

Indian Literature in English: An Introduction

This course of lectures provides an overview of literature written in English in India. This body of work can be usefully subdivided into 'Anglo-Indian literature' on the one hand (i.e. English literature produced in India or against the background of experiences in India by British writers in the days of colonialism) and 'Indo-English literature' on the other, written in English by Indians, before and after independence. The emerging historical trajectory of colonial and postcolonial writing will then be pitted against standard accounts of English literary history.

Lecture 1: Introduction

- 1) Starting Points
- 2) Time Frames
- 3) The Status of the English Language in India
- 4) Course Overview

1) Starting Points

- the "Stilz-tradition"
- the Pune-connection
- India today (BRICS etc.)

India (Encyclopedia Britannica 2002):

- **Official name:** Bharat (Hindi); Republic of India (English).
- **Form of government:** multiparty federal republic with two legislative houses (Council of States, House of the People).
- **Chief of state:** President.
- **Head of government:** Prime Minister.
- **Capital:** New Delhi.
- **Official religion:** none.
- **Monetary unit:** 1 Indian rupee (Re, plural Rs) = 100 paise.

Statistics:

- **Birth rate** per 1,000 population (1998): 26.4 (world avg. 22.1).
- **Death rate** per 1,000 population (1998): 9.0 (world avg. 8.9).
- **Natural increase rate** per 1,000 population (1998): 17.4 (world avg. 13.2).
- **Total fertility rate** (avg. births per childbearing woman; 1999): 3.2.
- **Marital status** of male (female) population age 6 and over (1992–93): single 48.3% (37.1%); married 47.5% (55.2%); widowed 3.6% (7.2%); divorced or separated 0.6% (0.5%).
- **Life expectancy** at birth (1999): male 61.5 years; female 62.7 years.
- **Major causes of death** per 100,000 population (1987): diseases of the circulatory system 227; infectious and parasitic diseases 215; diseases of the respiratory system 108; certain conditions originating in the perinatal period 108; accidents, homicide, and other violence 102; diseases of the digestive system 48; diseases of the nervous system 43; malignant neoplasms (cancers) 41; endocrine, metabolic, and nutritional disorders 30; diseases of the blood and blood-forming organs 25; ill-defined conditions 129.

- **Population** (2000): 1,014,004,000.
- **Density** (2000): persons per sq mi 829.6, persons per sq km 320.3.
- **Urban-rural** (1999): urban 28.1%; rural 71.9%.
- **Sex distribution** (1995): male 51.66%; female 48.34%.
- **Age breakdown** (1995): under 15, 35.4%; 15–29, 27.0%; 30–44, 19.2%; 45–59, 11.2%; 60–74, 5.9%; 75 and over, 1.3%.
- **Population projection:** (2010) 1,168,000,000.
(acc. to 2011 census: 1,210,193,422)
(2020) 1,312,000,000.
- **Doubling time:** 40 years.

- **Households** (1991): Total households 151,032,898. Average household size 5.6; 1–2 persons 12.1%, 3–5 persons 44.4%, 6–8 persons 30.5%, 9 or more persons 13.0%.
- **Average number of rooms per household** 2.2; 1 room 40.5%, 2 rooms 30.6%, 3 rooms 13.8%, 4 rooms 7.1%, 5 rooms 3.2%, 6 or more rooms 3.9%, unspecified number of rooms 0.9%.
- **Average number of persons per room** 2.6.

- **Religious affiliation** (1995): Hindu 81.3%, Muslim 12.0%, of which Sunni 9.0%, Shi'i 3.0%, Christian 2.3%, of which Protestant 1.1%, Roman Catholic 1.0%, Sikh 1.9%, Buddhist 0.8%, Jain 0.4%, Zoroastrian 0.01%, Other 1.3%.

- **Major cities** 1991 (urban agglomerations 1995):
 - Greater Mumbai (Greater Bombay) 9,925,891 (15,093,000)
 - Delhi 7,206,704 (9,882,000)
 - Kolkata (Calcutta) 4,399,819 (11,673,000)
 - Chennai (Madras) 3,841,396 (5,906,000)
 - Bangalore 3,302,296 (4,749,000)
 - Hyderabad 3,145,939 (5,343,000)
 - Ahmadabad 2,954,526 (3,688,000)
 - Kanpur 1,879,420 (2,356,000)
 - Nagpur 1,624,752 (1,847,000)
 - Lucknow 1,619,115 (2,029,000)
 - Pune 1,566,651 (2,940,000)
 - New Delhi (within Delhi) 301,297.

2) Time Frames

India in World History (Sethia 1996):

- one of the oldest strands in the fabric of world civilization e.g. Buddhism, the discovery of zero and numerals ('Arabic' numerals), raw materials, market, value-added goods and services
- longevity (3500 years) and diversity: a perplexingly multicultural, multiethnic, multi-lingual, and multireligious though officially secular state
- images of India in the West ("Orientalism"): maharajas and snake charmers, the sacred cow the land of fabulous wealth vs. the land of abject poverty spirituality, metaphysical reality, mystical happenings memories of Gandhi and the Raj

Pre-Colonial History:

3300-1700	BCE	Indus Valley Civilization (Bronze Age)
1500-500	BCE	Vedic Period (Indo-Aryan culture, Bronze Age → Iron Age)
321-185	BCE	Maurya Empire (united subcontinent) fragmentation
...		
4th to 6th C	CE	the “Golden Age of India” with a united northern part of the continent (Gupta Empire) and a flowering south
7th to 13th C	CE	the “classical age”
8th C	CE	arrival of Islam
1206-1526	CE	Delhi Sultanate in the North
1526-1858	CE	Mughal Empire in the North plus independent kingdoms in the West and South

Colonial History/Modern History:

- 1498 Vasco da Gama discovers sea route to India
→ arrival of the Portuguese (Goa, Daman, Diu, Bombay) as well as the Dutch (Travancore), the French (Pondicherry, Chandernagore) and the British
- from 1617 increasing influence of East India Company
- 1757 Battle of Plassey, Robert Clive Governor of Bengal Battle of Buxar, Company acquires civil rights of administration in Bengal
→ beginning of the formal rule of the East India Company in India, gaining control over most of the Indian subcontinent by the 1850s
- 1857 First War of Indian Independence (‘Indian Mutiny’)
- 1858 British Rule
- 1947 Independence/Partition

3) The Status of English in India

Linguistic composition (1991):

Hindi 27.58% (including associated languages and dialects, 39.85%); Bengali 8.22%; Telugu 7.80%; Marathi 7.38%; Tamil 6.26%; Urdu 5.13%; Gujarati 4.81%; Kannada 3.87%; Malayalam 3.59%; Oriya 3.32%; Punjabi 2.76%; Assamese 1.55%; Bhili/Bhilodi 0.66%; Santhali 0.62%; Kashmiri 0.47%; Gondi 0.25%; Sindhi 0.25%; Nepali 0.25%; Konkani 0.21%; Tulu 0.18%; Kurukh 0.17%; Manipuri 0.15%; Bodo 0.14%; Khandeshi 0.12%; other 3.26% (415 languages in all)

Literacy rate: 44% (1981) → 61,6 % (2005).

Hindi (66.00%) and English (19.00%) are also spoken as lingua francas (second languages/national languages).

English and Urdu without a regional base (naturalised sub-continental languages resulting from British Empire and earlier Muslim conquerors)

Native speakers (L1) of English (decreasing): 178.000 but: L2 English: 8%, L3 English 3,5% < 100 million speakers (second largest anglophone population after U.S.A.)

“One man’s ghetto of privilege is another’s road to freedom.”
(Rushdie/West 1997, x)

Indian Literature in English Today (1)

[T]he prose writing – both fiction and non-fiction – created in this period [1947-1997] by Indian writers working in English, is proving to be a stronger and more important body of work than most of what has been produced in the 16 ‘official languages’ of India, the so-called ‘vernacular languages’, during the same time; and, indeed, this new, and still burgeoning, ‘Indo-Anglian’ literature represents perhaps the most valuable contribution India has yet made to the world of books.

(Rushdie/West 1997, viii)

Indian Literature in English Today (2)

We are, apparently, in the midst of some sort of resurgence in Indian writing (in English) [...] The continuing marketability of India should come as no surprise [...] The first global superstar or celebrity in literature was not an Englishman or an American, but an Indian, Rabindranath Tagore [...] The only way India enters history is, evidently, via colonialism [...] Most unsettling of all for the Western reader [...] is perhaps not the oft-cited problem of untranslatability, but the problematic questions raised by concordance and kinship; the unsettling fact that native colonial and post-colonial literatures in India are not 'different', but that they, in many ways, share many of Western culture's own concerns and problems, and that the differences from Western culture are subtle and challenging rather than obvious; that there is a shared history and even narrative idiom in common, the idiom of modernity.

(Amit Chaudhuri, "Modernity and the Vernacular", TLS 1997,
repr. in Chaudhuri 2004, xvii-xxii)

Beginnings of Indian Literature in English (1)

Die Geschichte der englischen Literatur Indiens beginnt in bisherigen Darstellungen nicht vor 1800. Das Gründungsdatum der Ostindischen Handelsgesellschaft (1600), das den Beginn des britischen Engagements in Südasien markiert, kann ebensowenig als literaturgeschichtlicher Ansatzpunkt dienen wie die Kanonade von Plassey (1757), durch die Robert Clive die britische Vorherrschaft in Bengalen sicherte. Zwar spielte Indien schon während dieser Zeit eine beachtenswerte Rolle in der englischen Literatur als exotischer Topos, in dem sich das Phantastische mit der Wirklichkeit und das Märchen mit dem Alltag verband. Doch in der Kolonie selbst konnte eine englische Literatur erst entstehen, als sich dort im frühen 19. Jahrhundert eine englischsprechende Gesellschaft etablierte, deren Selbstverständnis und Unterhaltungsgewohnheiten vom orientalisierten Habitus der frühen Nabobs deutlich abwich.

(Stilz 1981, 9)

Beginnings of Indian Literature in English (2)

This volume, which covers almost two hundred years of the literature written largely by Indians in English, has for its starting point the year 1800. The date has no literary significance but is chosen for its rough and ready usefulness: by 1800 there was no real challenge left to the British domination of India from either the other European powers in the region [...] nor, except for the Marathas, from the native states. British domination eventually covered all aspects of Indian life – political, economic, social, cultural. The introduction of English into the complex, hierarchical language system of India has proved the most enduring aspect of this domination.

(Mehrotra 2003, 1)

4) Course Overview

Part 1: Introduction

17th April	Lecture 1	Introduction
24th April	Lecture 2	Anglo-Indian Literature and Anglophone World Literature
[1 st May		Labour Day]

Part 2: Before Independence

8th May	Lecture 3	Indo-English Literature: Genres and Conditions
15th May	Lecture 4	The Emergence of Indian Poetry in English
22nd May	Lecture 5	The Emergence of Indian Fiction in English
[29 th May		Ascension Day]

Part 3: After Independence

5th June	Lecture 6	Indian Poetry in English
[12 th June		Whitsun Holidays]
[19 th June		Corpus Christi]
26th June	Lecture 7	Indian Fiction in English: Before and After Rushdie
3 rd July	Lecture 8	Visions of Urbanity
10 th July	Lecture 9	Globalising India
17 th July	Written Exam	

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