

Exploration of Identity in South Asian Poetry and Novels

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Abstract

This project analyses the exploration of identity as a theme in South Asian poems and novels and considers certain well-known works of established writers from the region to highlight the multidimensional aspects of identity. The main objective of this study was to analyse the history and evolution of South Asian literature with regard to the impact of colonisation on South Asian literature sources. Further, it provided insight into the relevance of the poems and novels considering the demand of worldwide readers.

Keywords: South Asian literature, colonisation, South Asian novels, South Asian poetry, Identity

Introduction

South Asian poetry and literature are distinct from the common norms followed in European and American literature as the poems and novels of South Asian authors ponder over unique traditional and cultural phenomena present in this region. Exploration of the theme of Identity is one such phenomenon that has been widely used in the pieces of literature produced by authors of South Asian origin. The pronounced distinctness of South Asian philosophies ensured that the development and exploration of the theme of identity in South Asian literature is exquisite to its culture and history. The South Asian writers ensured the evolution of identity as a theme in various phases and forms in the literature. Considering the multiple facets of South Asian poetry and novels several themes have been developed in this study

Objectives of the study:

- To analyse the history and evolution of South Asian literature.
- To examine the impact of colonisation on South Asian literature sources.
- To determine the exclusive identity of South Asian novels and poetry in a worldwide context.

Methods

Adopting appropriate methods to collect data regarding a specific subject topic ensures that the findings regarding that topic are relevant and accurate. Among multiple methods taken up to gather data for a subject, this study chose to collect and analyse qualitative data from secondary sources of literature. Analysis of qualitative data in secondary research is capable of inducing plentiful detail in a study. Exploring ideas from a large data set can be challenging in the case of secondary qualitative data [1]. Considering this, this study has focused on gathering information from the most relevant and authentic sources to gain a compact and effective insight regarding the topic of discussion.

Findings

History and Evolution of South Asian Literature

South Asian pieces of literature have a long and rich history as multiple political, cultural, and social dynamic changes have influenced the literature. The initial stage of South Asian literature dates back to the writings of the Vedas and Upanishads and from then on the pieces of literature artwork have developed through multiple stages gaining influences from changes in the facets of society. The development of Indic culture and its spread throughout influenced the literature of the south-eastern region of Asia especially Indonesia as it was one of the regions that inculcated Indic knowledge in its literature the most [2]. The aspects of identity and nationalism are explored in great detail often concerning the previous scriptures from this region in modern South Asian literature. The literary development of the Southeast Asian region was not limited to novels and scriptures rather there is much significance to legends, folklores, fairy-tale, and others.

The literature of the South Asian region in many aspects has been highly influenced by colonial rules and there is a noteworthy amalgamation of the cultures of colonising forces and the traditions of the native land and indigenous people of that region. It is noted that those South Asian regions that were under the control of British, Chinese other European forces have developed a culture of writing prose, poetry, and novels using the language of the colonisers. Since there was much need to fit into the traditions of colonisers to gain recognition, the literature of the colonial period shows significant evidence of it. As an example, early Vietnamese literature can be considered. The medieval Vietnamese literature from the 10th to 19th century mostly used the Chinese language and characters due to China's influence over the land [3]. The development and exploration of individual identity in poetry and novels are comparatively modern phenomena as the resistance wars in the colonised countries changed the social structure and order in various ways.

Analysis of a few South Asian novels and Poetry

Writers of the South Asian region took conscious measures to break the shackles of the colonial past and explored the unique identity of this region through poetry and novels. Since this region is a melting pot of cultures, the spiritual and philosophical facets of each

region influenced the literature of other regions as well. This uncommon exchange between *Indic scriptural languages* and *regional vernaculars* had a significant impact on South Asian novels and poetry [4]. There are multiple exquisite pieces of literature in modern times that delve into the depths of identity and crisis. *A Dutiful Boy* by *Mohsin Zaidi* in this context explores the issue related to acceptance of one's identity as an individual in the confused modern world [5]. It is a *British Asian identity narrative* that describes a young boy's journey from denial to acceptance. Exploration of racism and its implications on the lives of young adults in foreign lands is beautifully navigated throughout the novel.

Another significant poem that dwells in the exploration of the identity of people living in the countryside facing hardships and lack of opportunities is *The Heart's Fifth Chamber* by *Angkarn Chanthatip*. The Thai poet refers to the relevance of compassion and warmth in dealing with the challenges of mundane lives as the poetry seems to harbour the spiritual nature of self. The social wrongs related to inequality in the social hierarchy and the struggle present in the poem is radically influential providing further relevance to the exploration of identity and self [6]. The poem explores the individual choices of finding one's own identity in the mainstream world and staying true to one's own roots. This exploration provides insight into the modern social needs of today's world and the alignment of individualistic needs with those set social norms.

Impact of colonization on South Asian literature sources

Most of the South Asian nations were affected by colonial rule and although in many respects it damaged the uniqueness of the South Asian Identity, the literature of the colonial period showed instances of artistic amalgamation of two distinct cultures in literary works. Eminent writers such as *Bhaba*, *Spivak*, and *Said* have significantly contributed to establishing awareness about the South Asian nations that remained in colonial clutches for a long time [7]. Identity crisis and cultural assimilation became the focus of discussion in most literary works by South Asian writers and poets.

The social movements in the post-colonial period helped in creating a shared identity among the natives of South Asia. This recreation of the concept of identity was depicted in the poems and novels of South Asia. Even in the decolonisation phase, South Asian literature was still in its inception phase of exploring the true identity of South Asian culture. Literary narratives have the capability to construct and deconstruct the concept of identity and discursive practices in modern times as it seems to affect the recent identity narratives among modern writers. Literature that does not influence the critical spirit and make the readers face the realities of life is not worth much [8]. Considering this view, surveying the challenges specific to South Asian culture in the colonial and post-colonial periods through literature helped the writer explore identity in poetry and novels

Exclusive identity of South Asian Novels and Poetry worldwide

The ability of South Asian literature to quench the thirst for philosophical and spiritual endeavours of the global community increased its relevance and helped poems and novels of South Asian origin gain worldwide popularity. Poems and novels of the South Asian region

reframed the dominating perspective of the global north by establishing cultures and traditions of Asia in the global platform. It is noted in many respects that women writers and poets put the best foot forward regarding establishing their own identities through pieces of literature. Women writers such as *Kamala Das* represent all downtrodden women through literature thus creating an individualistic identity for women through literature [9]. Furthermore, authors such as *Arundhati Roy*, *Amitabh Ghosh*, *Victor Fernando R. Ocampo*, and poets such as *Oka Rusmini* and *Angkarn Kalayanapong* presented the best notions of South Asia among the global populations and gained immense acclamation.

During the twentieth century, poets of the South Asian region tried to establish their own identity in the global literary field by writing in English. Poets such as *A.K Ramanujan* and *Agha Shahid Ali* from this region explore the concept of identity through childhood memories and final maturity [10]. The characters of literature often face the loss of identity among all other duties making it more relevant for all the readers. The global population can identify with South Asian literature as the quest to find one's true identity is most appealing to readers of all ages, genders, and races.

Conclusion

The study aims to provide relevant insight regarding multi-layered features of the exploration of identity in South Asian poems and novels. Exploring identity through literature is a complex phenomenon that developed quite recently in the literary pieces of South Asia. The writers from this region, suffering from the trauma of the colonial past tried to break the conventional shackles of colonised mentality and establish one true identity of the region. The only problem with an exploration of identity is that it is not one-dimensional but rather multifaceted. The South Asian writer took up this challenge and explored the unique aspects of South Asian traditions and cultures and even got influenced by the colonial mind set as negating the colonial past of South Asian nations would have done injustice to the exploration of identity.

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