CHAPTER 1

The Notion of Indianness and Its Contexts in Contemporary Indian Writing in English

Indianness is one of the important notions for discussing the relevance of the various ideas and concepts made available in India since antiquity. In the present context of globalization a diasporic Indian author who is metaphorically ‘homeless’, also comes to signify ‘several homes’. Perhaps this is the only way he has increasingly felt at home in the world.1 In such a case, the notion of Indianness is made culturally very complex. Subsequently, there can be seen among the authors an urge to adopt various narrative strategies to write novels, one method being the use of Indianness as a representational mode.2 An analysis of Indian history, culture and literature, thus provides an interesting ground to study how the notion of Indianness has emerged as part of the representational politics and the anxiety over the articulation of identities. It is obvious that the authors of CIWE often embrace two different Indias. Firstly, ‘being Indian’ produces a sense of ‘unity’ or ‘homogeneity’ in various locations where they currently reside. Secondly, ‘being Indian’ also means belonging to any one of the twenty eight Indian states whose topography, history, language and culture drastically differ from each-other producing an ever-increasing sense of ‘heterogeneity’ within India itself. Thus, the assertion of Indianness becomes a very difficult issue to be tackled with much caution.

Although the contexts for discussing Indianness differ from author to author, what is so common among them is the awareness of the ‘constructed’ nature of ideas. Romila Thapar makes an inclusive historical survey of the ‘constructedness’ of the term India. She writes that—“historical interpretation can therefore become a two way process where, the needs of the present are read into the past, and where the image of the past is sought to be imposed upon the present” (1). Subsequently, she identifies three different ways that might have
affected the construction of the idea of India—the discovery done by British Orientalists, the records kept by the Indians themselves in various phases of its history, and the records of the travelers coming to India from the outside world. But more than anything else, the history of India is one of cultural proliferation and exchange. Thus, one construction of Indianness can easily be seen in the Vedic literatures which implicitly refer to the supremacy of an Aryan race over the non-Aryan.

According to Irfan Habib, India was not naturally a country from 'times immemorial' and that its cultural and social developments helped in its own evolution. Habib refers to Al Biruni, the Khwarizmian scientist and traveler to India, and to his experience of the new wave of cultural diffusion resulting out of the clash between the Hindus and the Muslims on the issue of cultural superiority. As the only dominant literary realm, Sanskrit literature became rich in allusions to different geographical terrain of India. But Al Biruni found himself commenting unfavorably about India in his book by the same name *India*. He said: "The Hindus believe that there is no country like theirs, no nation like theirs, no kings like theirs, no religion like theirs, and no science like theirs" but "their ancestors were not as narrow-minded as the present generation" (qtd. in Habib). Consequently, as Habib says, the present day tendency to derive Indian heritage from 'Hindu' civilization, bereft of extraneous elements, thus accords, with only one phase of insularity in the development of ancient Indian culture, in which the rejection of the external world was by no means shared by some of its great minds. But, contrary to such a view, the expansion of the Muslim rulers in India or the rise of Sultanate, in the subsequent periods, established a new compromise between the court and the local aristocrats giving birth to a new enrichment to the concept of India (Habib 6).

In some circles however, the regeneration of the idea of India was sought to be projected through the restoration of Indian cultural history in terms of the idea of Hinduism that developed with the Vedic culture. It is in this context that
Max Muller's study of the Vedic literatures of ancient India indirectly helped in the regeneration of Indian cultural history from its stagnation. He said very poignantly: "If I were to look over the whole world to find out the country most richly endowed with all the wealth, power and beauty that nature can bestow—in some ways the very paradise on earth—I should point to India" (5). With the publication of the *Rig Vedas*, Muller became one of the leading exponents of Indian thought, religion and literature because the revival of Vedic studies after the publication of his volumes of *Rig Veda* proved to be a major boon in the regeneration of Hindu culture of India. In his words:

> India has never had full justice done to it, and when I say this I think not only of ancient, but of modern India also. And though it can easily be seen that my chief interest lies with ancient India, it should be remembered that in no other country is the past still so visibly present...the religion of the Veda is by no means entirely extinct...I can truly say that there is behind that warm and almost Italian colour of the Aryans of India, the same warm heart, the same trust, and the same love as under the white skin of Europeans. (qtd. in Mukerjee 4)

In this context, the crucial point to be made is whether the authors of CIWE are aware of the historically and culturally rich traditions of India. While studying the notion of Indianness in Indian English writings, we must first acknowledge the fact that the historical idea of India has undergone a drastic change in the recent years through various 'constructions' and 'reconstructions'.

R. S. Sharma in the essay "The Question of Indianness" addressed certain issues some of which can be summarized like these—Is Indianness a criterion, a practice, a guarantee or an aesthetic measurement? Can we believe that fiction must directly or indirectly deal with a specific reality, which is different for each socio-cultural group? (Sharma, *Indian Writing in English* 205). Is it really possible to assign of Indianness to the expatriate authors of CIWE at all? Such queries help in considering how the authors of CIWE have come to occupy a significant position between cultures and countries; how their writings have generated theories and helped in defining stands to negotiate their dislocations.
However, the discussion of ‘India’ as an idea, and ‘Indianness’ as a representational mode also invite a debate on how such ideas have worked in the large gamut of CIWE which today refers to a body of work written by Indian authors who mostly write in the English language but whose mother tongue is usually one of the many existing languages of India. As a major genre of literature, and often associated with the works of a number of novelists from both generations of the Indian diaspora, this body of writing is sometimes used synonymously with post-colonial Indian literature. Besides, CIWE ranges across a number of disciplines and practices different from its early form as Indian English Writings engaged mainly with certain specific considerations. Such writing also expresses “its mastery over the English language, a commitment with matters ‘Indian’ and an intellectual power of very high order” (Chattarji and Chakravarty xiii).

Discussing the role played by representational politics in the writing of Indian English Fiction, Peter Morey writes:

The Story of English Language Fiction on India is also the story of a struggle around representational politics: British writers seek to represent the Indian; colonized Indian writers strive for a space in fiction to represent themselves; and post colonial Indian authors offer to articulate identities for Indianness which avoids ethnically specific state-sponsored versions. (Morey 2)

But, the way the terms ‘India’ and ‘Indian’ are used in CIWE is also connected with the political consolidation of diverse groups of people into a particular idea of Indian nation following the end of the British rule. Subsequently, the condition of ‘being Indian’ has been seen in terms of the political definitions at different levels. But Aijaz Ahmad argues that there has never been any need in India for arousing among its inhabitants a cultural consciousness, as the people of all strata have strong cultural moorings. Thus, talking about nationalism in India has always ended up in re-discovering the essential elements of this cultural background of the Indians. Ahmad also opined that the principle of unity in India
was 'civilizational' and 'historical' for many centuries before it could be encapsulated in the national form which is nothing but some 'constructs' (254-255). But the irony is that although initially, the idea of a homogeneous Indian nation seemed to have worked, the various ethno-religious or linguistic communities or political movements across the spectrum, have refused to subscribe to this view of an Indian nation (Chattarji and Chakravarty xiv). Moreover, the development and expansion of Indian English novels in the last two decades of the twentieth century is to be seen as an outcome of the economic liberalization\(^\text{10}\) that has enabled a new marketability of the English writings by an Indian, along with altering in some essential ways, the desires, tastes, cultures, and the ethnologies of everyday life.

Since the time of its emergence as a distinct genre of literature, two questions on the nature of CIWE have led to lot of speculations on the nature of CIWE—a. Which audience does an author write for? b. Is he/she exoticising India for a Western audience? Both the questions however are integrally related to the nature of Indian Writing in English\(^\text{11}\). These questions are also related to the representational politics as well as the intellectual compulsions that go into the very act of writing by an Indian English author. However, the issue of readership was another preoccupation for the author choosing to write in English\(^\text{12}\). Thus, an inquiry into how the notion of Indianness has evolved out of its discussion in different contexts necessarily draws attention to the fictional strategies adopted by the Indian English authors. These strategies mostly include the narrative forms, motives and images by which they tend to make the readers realize that what they offer is just a 're-presentation' of India, not the essence of India, and that the tradition, to which they belong as writers, also provides the means for such representation\(^\text{13}\).

So, any discussion of Indianness in the contexts of CIWE should focus on how one would like to narrate one's experience about India. The blend of fiction and history will give birth of a hybrid text. Many observations have gone into the
matter of describing such hybridity. For example, Firoza Jussawalla writes: "India, divided by many languages and many religious subtexts, readily gives meaning to the concept of hybridity. The vast number of cultures that give India its diversity blend together to give India its unity and oneness" (Jussawalla, Hybridity and Postcolonialism 200). In the context of a 'hybrid' Indian text, Mukesh Shrivastava mentions that Nehru’s Discovery of India, is an excellent example of the hybrid text that mixes fiction and history to forge the story of India for a nationalist design. He writes:

In Nehru’s recounting of this long succession of events – beginning from the Indus Valley civilization, moving forward to the period of great epics the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, through the great classical period of the Guptas and Mauryas, and the ‘dark age’ of the medieval Mughals down the modern period of Tagore, Vivekananda and Gandhi—historical time itself becomes episodic. Every civilization, the argument runs, has its periods of growths and decay. After a long period of magnificent growth, the old springs of vitality and innovation of the Indian civilization gradually dried up and it was at this particular historical conjecture that the clash occurred between the West and East, resulting in the domination of the West over the East. (Shrivastava 136)

Nehru’s The Discovery of India is to be discussed in the way of constructing the ‘present’ which establishes the link between the readers’ present with a common historical past. Therefore, hybridity is not a new condition of the postmodern era and is most definitely not a result of British Postcolonialism. Thus, hybridity itself is the Indianness that is being discussed. Yet, fifty years after independence, ethnic identities are pulling India apart in their effort to recover their authenticities (Jussawalla, Hybridity and Postcolonialism 200).

Deiter Riemenschneider too takes India’s literary tradition as a ‘hybrid phenomenon’ and tries to explore the basis of the fictitious prose narrative, implicitly or explicitly related to or rooted in two drastically different cultural locations—Indian and Western (Riemenschneider 1). As a response to such views Meenakshi Mukherjee takes the novel as an artistic execution of an individual’s
groping toward self-realization and also states that novels must be “rooted in the concept of history, the concept that man is shaped by the changing forces around him.” She also states that the Indian authors’ lack of a composite tradition and attempts at setting up one’s own roots in a distinct national experience, or the use of English to address the heterogeneous audience, makes her to assess the literary achievements of some novelists by exploring how Indianness has been represented and treated technically. She also states that the critical investigations between 1930-1964 were mostly preoccupied with the general problems of Indo-English writings instead of any discussion of individual books and authors.\textsuperscript{14}

In the field of CIWE, the problems of identity and articulation have produced an ambivalence which undercut more complicated issues of socio-cultural identifications. Following this, the authors of CIWE have tried to prove that ‘being Indian’ also absorbs identities ranging from generic Indianness to indigenous folk culture, social need and self-examination. They have tried to understand the socio-cultural systems in India and are also putting their own ideas of unifying these systems. Thus, the notion of Indianness is the end-product of the knowledge that might have evolved out of such an encounter between the self and the systems they are trying to represent.\textsuperscript{15} It is almost apparent that the Indian critical and intellectual discourses are intimately related to the common political discourse on nation, national identity and articulation that characterize both the periods of pre-independence and post-independence India. This can be viewed along with T. D. Brunton’s argument that “India had many of the cultural conditions favourable to the novel before she came into contact with Europe. But now she has social forces actively favourable to the production of fiction: a large audience, an educated class, a new questioning of age old socio-religious dogma, and a consuming urge for knowledge and interpretation of society” (Brunton, \textit{Critical Essays} 214).
V. S. Naipaul too said something very significant regarding the birth pangs of a novel to be written by an Indian author. Telling about his own predicament, he stated:

For every kind of experience, there is a proper form and I do not see what kind of novel I could have written about India...I am not sure whether the novel (about India) can offer more than the externals of things. The Japanese imported the novel form and added it to their own rich literary and historical tradition; there was no mismatch. But where, as in India, the past has been torn away, the history is unknown or unknowable, or denied, I don't know whether the borrowed form of the novel can deliver more than a partial truth, a dim lighted window in a general darkness. (24-25)

Such views are typical of any critic on IWE. But such debates, as already discussed, should not forget that novel writing in India is embedded in the process of ‘an emerging national consciousness’ in India, and at the same time, it also manifests a hybrid consciousness of the intellectual elite of the country which further leads to the fact that these authors are ‘certainly not typical of the Indian population’ but represent a particular social segment. Thus, as T. D. Brunton opines, their works are to be approached by keeping their specific social-political context in mind16 (qtd. in Remenschneider 9). However, the most debatable issue in Indian English fictions of recent times has been the precondition that there is an ‘India’ to be defined, located and interpreted. For this we need to refer back to India’s rich cultural history as the renewed interest in locating and establishing Indianness became a momentous effort among the Indian critics and authors writing in English.17

While examining the notion of Indianness in CIWE, the synthesis between India’s past and present must be studied meticulously. Historical survey informs that IWE, since its inception, has gone through a process of socio-historical cross-fertilization and following the decolonization this cross-fertilization had become very enriching. So, the examination of the English language to narrate Indian experience and how it has synthesized the East and the West from which Indian
Writing in English had actually emerged, help in discussing Indianness in the present context. Such realization also ensures an understanding of Europe’s scholarly quest for Asian civilizations as a tool for consolidation of power and imperial control which indirectly helped in ‘othering’ the East from a fundamentally different and necessarily superior West (Ray Choudhury x-xii). Then, the kind of response that had evolved out of such processes reflected the problematics involved in concept-formation. Consequently, the roots of Indianness could be located in the ways Indian intellectuals perceived Orientalism\(^{18}\) which helped them to delve deeper into their own Indian heritage. Although Orientalism in some way became instrumental in the ‘discovery of India’, the silent and continuous flow of pan-Indian cultural elements had the power even to dismiss all the claims on the ‘discovery’ made by the Indologists and Orientalists.\(^{19}\)

The deliberations of the Nativist critics dismiss many of the claims made during such debates. G. N. Devy, for example, proclaims the need for a greater self-awareness and more accurate knowledge of the native tradition and an insight into their modern transformation as the precondition for initiating relevant and meaningful debate around the function and practice of literature and literary criticism in India. What is so significant is Devy’s concern over the term ‘India’ which, as a cultural label, is hopelessly inadequate and simplistic. He feels that this term is a product of colonial historiography and it brings with it a politically coloured self-image and the suggestion of cultural amnesia. Talking about the lack of a proper historiography in India, Devy opines that each literature demands its own kind of historiography, which, as an area of investigation, remains neglected in India. Devy locates this neglect in the views of the Indologists like Sir William Jones, Albrecht Webber, George Grierson, and Maurice Winternitz. Their assumption was that the beginning of modern Indian literature is synonymous with the British colonial period. But this is not true and hence the
crisis in criticism in India as well as in Indian historiography\textsuperscript{20} (Devy, \textit{Amnesia} 4).

However, in CIWE, two most predominant anxieties still continue as recognised by critics like Devy and Ashish Nandy. One is the conflict between the mother tongue and English, the other being the means to be followed to resist the psychological impact of colonialism. Regarding the use of the English language for literary deliberations, Devy writes that language has exerted a pervasive control in Indian fiction in English. As he says: “In the case of the postcolonial Indian English writers, fictions precede language; it is as if these writers are trying to create an Indian English through their fictions rather than creating fiction out of a living Indian English. It is therefore that playfulness and fiction making become obsessive concerns for the post-colonial period of Indian English Literature” (Devy, 116). He further states that Indian English Literature cannot be adequately analysed as ‘postcolonial’. Undoubtedly, Indian English writing shares almost two hundred years of intellectual/colonial history but also there are thousands of years of Indian Writing that stand behind any literary culture that is truly Indian. So, Indian literature in general, embody a complex Indian experience which has been historically multilingual and confusingly multicultural (Devy, \textit{In Another Tongue} xiv). But Devy also hints at the first anxiety amongst the contemporary Indian authors for whom writing in English also involves a conflict between the mother tongue, and English—the other tongue, which has been our ‘intimate enemy’.\textsuperscript{21} As he states:

\begin{quote}
Whether one likes to accept it or not, it is a fact that Indian English Literature seems greatly Indianised when looked at from outside India, but appears highly anglicised when looked at from the Indian languages perspective. It has a dual personality, it is conscious of being so, and tries to play up both at once. (38)
\end{quote}

It is needless to state that English was legitimized by the early Indian English novelists as a tool to homogenize the spirit of India under the idea of Indian Nationalism. This aspect laid the foundation of the modernist ideology of
pan-Indianism. For example, Raja Rao, despite the individual differences with his contemporaries, subsumed their literary world under the grand narrative of the nation—a strategy that continued till 1960s. But it was none other than Rao who inculcated among his fellow writers a sense of national identity and cultural revivalism. Consequently, both in temper and tone, IWE during that time, continued to nostalgically revisit the Raj with a borrowed notion of an identity that was needed to be forged. But, paradoxically the emergent notions of Indian nationalism continued to plague Indian writing till 1970s when a new kind of writing brought about a fresh creative breakthrough (Nanavati and Kar 13).

But in the process, the West has also been recreated as a psychological category from where there is no escape for the Indian English authors like Rushdie and Ghosh. Simultaneously there continues a resistance to such form of colonial impact. But Nandy states that it is also possible today to opt for a non-west which itself is a construction of the West, which further problematizes the whole idea of CIWE where the majority of the writers do not live in India. Thus, it is interesting to find out how the authors of the CIWE are trying to deal with the problem of identity and articulation. But they have to make choice. Those who have chosen their alternative within the West have also re-evaluated the Occident to discuss their relationship with the orient—a process which has finally enriched their oeuvre. Understanding and appreciation of Indianness thus becomes a part of shared principles.

In his introduction to the book Indian Literature: Positions and Propositions K. Satchidanandan refers to the conceptual difficulty of the history of Indian literature like this:

Rooted inextricably in their social, historical and cultural contexts, Indian writers therefore continue to be, first and foremost, Indian whatever language they write in. This basic unit has in no way eroded the fascinating diversity of our literatures. The local traditions, the rhythms of popular speech, the varying landscapes, ethnic communities with their lifestyles and styles of worship and celebration, folklore
Thus, he provides an important survey of the different currents in the study of Indian writing in general. He states that India and Indian literature had existed as ideas and images in creative writing for centuries, but they began to emerge as critical concepts and tools of comparison probably during the 19th century when the Western scholars who conducted research on the affinity between European and Indo-Aryan language, began to study the literatures in Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrit which they called Indian literature. Regarding the position of literature in India in the last 50 years, Satchidanandan refers to the various attempts to grapple with the postcolonial situation in which paradigms are tried and tasted, communities are imagined and dissolved, traditions are constructed and deconstructed, the presence of the West is both acknowledged and negated, European concepts are altered with indigenous roots, classical and folk elements are brought back to play upon, the write and the oral both are explored together. Thus, the creativity of the Indian authors, Satchidanandan claims, has been dialogic, and rests on the negotiations of a necessary heterogeneity. Thus, there cannot be any beginning in Indian English Literature; there are only renewals of our analysis of the sources (Satchidanandan, 25).

In another context of discussion, Makarand Paranjape opines that Indian novel is yet another narrative form in a culture having a very rich tradition. Although the novel as a form was borrowed from the West, it is not entirely new in India as a form of writing. But, the traditional analytical methods need to be deconstructed. The use of myth to represent India has been one of the most important methodical tools for the authors. It is because; myths still function as the residual elements in the formation of the Indian culture. Thus, the residual
elements can be traced through the values steeped in the ancient myths. This is a literary tradition. So, the use of myth in socially constructed texts reinforces the strength of the very text and makes its main objectives realized (Rao 10-11). Rushdie, Ghosh and many authors of CIWE reflect on these aspects in practical terms. Because they believe that myths strengthen the fictionality of fiction as the fictional text must ensure a place for the readers as well. Hence, there arises a need to write ‘epics’ to suit the vastness of the Indian experience. The text that combine myths and history exploit a variety of devises like irony, satire, farce, and parody that enrich the text’s ‘literariness’. For example, Salman Rushdie uses the Kal Yuga myth in MC to show how money, power and corruption are eating into the vitals of India as a nation (MC, 194). These authors have thus sought to reinterpret life and history through the use of mythical prefiguration. And, Indian epics and the mythical tradition here offer ample scope for evolving a radical world view to make literature meaningful to society even today.

Amidst the plethora of observations made on the notion of Indianness, V. K. Gokak perhaps provides the biggest solutions to the problem of Indianness in the context of CIWE. He states that in its five thousand years, the Indian sensibility expresses itself in historical events and in the creation and assimilation of various art forms to communicate the age-old experiences. So, Indianness is the awareness of the manifold Indian achievements down the ages. As he states:

I rather wish to suggest that the ‘doings’ of Indians, which took shape in the course of thousands of years, can coexist in the consciousness of an Indian in a moment of time. They can consubstantiate and constitute the awareness which is ‘Indianness’. It is this consubstantiation that is the soul of Indianness. Comparing Indianness to a human being, we have said that style is its manner of speech, theme its flesh and blood, setting its local habitation, imagery its subtle body, literary forms its wardrobe, rhythm its voice and the writer’s philosophy of life its bone structure. It is this consubstantiation of historical events and achievements in India that constitute the soul of Indianness. (Gokak 113)
The diasporic Indian authors have a vantage point to reconsider the issue of Indianness objectively. Amit Choudhuri writes that with the advent of modernity and the free market, one must come to terms with the changing face of the realities that make India what it is, today. After Rushdie, however, the authors of CIWE started employing magical realism, non-linear narrative, and hybrid language to sustain themes seen as microcosms of India supposedly reflecting Indian conditions. He contrasts this with the works of earlier writers such as R. K. Narayan in whose writings, the use of English is pure, but the deciphering of meaning needs cultural familiarity. He also feels that Indianness is a theme constructed only in CIWE, and does not articulate itself in the vernacular literatures.

In another context of secular fictions in CIWE, Neelam Shrivastava opines, the novels that represent the Indian secular canon in English, are 'historical' in the sense that they respond to specific moments of India's historical and political context at the time of publication. They all engage with the question of secularism and conceive the novel form as non-sectarian, though it is secular in different ways in each author. These novels create an 'imagined community' of readers who are not defined by national boundaries, but by the transnational scope of English. *MC, A Suitable Boy, A Fine Balance, The Great Indian Novel, TSV, TSL* are some examples that narrate the radical shift in the perception of the public sphere in India. New forms of political participation with the rise of the BJP and caste based politics in the Indian states, also signaled that the language of the political elite, and indeed of the public sphere, was no longer English, just as political conceptions of the nation were no longer dominated by secularism. The novels have different approaches to the idea of the state, which indeed had undergone an important evolution between the end of the Emergency and the beginning of the 1990s.

So, the confusing and heterogeneous socio-political realities of India, the need to assert one's identity in front of a world community, have made the
authors of CIWE more promising and influential in the last three decades of the 20th century. Indian English authors of the 1980s and 1990s, of which Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh are the fitting examples among others, have used their indebtedness to India to represent the cultural space in which they are conditioned to write. However, during 1980s, Rushdie’s adoption of a kind of realistic (emphasis added) writing inaugurated a new ‘construction’ of the notion of Indianness and opened up new possibilities of discussions. Similarly, the use of English by Rushdie’s next generation of writers like Amitav Ghosh, who initially follows Rushdie but later takes history as the mode of representation, can be regarded as a deviation from a literary language invented mostly by Raja Rao or R. K. Narayan.

How often an Indian or a Desi writer in the West returns to India in what he/she writes is the other important question that is contextually very relevant. This is because it is not merely a case of nostalgia, followed by a terrible intellectual dilemma and a shift in perspective. The immigrant writers are discovering not only the new country but also the place that they have left behind. Thus, a new India is explored and mapped in the imagination of the writers abroad. So, its time one changed the ways of reading the literary history of IWE. It becomes obvious from a systematic survey that most of the research conducted on Indian novels in English in the post-independence period was based on ‘chronological classification’ of the literature, and not on any farm critical norms. However, the books like *Vintage Book of Indian Writing in English* (1997) edited by Salman Rushdie and Elizabeth West, and *Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature* (2001), edited by Amit Choudhuri provide the first sustained attempts to re-define the notion of IWE in a changing context of globalization and multiculturalism. Such collections also help in mapping a whole body of writing through which the notion of Indianness is sought to be explored in the two centuries old Indian Writing written both in English and Local Indian Languages.
So, it is obvious that various discursive and subversive elements have contributed to the development of an overall idea of Indianness in the history of IWE. This also derives much from Indian nationalism whose history offers examples of the yokings of the national project with regard to the different communities occupying the space of the projected nation (Morey, 163). Critics like Bipan Chandra observes that the old colonial identification surviving mainly in rural India; demographic complication with predominantly Hindu landlords and Muslim tenants; the Hindu nature of the nationalistic politics that alienates the Indian Muslims; and the distorted and compartmentalized view of Indian history through British historiographic records are some factors within the traditional Indian society which nullify any claim of a 'totality'. Contrary to this view R. Radhakrishnan argues that CIWE tries to make room for body of writing which is internally heterogeneous and each work speaks of infinite textuality and indeterminate semiosis and signification. The point Radhakrishnan makes is that India’s worth and self-esteem lies in its visibility and being for the other of English speaking world. It is in this context that the connection between the notion of Indianness and CIWE can be best explored to meet the demands of the changing time.

An Indian writer often needs to remain conscious of his/her national and regional identity when he/she addresses a global audience and also when he/she responds to issues related to his/her homeland in the Rushdian sense. Premila Paul argues that the assumed role of being an interpreter of India is bound to create in the Indian author an anxiety to be authentic. Such authors are aware that their raw material is Indian, they are Indian but their readers may not be necessarily so. This again has political implications as it imposes certain unconscious checks on the writer. (Paul, The Politics of English 363). It is in this context that the study of Indianness in the novels of the diasporic writers becomes a fitting response. But the very notion of India has been problematized by a preference of one singular Indian element to the other. Instead Indianness

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must be extended to incorporate the wide range of cultural identities, nationality and voices so that an Indian never finds it difficult to understand. At the same time, emphasizing the notion of Indianness as the starting point may not be always productive as it may sometimes blind the reader of the important tools for pointing out structures in the narrative and the ideologies of the author. This is a danger which one must be aware of. But this is also true that authors of CIWE have made Indianness and Indian reality a part of the cosmopolitan narrative. This is what is so significant a matter to discuss in detail. To be an Indian is itself a marker of the inherent hybridity of Indian English writing. Hence, the main objective for anyone involved with the study of IWE is to discover the structural elements that constitute the Indian character in the novels.

Viney Kirpal argues, the novels of 1980s reflect the theme of the mixed Indian tradition. The controlling temper of the period is recognized as synthesis and polymorphism where all religions, all communal groups, including the minorities, could have an important reference (Riemenschneider 26). Rushdie has proclaimed that “The idea of India...is based on...multiplicity...plurality and tolerance...There can be no one way—religious, cultural or linguistic—of being an Indian; let differences reign” (Rushdie, Imaginary Homelands 41). This idea of India and the way Rushdie conceives it, answers many of the questions that are associated with the contemporary notion of Indianness, and his allegorical representations of Indian history and society offers a well-prepared ground for discussing Indianness as the inspiration on his novels. An ever-expanding literary space was created to exemplify and articulate the multiplicity of communal, ethnic, caste and class voices that comprise post independence India. These tropes were later repeated and reworked through the narration of partition and the subsequent Indian political history, including Indira Gandhi’s State of Emergency in 1975-77.

So, the notion of Indianness has to be seen as an essential criterion for examining the merit of CIWE. The term ‘Indianness’ suggests an abstract essence
and is often used to address the problematic issues of identity and articulation involved in the production of literary texts by an author of Indian origin. Any response to such issues begins with a very common question—what is this ‘Indianness’ that Indian English authors often seek to address? The argument is that the notion of Indianness has been used, more than anything else, as a representational mode by such authors.\(^3\)\(^4\) It has increasingly been seen as a construct of literary devices and practices that intends to both critique and represent Indian realities or realities accessed by an Indian. This realization necessitates a reflection not only on the socio-political and cultural stances of the author/narrator, but also on his/her use of certain narrative traditions, styles and modes of presentations. Besides, the socio-economic positioning of the authors of Indian English novels in relation to the different aspects of political India, and their cultural displacement has become the necessary component of their literary output. When seen against the more recent renderings in CIWE, it is evident that the sources relevant to the problem of ‘Indianness’ are to be accessed through a kind of Indian English Writing which is historical, topical, literary, journalistic and even political, best exemplified by the novels of Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh.

End Notes:

1 This is the point that Bhiku Parekh raises about the perceptions of the diasporic writers and their idea of ‘home’. But the irony is that the multiplicity of ‘homes’ does not bridge the gap between ‘home’ the culture of origin, and ‘home’ the culture of adoption (qtd. in Jain 12-13). Hence, the resultant anxiety of Indianness becomes a necessary precondition.

2 While discussing the idea of India, authors like Rushdie and Ghosh seem to have addressed not only their geographical dislocation from India but also the socio-cultural displacements following such dislocations. Consequently, their concerns are global and not simply ‘Indian’ as their experience relates to the modern world of immigrants, refugees and all sorts of exiles. Thus the local-global binary is dismantled in their writings. The depiction of the dislocated characters,
mostly in the fictions of Amitav Ghosh, becomes significant if seen against the geopolitical background of the vast Indian subcontinent.

3 According to Romila Thapar, the British Orientalists initiated a kind of discovery of India as well as a 'construction' of the Indian past both as a part of intellectual curiosity and as a means of administration. But, Thapar also exposes the fact that the British only provides a partial view of India and that so much is yet to be explored. But thanks to the British because of whose efforts we have developed a historiography of the Indian past. She states that the Indians did keep meaningful records of their time and most of such records have nothing to do with political concerns and activities. They are more in the form of genealogies, legends and monastic chronicles considered as legitimate constituents of historical tradition of India. Examples can be cited of the Court chronicles and historical biographies maintained by Turkis and Mughal courts and when the Europeans invaded India they found certain ready-made materials since 1000 AD (Thapar, 3).

4 Romila Thapar explores why the Aryans are projected as superior, although the notion of an Aryan race is alien to the Indian tradition. What she shows is the way Europe constructed a theory of 'Oriental Despotism' which was reviewed in the nineteenth century with reference to the past of entire Asia. Indian culture with its spirituality and non-materiality became the part of a description of the 'Oriental' culture which was different from the 'Occidental' in material values. Gradually, 'the dichotomy between Oriental and Occidental became the only way to conceptualize Indian historical thinking (5).

5 See Al-Biruni's India, Trans. E. C. Sachau, Ed. A. Qeyamuddin. (New Delhi: N B T, 1983). Al-Biruni studied Sanskrit and made a serious attempt to understand Indian culture and convey it to the Arabic speaking world. He portrayed India as a single cultural tradition, with its variety of faiths, languages, and social formations.

6 In order to know the meaning of the term Hindu in the Indian context, reference can be made of S. Radhakrishnan's The Hindu View of Life, Viswanathan's Am I A Hindu?, and Jyotirmaya Sharma’s Hindutva. S. Radhakrishnan, who became the president of India 1962, in this book shows that the Hindu religion in India stems from the love of storytelling about the different gods and goddesses. Under Hinduism there is also a system of unifying belief that has guided the lives of the ordinary Indian people for generations. While Viswanathan's book is a good introduction to the idea of Hinduism. Like a glossary it presents a comprehensive picture of Hinduism. On the other hand, J. Sharma's book discusses how Hindutva poses a formidable intellectual and political challenge in contemporary India today. Then he takes to analysing the
views of Dayananda Saraswati, Sri Aurobindo, Swami Vivekananda and Vinayak Damodar Savarkar regarding Hindutva.

7 Although I have used the term CIWE, S. Subrahmanya Sarma in his essay “Indian English Literature: In Search of a Name” states that the literary nomenclatures like Indian Writing in English are never fully resolved to the best satisfaction of all. He presents six different terms to name literatures written in English in India. These are—Anglo-Indian Literature, Indo-Anglian Literature, Indo-English Literature, Indian Writing in English, Indian-English Writing, and Indian English Literature.

8 During 1960s, new creative structures gained prominence in IWE. The first was through the “Writers Workshop” conducted by Prof. P. Lal in Calcutta that created a community of writers interested in using English freely. Then, M. K. Naik’s essay on “Indian Writing in English” established Indian English Writings as topics of serious academic research. As G N Devy writes, around 1970s, the Journal of Commonwealth Literature from Leeds, and The Literary Criterion, and the Literary Half Yearly from Mysore developed a sense of the “Commonwealth”, Indian English Literature had already established itself as a self-defined entity (Devy 2). When we discuss the idea of CIWE now, we should never forget that the novels of authors like Rushdie and Ghosh explore in many ways their own history.

9 In an essay “India an Experience”, C.T. Indra writes that five thousand years of collective spiritual evolution has assigned the Indians with a unique cultural heritage. So, while discussing the notion of Indianness in terms of a literary text written by an Indian author, the experiential reality of India as a continuum can never be ignored. Thus, the concept of the Indian ‘nation’ requires reinterpretation when the term is applied to the geopolitical space called India (Indra and Shivam 45-57).

10 Regarding economic liberalization in India, one may read Gurucharan Das’s India Unbound and The Elephant Paradigm: India Wrestles with Change which can be cited as insightful guides to the rapidly changing Indian nation in the 21st century. However, for an argument on the importance of India to the future of the industrialized world, one may also read Shashi Tharoor’s India: From Midnight to the Millennium.

11 Amit Choudhuri provides interesting reflections in the regard. The first question, according to him, implies that the Indian writers in English are removed from his/her natural readership: an Indian reader. But the idea of an Indian reader itself is a utopian idea (Choudhuri 88). The second question, implies the currents and cross currents of any attempt made to exoticise India under the concept of Orientalism. But one must seriously consider that the Orient is not only a
European invention, but also an oriental one that has created an intellectual, cultural, and political space for intellectual analysis.

Against the onslaught of the English language in India, a central question is if there is any living Indian tradition. Thanks to Sahitya Akademi’s effort to bring out the history of the literatures of the Indian languages. Sisir Kumr Das’s three volumes of A History of Indian English Literature (500-1399), (1800-1910), and (1911-1956), compiled by a team of scholars, is an effort to overcome this problem which Indian multilingualism posits before us. Das presents the Indian literatures not in isolation from one another, but in their close connections in a larger and complex existence of the age old multilingualism and a variety of literary traditions. So far, many books have been written to find out whether Indian Literature is singular or plural. The idea of cultural oneness preaches for its singularity, while India’s inherent cultural multiplicity preaches for its plurality.

Peter Morey in the “Introduction” to his book mentions about the fictional strategies at work in Indian Novels in English. Although he refers mainly to the pre-independence Anglo Indian writers, there are some common questions faced even by the post-colonial Indian writers like—the nature of the discursive forces delimiting and enforcing notions of India, the meaning of ‘being an Indian’, the polyphonic potentialities of Indian narrative fiction, and the metaphoric plurality of India.

In her essay “The Anxiety of Indianness”, Meenakshi Mukherjee discusses the reasons behind the sudden fad around the idea of Indian novels in English. She explains that, in the early stage, it was out of an attempt at exploring ‘Indian elements’ that Indian English novels as a new genre was taking shape, whereas now, although the raw materials are borrowed from India’s history or past, the emphasis is laid on gaining a wide readership from country to country. Hence, the supposed anxiety (Mukherjee 166-186).

For example, Salman Rushdie’s views on English imperialism and its role in Indian modernity are acceptable not perhaps as a motto, but as a strategic resistance. When his novels are read, this tendency is clearly felt.

Also Tabish Khair in his book Babu Fiction argues that the situation of Indian English writer is complicated by his/her privileged socioeconomic and cultural position within India. The Indian English writer can be seen as a Babu—an urban, westernized English educated person. On the other hand, it would be reasonable to claim that the majority of Indians share the condition of ‘coolies’ urban and rural, not overtly Westernized and largely illiterate or semiliterate (Khair 143).
The idea that many dominant races had invaded this land, and their contributions and legacies had been transformed and assimilated into an Indian cultural past has immensely contributed to the notion of Indianness. The cultural history of India, according to A. L. Basham, introduces us to the development of India as a cultural concept. Basham also states that for an inclusive survey of how Indianness has been characterized and represented, the records of the foreign travelers to the Indian subcontinent provide the other important sources. His books *The Wonder that was India* and his next edited book *A Cultural History of India* are to be mentioned in this context. Amartya Sen, in another context of discussion, seeks to present 'India's long argumentative tradition' as the 'signifier' of Indianness. He takes up this issue in his books—*The Argumentative Indian* and *Identity and Violence*. There are mainly two views of India presented in this book: 1. India synonymous with religion, magic, austerity, spirituality, the irrational – a typical Western perception of India becoming a justification through imperialism. 2. The invention of a particular India by the right-winged Hindus to present resemblance with the Western invention.

The term is originally used by art historians and literary and cultural studies scholars to discuss some aspects of Middle Eastern and East Asian cultures. However, since the publication of Edward Said's seminal book *Orientalism* in 1978, the term came to refer to a patronizing attitude of the West towards Middle Eastern, Asian and African societies. In Said's analysis, the West essentializes these societies as static and undeveloped—thereby fabricating a view of Oriental culture should be studied and reproduced. As Said writes: “The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences. Now it was disappearing” (Said, 1).

For example, Rammohun Roy acquired his Vedic learning not from the British scholars but from the Pandits in Benares; Bankim Chandra Chattopadhaya, initially ventured into Hindu scriptures and the civilization of ancient India through Orientalist writings, but in his efforts to gain a direct knowledge of that heritage, he chose the Pandits of Bhatpara as his mentor; or Vivekananda, whose induction into the Indian mystical tradition was possible through an illiterate man who knew nothing about the West or English language.

While offering such an opinion, Devy is not negative about Western Impact. Instead he brings in ‘Marga’- the metropolitan main stream tradition, ‘Desi’-the regional and sub-cultural tradition, and Western intellectual tradition, each conflicting and collaborating with the other in a number of ways (Devy, *Amnesia* 19). He asserts that through a nativistic self-awareness Indian criticism should come out of the crisis caused by this amnesia. As he states: “A recovery of memory of native literary traditions will reduce the anxiety about the absence of theory. What
Indian literature needs at the present times is a realistic historiography and not so much of a theoretical discussion” (124).

21 Ashish Nandy addresses the second anxiety quite significantly. In his *The Intimate Enemy* he tells that modern colonialism created certain hierarchies which, unlike the traditional order, opened up new ideas for both critics as well as readers. Thought in terms of the intellectual resources for the Indian English authors it can be observed that colonialism was in a sense necessary for the liberation of the third world. In another book *The Romance of the State*, Nandy deals with certain central concepts in the mainstream culture of Indian politics like secularism, development, history and so on that would certainly influence a writer from India.

22 Deiter Riemenschneider refers to Dorothy Spenser’s *Indian Fiction in English* (1960), as the later held that ‘Indianness’ has prevented the development of the novel before the arrival of the British, but since thereafter, there had been a considerable re-orientation of the Indian world view that preceded and accompanied the emergence of novel in India (Riemenschneider 9).

23 But the Orientalism of these Western scholars would not permit them to admit that the pre-Aryan inhabitants of India could also produce great literature and civilization. For example, Albrecht Weber, the author of *A History of Indian Literature* in German, stated that he had retained the name Indian literature for reasons of brevity. Maurice Winternitz in his *History of Indian Literature* (1907) again limited himself to Sanksrit, Prakrit and Pali. Even the Orientalist scholars like William Jones and George Grierson, although they rendered great service to Indian literature through their well-researched studies on ancient Sanskrit texts like the Vedas, also distorted and simplified the concept of Indian Literature (20). Thus, the study of the notion of Indianness in CIWE, being born out of such an intellectual background, makes itself presented as an important area of research.

24 One such example is Shashi Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel* in which the author presents the *Mahabharata* with its meditations and subversions as part of his fictional strategies. This novel is an attempt to retell the political history of the 20th century India through a fictional recasting of events, episodes and characters from the *Mahabharata*. The *Mahabharata* in this novel is read to mean ‘Great India’.

25 See Amit Chouduri’s Interview with Reeti Roy.

26 In her book *Secularism in the Postcolonial Indian Novel*, Neelam Srivastava explores the connection between a secular Indian nation and Indian fiction in English by a number of postcolonial Indian writers like Vikram Seth, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Tharoor, and Rohinton Mistry, of the 1980s and 1990s. She investigates different aspects of postcolonial
identity within the secular framework of the Anglophone novel. In particular, this book examines how these writers have used the novel form to rewrite colonial and nationalist Indian history, and how they radically reinvent English as a secular language for narrating their state of mind. Ultimately, it delineates a common conceptual framework for secularism and cosmopolitanism, by arguing that Indian secularism can be seen as a located indigenous form of a cosmopolitan identity.

27 Rushdie has made a number of important comments on the idea of India and Indian literature in *Step Across this Line*. He states: “It is true that there tends to be a bias (among the Indian English writers) towards metropolitan and cosmopolitan fiction, but there has been, during this half-century, a genuine attempt to encompass as many Indian realities as possible, rural as well as urban, sacred as well as profane. This is also, let us remember, a young literature. It is still pushing out the frontiers of the possible... One important dimension of literature is that it is a means of holding a conversation with the world. These writers are ensuring that India, or rather, Indian voices (for they are too good to fall into the trap of writing nationalistically), will henceforth be confident, indispensable participants in that literary conversation” (165). Rushdie also states: “In fact many of the writers I admire have profound knowledge of the ‘soul of India’; many have deeply spiritual concerns, while others are radically secular, but the need to engage with, to make a reckoning with, India’s religious self is everywhere to be found” (166). Thus, “The map of the world, in the standard Mercator Projection, is not kind to India, making it look substantially smaller than, say, Greenland. On the map of world literature, too, India has been undersized for too long. Fifty years after India’s independence, however, that age of obscurity is coming to an end. India’s writers have torn up the old map, and are busily drawing their own” (173).

28 In this connection, one may cite Mulk Raj Anand’s 1930 book *Coolie* where he made an attempt to represent the poor classes of India in English fictions. Later on, diasporic Indian writing came to discuss the ‘new India’. And finally, the failure of Indian state in the years after the independence has freed the writers from carrying the burdens of idealism and impotence. This has been discussed in detail by Amitava Kumar in his book *Away: The Indian Writer as an Expatriate*.

29 In this connection, one can name the pioneering efforts like K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar’s *Indian Writing in English* (1962), P. P. Mehta’s *Indo-Anglian Fiction* (1968) and M. K. Naik’s *A History of Indian English Literature* (1982). But, K. S. Ramamurti, in his *Rise of the Indian Novel in English* (1987), discussed that although Indian novels are imitative of its Western counterparts, ‘criticism related to it has to be two-sided. It has to address novels in terms of
criteria applicable to all novels-Indian or European and then it has to direct an aesthetic responsiveness to the appreciation of Indianness (qtd. in Riemenschneider 6). Based on the experience of reading, some generalization of the major concerns of IWE can be made in this way: 1930s: National and Socio-political problems, 1960s: Individual’s quest for personal feelings, 1980s onward: Relation between the Individual and national issues.

30 The publication of these two books is also significant for other reasons. Rushdie’s statement in the Vintage book that “the ironic proposition that India’s best writing since independence may have been done in the language of the departed imperialists is simply too much for some folks to bear” created a lot of resentment among many writers, including writers in English. Similarly, Amit Chaudhuri’s question in the Picador book- "Can it be true that Indian writing, that endlessly rich, complex and problematic entity, is to be represented by a handful of writers who write in English, who live in England or America and whom one might have met at a party?” created lot of debates around the nature of English novels in India. Such contradictions encourage a reader to study CIWE in a more exploratory manner.

31 For example, according to Bipan Chandra, the records often consider Indian history as an era of Hindu artistic and cultural achievement followed by an eclipse of ‘Muslim Dark Age’ after which the British appeared as the saviour of the Hindu culture (qtd. in Morey 164).

32 In his essay “Indian English Literature in the Context of Globalization” R. Radhakrishnan asks if English is a form or a context, if it is a style or a message, and tries to find an answer through the advocacy of a strategic need to beat back the modern Hindi hegemonies. Although he says nothing new, the point he makes relates to the question “how should Indian English achieve its own form of contemporaneity without sounding derivative, and if it was to be ‘contemporary’, with reference to what norm of contemporary?” (Radhakrishnan, Rushdie the Novelist 18).

33 For example, Gyanendra Pandey’s analysis of the ‘fragmentary’ nature of the India as a nation and his negation of ‘homogenisation’ enables us to consider the idea of nation in the context of a future political community. Also important is the analysis of Frederick Jameson in his essay “Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” following which the idea of Indianness can be conceived as fabricating the third world culture and society like India.

34 Taking up the notion of ‘Indianness’ as a problem as well as a source, I have tried to find out what happens when a multilingual country like India gets represented and narrativised in English. I am convinced that a study of Indianness as a mode of representation in the novels of Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh will certainly bring out many new aspects of ‘Indianness’ that will enrich the minds of readers.
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