

Targeted Writing: The Culture of Fiction Writing in 21st Century India



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Three Phases in IWE

- Pre-Independence India
- Post Independence India
[Mostly 1st and 2nd Diaspora Narratives]
- Post Millennial India

Important Questions

- Which audience does an Indian English author write for?
- Is he/she **Exoticising India** for a Western audience?
- The Writers' Take on the **Notion of Indianness?**
- These questions are also related to the **representational politics** as well as the **intellectual compulsions** of an Indian English author.
- However, the **issue of readership** is also another preoccupation of the author choosing to write in English.

Issue of Indianness

An inquiry on 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 even in the Post Millennial Indian English Fiction.

These strategies mostly include:

- a) The Narrative Forms
- b) Motives and Images
- c) Representing the Tradition to which the Authors belong
- d) Representational Modes

Latest Trends

- The latest trends in 21st century Indian English fiction reflect a kind of development in the 'culture of writing' following which the term 'culture' itself has started connoting very specific world-views.
- Some segments of literary writings are being identified as **popular** or **best sellers** which are actually the spinoffs from the publishing houses that see themselves as being under threat from a readership that has found a new irreverence thanks to the **World Wide Web**.
- Hence, it is time we should find ourselves engaged with a reading fraternity who are consciously monitoring such developments.

Targeted Writing

Here comes the issue of Targeted writing. The publishing houses are sponsoring certain works targeted at a kind of readership based on their market research. And these targeted writings shall have their names too.

Examples:

- **Metro Reads** and **Young Adult Literature** targeted mainly at the fantasy-crazy and techno-savvy young generation
- **Writings by the Medical Fraternity**
- **Travel Narratives** that don't just enlist the names of people met or places visited
- **Journalistic Writings** that often blur the distinction between documentary and fiction, and so on.

Fiction in 21st century India

- In the context of Post Millennial Indian English writing, it is time to move the debate **beyond the Post-colonial**.
- India, till 2016, has succeeded in establishing a developed literary scene thanks to the **global economic liberalisation** that has provided visibility to Indian English Writing by **Resident Indian Writers** like never before.
- There is abundance of **new literary forms and voices** and modes of representations being experimented.
- But one should also look at the fact that such unprecedented rise in literary activities is also impacting the **readership of IWE**.

Fiction in 21st century India

- The 21st century has its own shifts and turns. We now have a body of literary works from India in the English language which are to be studied with certain new perspective.
- This can be seen as a turn towards **domestic India, New India, Young India Narratives** and so on. Suddenly, there has been a 45% rise in the sale of novels in India.
- I am reminded of **Alexander Pope** who once rightly stated: “I only read novels that are relevant to my personal experience” (Ref. Pope’s book club).

This is perhaps becoming absolutely true in the context of **Post millennial Indian English fiction** which has become almost a fad.

Fiction in 21st century India

In Contemporary Web-based and Techno-led society,

- Blogs have changed the ways one expresses oneself to others.
- Television watching has replaced reading.
- BPO activities has replaced the traditional job profiles.
- Transitory life style of the young workers looking to move towards US and UK is becoming a new culture.

A major part of the 21st century Indian Writing in English are trying to address these issues. A Recent Book like Chetan Bhagat's **One Indian Girl** (2016) deals with that kind of an experience.

Some Types of 'Young India' and Other Narratives:

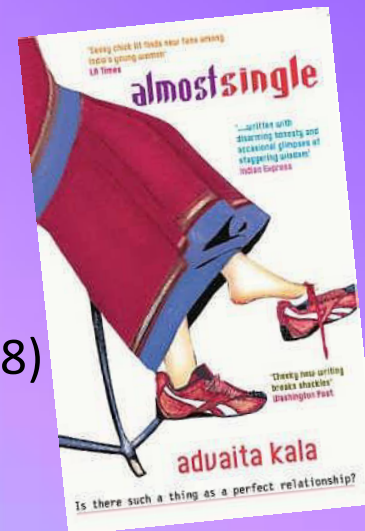
- **Narratives of the Corporate world and urban scapes/Metro Reads**
- **Literature on Cricket**
- **Literature by Young Women of India**
- **Crime Writing and Murder Mystery**
- **Fantasy and Graphic Novels**
- **Retelling of Hindu Epics and Religious Stories**

Narratives of the Corporate world/urban scapes (Bangalore, Mumbai and Delhi)

It's a young India narrative with **protagonists in their 20s and 30s**. The characters are at the cross roads with modern day India, aspirations vs family expectations, challenges of careers and personal relationship and finding a life partner.

Examples:

- Bangalore: *Neti, Neti, Not This, Not That* (2009) by Anjum Hassan
- Mumbai: *Last Man in Tower* (2011) by Arvind Agida
- New Delhi: *Almost Single* (2007) by Advaita Kala
One Night @ The Call Centre (2008) by Chetan Bhagat



Metro Reads

The term is derived from the metro transport systems across India, and how they have changed the landscape of the Indian cities that have brought in important changes in people's life styles.

Examples: Partha Sarathi Basu's *With or Without Love* (2010) , Amrita Setty's *Love Over Coffee* (2010) etc.

These books are light weight easy reading books with tag lines: "Fun Feisty Fast Reads", "For The Reader On the Go", "Every life has a Story" etc.

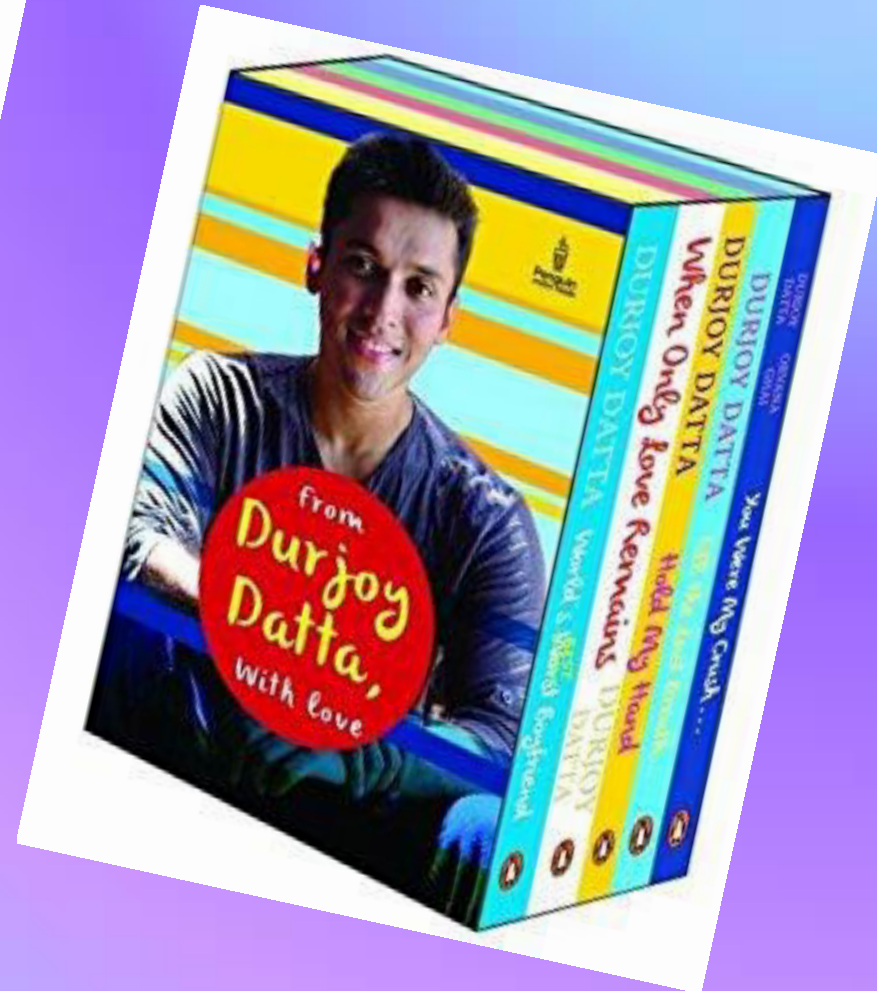
Even the cost of these books is also not more than Rs 150/-.

In their website www.metroreads.in, they state:

"How many times, have you wished for books that wont weigh you down with complicate stories, do not ask for much time, don't have to be logged around? Penguin Books India proudly announces the launch of its latest series, Metro Reads, that does all that and more."



In 2008, The New York Times cited Bhagat as “the biggest selling English language novelist in India’s history.”

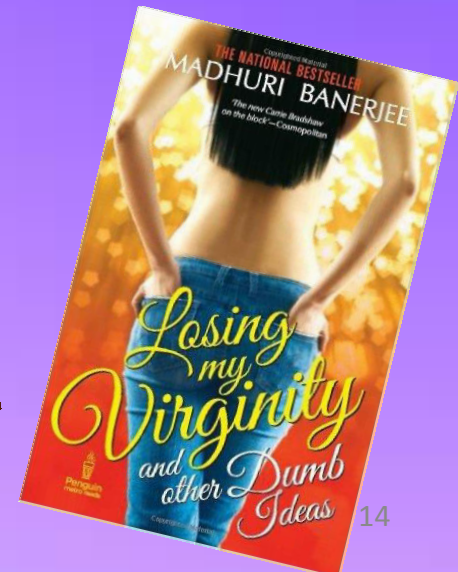
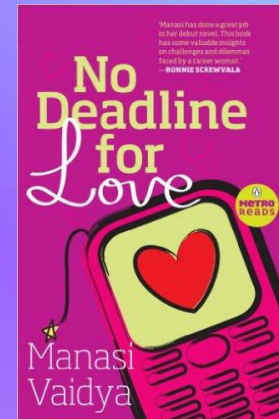


Books Writing by Women

A body of writing mainly written by women with a female protagonist who in many ways challenges, questions and changes contemporary Indian society. These writers often explore emotional domestic territories like detailed descriptions of interior spaces of home, the negotiations of roles and hierarchies as well as lives in bedroom and kitchen.

Examples:

- *Neti, Neti, Not This, Not That* (2009) by Anjum Hassan
- *No Deadline for Love* (2011) by Manasi Vaidya
- *Loosing My virginity and Other Dumb Ideas* (2011) by Madhuri Banerjee
- *Dreams in Prussian Blue* (2010) by Paritosh Uttam

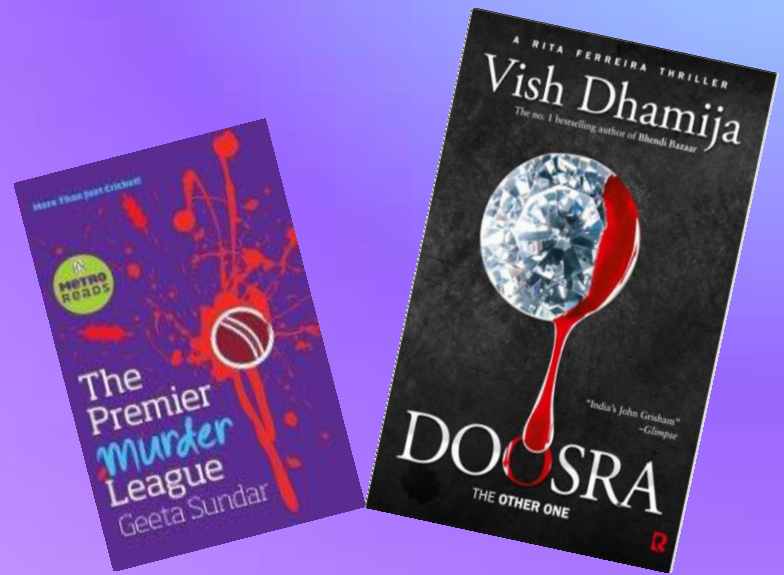


Literature on Cricket

Fiction about cricket in India which is a national obsession particularly in the 21st century. Following the launch of IPL in 2008, this type of works have gained unprecedented popularity.

Examples:

- *The Premiere Murder League* (2010) by Geeta Sundar
- *Bowled and the Beautiful* (2009) by Shubhasis Das
- *Doosra* (2011) by Vish Dhamija
- *The Game Changers* (2010) by a Blogger, [An anonymous blog called **Fake IPL Player** took the world by storm with this book]

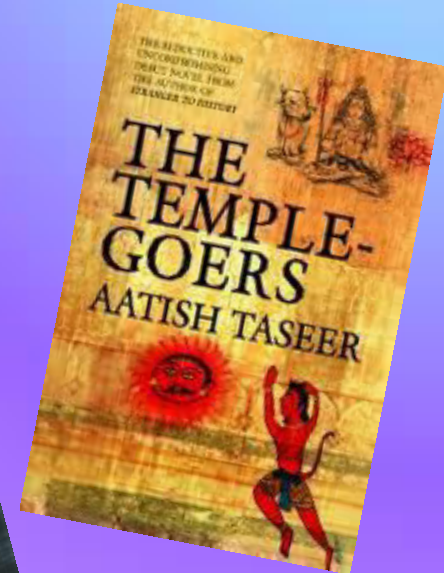


Crime Writing and Murder Mystery

Refers mostly to detective fiction written by an India author.

Examples:

- *The Monochrome Madonna* (2010)
by Kalpana Swaminathan
- *The Man with Enormous Wings*
(2010) by Ester David
- *The Temple Goers* (2010)
by Aatish Taseer



Fantasy Narratives

Narratives of the supernatural, of fictional worlds and of superheroes.

Examples:

- *Turbulence* (2010) by Samit Basu
- *Monkey Man* (2010) by Usha K. R.



Graphic Novels

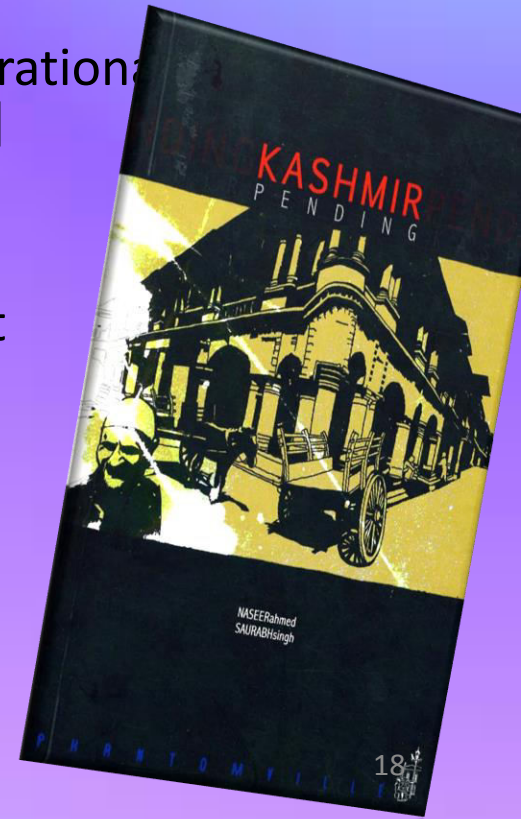
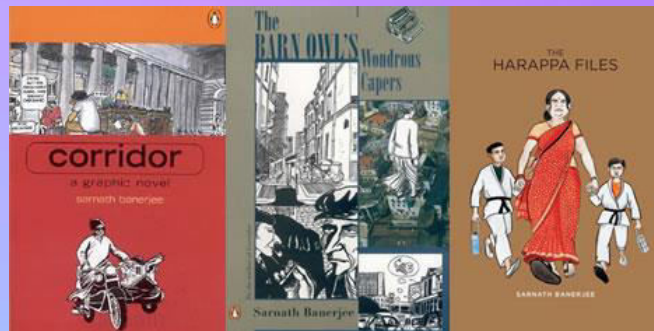
Longer than typical comic books and mostly self-contained rather than continuing stories. In the Indian context they mostly celebrate Indian narrative/religious/political/social histories.

Examples:

The Harappa Files (2011) by Sarnath Banerjee [A generation's cultural museum for an India that is changing at pace.]

Kashmir Pending (2007)

[Graphical description of Kashmir amidst violence, imprisonment and death in full colour.]

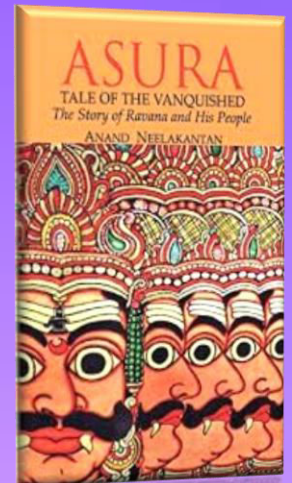
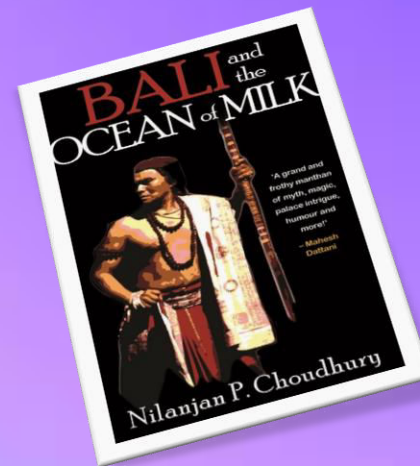
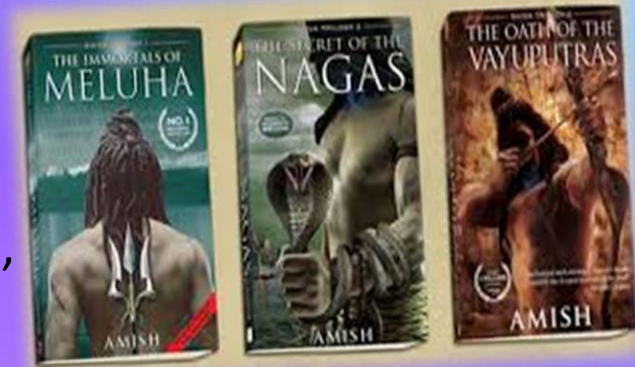


Retelling of Hindu epics and religious stories

Drawing significantly on Hindu Epics and narratives such as The Mahabharata, The Ramayana and the teachings of Vedas and Upanishadas.

Examples:

- Shiva Trilogy by Amish Tripathi [*The Immortals of Meluha* (2010), *The Secret of the Nagas* (2011), *The Oath of the Vayuputras* (2013)]
- *Bali and the Ocean of Milk* (2011) by Nilanjan P. Choudhury
- *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished: The Story of Ravana and His People* by Anand Neelakantan



Publishing Houses Other than Penguin

- Rupa and Co. (Made C B famous)
- Hachette India
- Tranquebar
- Zubaan Books
- Roli and Harper Collins India
- Srishti Publishers (which are cheaper than Penguin's Metro Treads books.)

Such books not only reflect the young generation of Indians doing jobs in a metropolis, but also indicate towards the changes in tastes of a reading public and their sensibilities. One **Example is:** Ravinder Singh's *I Too Had a Love Story* (2008).

Summing up...

- Difficult to project the **future of Indian English Fiction** on the basis of a comparison of the 21st century trends with the experience of the last 50 years of fiction writing.
- Although IEF is enjoying a stage of much higher yield today, still with the **global economic liberalization affecting India** more significantly, it is questionable whether some production and consumption of this type of fiction will remain at the same level of popularity in the future days to come.
- Another important concern being whether **Call-center narratives will wane** if India's service industry changes as part of its response to the ever-changing global economics.

Summing up...

- Increasing no of students in different educational institutes now-a-days are taking **creative writing courses**. The point is that most of them don't read fictions but want to become a writer.
- In the present day India, readers are changing. Hence, the writers too need to change. It is important to find out exactly what it is that **New Emergent India** is trying to read. Serious readers are reading novels as one can refer to **Amazon book reviews** which have exposed many of the complaints people have about a novel.
- It's the New popular fictions that have diverted the attention of every thoughtful intellectual. What is just being done is to create a scene and then populate it with fitting characters. **This may be a threat to the actual temperament of the writer.**
- **So, we should wait and see how 21st century Indian English Fiction takes its own course in the days to come.....**

Thank You for Your Patience



Reference: Varughese, E. D. (2013). *Reading New India: Post Millennial Indian Fiction in English*. London: Bloomsbury.