indian mythology, folklore, and traditions as a source of inspiration for their narratives. These cultural elements provide a rich tapestry of themes, symbols, and motifs that add depth and cultural resonance to the literary works. Indian Writing in English incorporates and reinterprets these cultural elements, giving voice to Indian experiences and perspectives on a global platform.

By incorporating Indian mythology, folklore, and traditions, Indian authors infuse their works with a unique cultural flavour and create narratives that resonate with readers. These cultural elements serve as a source of inspiration, symbolism, and cultural identity in Indian Writing in English. Exploring the significance and relevance of Indian cultural heritage provides a deeper understanding of the interplay between culture, language, and literature in this genre.

## Incorporation of Indian Cultural Elements

Indian Writing in English often incorporates Indian cultural elements to create a distinct literary landscape that bridges diverse cultures.

Interweaving Indian languages, idioms, and expressions with English text to create a linguistic hybridity. Infusing narratives with Indian mythology, folklore, and religious beliefs to add depth and cultural resonance. Incorporating Indian customs, rituals, and traditions to depict the socio-cultural fabric of Indian society. Employing vivid descriptions of landscapes, festivals, and everyday life in India to evoke a sense of place.

*Midnight's Children* (1981) by Salman Rushdie intertwines Indian history, mythology, and magical realism to create a narrative that captures the spirit of postcolonial India. *The God of Small Things* (1997) by Arundhati Roy's debut novel beautifully integrates elements of Indian cultural traditions and the English language to depict the complex lives of characters in Kerala. Through her short stories *The Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) Jhumpa Lahiri explores the immigrant experience while drawing on Indian cultural nuances and family dynamics.

Themes such as identity, diaspora, caste, gender, and social hierarchy are often explored through the lens of Indian cultural heritage. Symbols and motifs such as the lotus flower, the peacock, the *bindi*, or the saree represent Indian cultural identity and serve as powerful literary devices. The use of specific rituals, festivals, or mythological references provides deeper insights into characters, plot developments, and cultural contexts.

### Impact on Narrative and Reader Reception

The incorporation of Indian cultural elements in Indian Writing in English has a profound impact on the narrative structure, style, and reader reception. Indian cultural elements infuse the narrative structure with unique storytelling techniques, including nonlinear narratives, intertextuality, and mythic storytelling. The use of Indian cultural influences contributes to the development of richly layered characters, complex relationships, and vivid settings. Indian cultural motifs and symbols often shape the poetic and lyrical language, creating a distinctive style that reflects the cultural heritage.

Readers often engage with Indian Writing in English due to its ability to offer fresh perspectives, diverse cultural experiences, and unique storytelling approaches. The incorporation of Indian cultural elements enhances readers' understanding and appreciation of the text, as it provides insights into Indian history, traditions, and societal dynamics. Readers may connect emotionally and intellectually with characters and themes rooted in Indian culture, fostering a deeper engagement with the literature. Works that incorporate Indian cultural elements tend to

resonate more strongly with readers who are familiar with or interested in Indian culture, fostering a sense of cultural connection. The inclusion of cultural references can create a sense of authenticity, adding depth and richness to the narrative.

### Criticism and Debates

The integration of Indian cultural heritage in Indian Writing in English has generated critical reception and sparked debates surrounding various aspects of the literature. Literary critics analyse the effectiveness of incorporating Indian cultural elements in terms of thematic development, narrative coherence, and literary merit. Works that successfully integrate cultural elements are praised for their authenticity, cultural insight, and contribution to cross-cultural understanding. Some critics argue that the incorporation of cultural elements may at times overshadow other literary aspects, leading to questions of balance and storytelling quality.

Many a times debates center on the authenticity of writers' portrayals of Indian culture and the responsibility of writers to accurately represent diverse perspectives. Questions of appropriation arise when non-Indian authors engage with Indian cultural elements, raising concerns about misinterpretation or commodification of cultural heritage. Discussions revolve around the need for cultural sensitivity, respectful engagement, and the avoidance of stereotypes and clichés.

Multiple perspectives on the global reception of Indian Writing in English with cultural influences exist. Scholars and critics explore the reception and impact of Indian Writing in English with cultural influences beyond India's borders. Some argue that the infusion of Indian cultural heritage offers a distinct and valuable contribution to global literature, enriching the literary landscape. Others discuss how the global reception may be influenced by cultural familiarity, postcolonial perspectives, and the readers' willingness to engage with diverse narratives.

### Influence on Contemporary Indian Writing in English

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. They explore diverse perspectives, regional identities, and intersections of culture,

language, and modernity, reflecting the complexities of contemporary Indian society. Contemporary Indian Writing in English delves into themes such as identity, gender, globalization, migration, urbanization, and social change, examining their intersections with Indian cultural heritage. Writers adapt and reinterpret traditional stories, myths, and legends, offering fresh perspectives and engaging with contemporary readerships. They experiment with narrative structures, forms, and genres, blending traditional storytelling techniques with modern literary techniques.

The influence of Indian cultural heritage on Indian Writing in English continues to evolve, reflecting the changing socio-cultural landscape of India. The genre becomes more inclusive, embracing voices from marginalized communities and highlighting their unique experiences and cultural perspectives. Indian cultural elements serve as a bridge between traditional and contemporary narratives, enabling the exploration of universal themes while retaining a distinct Indian identity. The complex relationship between culture, literature, and the ever-changing landscape of contemporary Indian Writing in English.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the study of Indian Writing in English reveals a rich tapestry of literary works that incorporate Indian cultural elements. Through this paper, key findings and insights have emerged, shedding light on the significance and impact of Indian cultural heritage on the genre.

Firstly, it is evident that Indian Writing in English has a long and diverse history, with notable authors making significant contributions. These authors have skilfully incorporated Indian cultural elements into their works, resulting in narratives that resonate with readers and offer unique perspectives on Indian society and culture.

The incorporation of Indian cultural elements has been achieved through various techniques and strategies, such as blending languages, infusing mythology and folklore, and incorporating customs and traditions. This integration adds depth, symbolism, and authenticity to the literature, creating a distinct literary landscape.

Furthermore, the impact on narrative structure and style is significant, as Indian cultural influences shape the storytelling techniques, language, and thematic development of the works. Readers engage with and appreciate these works, as they provide insights into Indian culture, history, and societal dynamics.

However, this incorporation of Indian cultural elements has also sparked debates and criticisms.

Discussions surrounding authenticity, appropriation, and representation highlight the need for responsible and respectful engagement with cultural heritage. These debates contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in incorporating cultural elements into literature.

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