



Exploring Indianness through Code-Switching in the Works of Indian Writers

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Abstract

English literature has evolved into a unique body of work that portrays the culture, thought and spirituality of India, while using English as the medium of instruction. This paper focuses on the portrayal of Indian spirituality in English writing and examines how the essence of “Indianness” is expressed in terms of style and content.

This search is exemplified by the famous works of Indian writers such as R.K. Narayan, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy and Jhumpa Lahiri, among others. These writers use English not only as a medium of communication but also as a means of expressing Indian knowledge, thoughts and worldviews. Their works demonstrate that Indian thought, traditions, spirituality and social culture is conveyed in a language historically associated with political authority.

This examination of code-switching words portrayed in English writing and how Indianness and code-switching is expressed both stylistically and conceptually. The works of well-known Indian writers like R.K. Narayan, as well as Jhumpa Lahiri, are examined in this paper to illustrate this search for identity. These authors represent Indian knowledge, ideas, and worldviews in English, in addition to using it as a communication tool. Their research shows how Indian social culture, customs, spirituality and thought are expressed in a language that has always been connected to political power.

In summary, this analysis demonstrates how Indian literature written in English captures the spirit of India while embodying a fusion of civilisations, including literary culture from around the world.

Key words: Indianness, spirituality, communication, culture, code switching, and identity.

Introduction

Before independence, English was an important part of Indian education, functioning as the principal medium of instruction in many schools and colleges, particularly for higher study and administrative functions. Gurrey observed, "All languages are used for communication."

A person's mental, emotional and social growth is greatly influenced by their language skills. Over the past 200 years, the English language has had the biggest impact on India's political, social, economic, intellectual and cultural landscape. It continues to be a potent tool for social change today. One of the most widely used foreign languages worldwide is English. It makes the vast literature of the world easily accessible. English was first brought to India two centuries ago for trade and business by the East India Company. Subsequently, the reformers themselves were unaware of the profound ways in which the language would change. A class of people "Indian in blood and colour but English in tastes, in opinion, in morals and intellect" was to be produced by English education, according to Lord Macaulay's famous 1835 minute. English, being the language of administration and justice, contributed to the development of the art of governing. Democratic discourse and discussion. Many Indians were encouraged to develop their creative talents by its rich literary heritage, and as a result, many well-known English writers exist today. Indian vernacular and English were accorded equal status by Wood's dispatch of 1854, sometimes referred to as the Magna Carta of Indian education.

Indian writers, especially those who write in English, frequently traverse many languages and cultural contexts. Because of this, their works usually include code switching, which is the transition between English and other vernacular languages like Bengali, Tamil, Hindi, and others. This phenomenon reflects the

Indian mindset and is not just a linguistic quirk. It also serves as a hallmark of cultural hybridity.

Concerning the other Indian languages, is it true that English has also been mixed with them to create hybrids like Punglish (English and Punjabi), Kanglish (English and Kannada), Bonglish (English and Bengali), and Tanglish (English and Tamil), among others? Considering how similar these are all to the phenomenon called Hinglish, perhaps a more appropriate word for these languages would be "Inglish"

Indianness

A term that is both flexible and multidimensional, "Indianness" is influenced by the nation's colonial heritage, language variety, religious diversity, and geographical differences. It is a dynamic construct that is difficult to define in isolation. In literary works, the term "Indianness" designates the genuine portrayal of the Indian experience, which is frequently marked by subtle cultural, social, and historical details. Since this is one of the most important indicators of cultural identity, writers interact with it in a variety of ways, especially through language. Indian writers present a complex picture of their composite identities, where tradition and modernity coexist and the local and the global are blended—by fusing English with regional tongues.

Instead of being a single, static idea, "Indianness" is a multifaceted, intricate identity that is created by combining linguistic, cultural, religious and historical factors. The English language has been a powerful tool for government, education, and literature in India since the British Empire's colonial era. But this ancestry also produced a conflict between English and regional tongues, which Indian writers frequently depict in their use of code-switching.

English-language works of Indian literature frequently struggle to maintain their Indian heritage while writing in a colonial

language. Authors are able to regain control over their stories by utilizing regional dialects, idioms and cultural allusions in English literature as a reaction to English's monopoly. In this sense, code-switching becomes a statement of cultural authenticity and a representation of India's multilingual reality.

English falls short of completely capturing the Indian experience, as seen by the literary practice of Indian writers alternating between English and regional tongues. By using an Indian language instead of English, the author can maintain the cultural depth of the story while capturing certain ideas, feelings, or customs that may not have clear English equivalents. Additionally, this act compels readers to interact with the language and cultural quirks of India, especially those who are not Indian readers.

Code-switching

In the Indian setting, authors purposefully use code-switching as a narrative device to emphasize cultural specificity rather than just doing so for linguistic ease. Through the use of Indian languages in English literature, authors highlight how inadequate English is for accurately capturing the Indian experience. By challenging English's dominance—a language linked to colonial authority—this method reclaims English as a medium that takes into account regional vernaculars and cultural quirks.

Code-switching is common in dialogue, monologues, and even narrative descriptions in Indian literature. The social reality of multilingualism in India, where people regularly switch between languages in daily life, is better captured by this linguistic interaction. The use of regional slang, proverbs, and colloquial phrases gives the characters and locations additional realism and increases the story's appeal to Indian readers.

We might look at certain instances from Indian writers' works to comprehend how they

employ code-switching to portray Indianness and the theories of other writers.

Literary Review

In the multilingual societies like India, Code-switching, the practice of alternating between two or more languages or dialects within a conversation or written text, has been extensively. The researchers have explored its role not only as a linguistic phenomenon but also as a tool for identity formation, social negotiation, and power dynamics. According to Poplack (1980), code-switching occurs when bilingual speakers alternate between languages based on linguistic or social cues, serving as a bridge between cultural and linguistic identities. Myers-Scotton (1993) argues that code-switching is often a strategic choice, where speakers use it to assert social status, negotiate power, or align with specific groups. In literary contexts, authors such as Ch'ien (2004) have examined how code-switching in literature functions as a narrative device to reflect cultural hybridity and linguistic diversity, particularly in postcolonial texts where language becomes a marker of resistance or adaptation. Moreover, Bhatt (2008) explores the relationship between code-switching and globalization, suggesting that it allows for the expression of a cosmopolitan identity in a transnational world, reflecting the dynamic interaction between local and global linguistic influences.

Colonial Authors Prior to 1947

Colonial authors in India, prior to 1947, began employing English as a literary medium, despite it being the language of their colonizers. They sought to express Indian identities and perspectives through this foreign tongue, often merging it with local languages like Hindi, Urdu, and Bengali to capture the nuances of their cultural experience. This practice of code-switching became a subtle form of resistance against colonial dominance. By blending English with indigenous languages, these writers highlighted India's linguistic diversity and showcased the rich cultural heritage that

persisted despite British rule. This linguistic fusion also allowed them to assert their own voices within a colonial framework, challenging the notion that English could only serve colonial interests. Writers like Raja Rao, Rabindranath Tagore, and others used English strategically to communicate Indian philosophies, values, and experiences to a broader audience, while still maintaining ties to their native languages, symbolizing a quiet defiance of cultural subjugation.

Untouchable by Mulk Raj Anand (1935)

Mulk Raj Anand frequently flips between Hindi and English in *Untouchable* to portray the lives of India's underprivileged populations. Anand gives the story cultural and social realism by including Hindi language and caste-based jargon, highlighting the sufferings of the Dalits (previously known as untouchables). In this case, code-switching preserves the depth of the Indian vernacular experience while assisting readers from outside India in understanding the harsh societal realities.

In order to provide cultural and social depth, Mulk Raj Anand frequently switches between English and Indian vocabulary in his book *Untouchable*. The locale and the daily circumstances of the characters are reflected in the usage of Indian words, phrases and terminology. Several of the often-used code-switching terms in *Untouchable* are derived from Indian languages, mainly Hindi and Punjabi, and they help to ground the book in its distinct sociocultural setting.

Reversing Word Codes in *Untouchable*

In Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, Bakha is a jamadar, or sanitation worker, which places him in a marginalized position in society. He often deals with jutha (leftover food), reinforcing the stigma of his caste. His lota (water container) is essential for his daily needs. The tonga (horse-drawn carriage) reminds him of a past era, while he observes the pukka

(respectable) behavior of higher-caste individuals, like the powerful babu clerks.

Characters around him include the dhobi (washerman), who cleans clothes, and the pandit (priest), who offers spiritual guidance. These roles contrast sharply with Bakha's identity as part of the Chamar caste. Thakur landlords exert control, and the term sahib shows the colonial respect given to Europeans. Meanwhile, coolies (manual laborers) work tirelessly, and the hakim (traditional healer) provides care.

Bakha's life is full of cultural elements like puja (worship), karma (actions), and dharnas (protests), showing the complexity of his social interactions. He wears a simple langoti (loincloth) and is surrounded by the smell of garam masala (spices). Figures like the patel (village head), zamindar (landowner), and chowkidar (watchman) highlight the social hierarchy. Bakha's everyday life involves items like topi (cap), roti (bread), and ghee (clarified butter), grounding him in reality. The spiritual presence of Bhagawan (God) and the significance of dupattas (scarves) and lathis (sticks) shape his life within the framework of varnashrama dharma (social order).

Post colonial Indian writers

Postcolonial writers, particularly those who emerged after 1947, are often classified as post-independence or post-1947 literary figures, as their work reflects the transformative period following the end of colonial rule. These authors delve into themes such as identity, cultural hybridity, displacement, and the long-lasting effects of colonialism on both individuals and societies. Their writing is characterized by an exploration of the tensions between tradition and modernity, and the search for a sense of belonging in a world still shaped by colonial legacies. Additionally, these writers address issues of nationalism, resistance, and the reclaiming of native languages, while critiquing the socio-political structures left behind by imperial powers. Figures like Salman Rushdie,

Chinua Achebe, and Arundhati Roy, among others, use their narratives to provide a voice to the previously marginalized, highlighting the complexities of life in postcolonial nations. Their works serve as a means of asserting agency, resisting cultural erasure, and engaging with the global discourse on power and domination.

Code-switching was one of the ways Indian writers dealt with the colonial legacy of the English language after India attained independence in 1947 and to represent the hybridity of their identities. Despite frequently using English as their primary language, these writers incorporated regional languages into their works to affirm their cultural uniqueness and oppose linguistic uniformity.

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981)

One of the most well-known instances of code-switching in postcolonial fiction is perhaps the work of Salman Rushdie *Midnight's Children*. Hindi, Urdu and English are mixed together by Rushdie to depict the multilingual reality of post-independence India. The linguistic diversity of India is reflected in his use of idioms, slang and colloquialisms in his speech. Despite being written in English, Rushdie's narrative has a particularly Indian voice thanks to this combination. The novel's structure serves as a metaphor for how Indian identity was broken apart after Partition, and the linguistic shifts emphasize how divided the country felt.

Midnight's Children by Salman Rushdie is well-known for its extensive use of language, notably the combination of English words and idioms from Indian languages. Rushdie employs a literary technique known as code-switching to illustrate postcolonial India's cultural hybridity and linguistic complexity. Some significant examples of code-switching in the novel include terminology from Hindi, Urdu and other Indian languages.

In *Midnight's Children*, Salman Rushdie brings Indian life to vivid color through a clever

mix of Hindi and Urdu words. Terms like "baba" (father) and "jaan" (life) add cultural depth. Characters such as the "angrez" (Englishman) and "firangi" (foreigner) showcase colonial complexities. Rushdie's use of everyday words like "chapati" (flatbread) and "chai" (tea) alongside expressions like "sharam" (shame) makes the story rich and immersive.

Modern Indian Writers

In contemporary Indian literature, code-switching serves as a powerful narrative tool, enriching the text by capturing the multifaceted nature of identity and belonging in India's diverse cultural landscape. It brings authenticity to the story, making it more relatable while reflecting the nation's linguistic and cultural intermingling. Modern Indian authors continue to employ code-switching to emphasize the evolving complexities of identity in an increasingly globalized world. By doing so, they highlight the shifting boundaries of language, class, and self-perception, using it not only to navigate cultural intersections but also as a subtle form of resistance against homogenization. This practice mirrors the fluid and dynamic reality of modern India, where various languages, dialects, and traditions constantly interact and shape the everyday lives of its people, reinforcing the notion that identity in India is ever-changing and layered.

Chetan Bhagat's - *Half Girlfriend* (2014)

The socioeconomic gap between rural and urban India is highlighted through code-switching in Chetan Bhagat's *Half Girlfriend*. When expressing his innermost thoughts or feeling exposed, the main character, Madhav, frequently uses Hindi instead of English due to his difficulties with the language. In India, where speaking English well is frequently regarded as a sign of education and success, Bhagat believes that code-switching reflects the difficulties encountered by those from non-English speaking families. The struggles that millions of Indians confront as they try to balance their cultural beliefs with the demands

of globalization are reflected in the use of both languages.

Chetan Bhagat's *Half Girlfriend* also includes code-switching, which reflects the English-Hindi blend that is widespread in modern Indian conversation. Here are some examples of words and phrases from the novel that show code-switching. Indian writers have employed code-switching as a technique to convey the diversity of Indian identity from the colonial era to the present.

In Hindi culture, everyday language includes terms like "kitna" meaning "how much" and "naukri" which means "job". These words reflect common conversations and societal values. Family is very important, shown through affectionate terms like "maa" for mother and "papa" for father.

Social interactions often feature phrases like "bindaas", meaning "carefree", and "mujhe", which translates to "to me". Questions frequently start with "kya", meaning "what", and people commonly use "ladki" for girl and "ladka" for boy. Expressions like "bakwas", meaning "nonsense", and "pyar", meaning "love", add emotional depth to the language. Words like "dil" (heart), "tujhe" (you) and "saath" (together) enhance the sense of connection among people. Phrases like "chal" (let us go) make communication lively, especially during social events or when enjoying a "samosa" (a popular snack). Respectful terms like "bhaisaab" and casual words like "kaminey" show the rich nuances of Hindi, making it a vibrant and expressive language.

Chetan Bhagat's writing is well-known for capturing the informal, everyday speech patterns of modern India, where English and Hindi frequently mingle smoothly, especially in urban areas. These words serve to ground the story in.

Conclusion

Indian writers have used code-switching to explore the interaction between

English and native languages. Pioneers like Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand first employed this technique to address the complexities of using a colonial language. Postcolonial writers such as Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, Amitav Ghosh and Chetan Bhagat have continued this legacy.

Codeswitching helps illustrate the diverse facets of Indian identity from colonial times to today. It allows writers to show the blend of languages and cultures in India. By switching between languages, writers can express cultural resistance, highlight social differences and show the challenges people face when balancing multiple languages in their daily lives. This technique adds depth to their stories, making the characters and their experiences feel more real and relatable.

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