



Cultural Plurality In Bangalore As Portrayed In Millennium Writings

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Abstract

In the global literary firmament, the young writers of the call-centre generation assume themselves as India's cultural commissars project India as the land of illumination and emancipation, the major Samson's strength lying in the hands of the youth by the boundless consumption of natural as well as human resources. The colossal Indian landscape rejuvenates its cultural identity, plurality and solidarity only through the weapon of education. At present the millennium India is highlighted as the land of IIT companies, the corporate companies in the name of globalization. The globalization which is the important driver of BPOs and call centres leads to the tremendous growth in India to new technologies, new products and also their economic opportunities. Aravind Adiga presents the phase of urbanization and modernization of Indian cities such as New Delhi and Bangalore under the impact of globalization. Bangalore, New Delhi and Mumbai feature as city backdrops in the works of Anjum Hasan, Usha K. R., Aravind Adiga and so on. The themes of new Indian fiction in English take a new turn in this post-millennial era.

Keywords: Globalization, cultural plurality, millennium writings.

In the global literary firmament, the young writers of the call-centre generation assume themselves as India's cultural commissars project India as the land of illumination and emancipation, the major Samson's strength lying in the hands of the youth by the boundless consumption of natural as well as human resources. The colossal Indian landscape, inhabiting nearly one hundred and twenty crores of people of mixed race, class, caste, religion socially but one tenth percent of the elite intelligentsia, rejuvenates its cultural identity, plurality and solidarity only through the weapon of education. India's strength has always been its vibrant youth. The colonial India is painted as a land of rich resources from which the British robbed. The post-colonial India is daubed as a land of poverty with the poor, uncivilized and unhygienic beggars living in platforms. But at present the millennium India is highlighted as the land of IIT companies, the corporate companies in the name of globalization. By outsourcing, the progress of India should be holistic, with the provision of good education, food, clean environment, agriculture, irrigation which can be India's steps towards the centre from the periphery.

Major corporations in developed countries have established BPO divisions in developing countries and India has become a major hub of such operations. Call centres have



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become symbol of growing service economy of the country. This tribe of young generation works while India sleeps. Disquiet luxury has its grip on the new generation with the advent of multinational companies, call centres and outsourcing services. Women in this sector form the major work-force. To become “western” means to lead a party-lifestyle, loose sexual morals and socialite women behaviour. The country is improving by leaps and bounds and very soon, in ten years time, it would not only be like America with drivers, watchmen and masseurs but would be even better than America with servants who happened to become part of the family to help us with our daily needs and necessities.

In India of today, in cities like Bangalore and Gurgaon in Delhi which have been prospering with the establishment of BPO's, call centres, and the I.T. sector, there is a migration of a large portion of the village dwellers to these cities in search of gold-of better opportunities for livelihood and better standards of living. The fact is that not all those who aspire for instant success are rewarded with the same and so there is frustration and the resultant depression leading the protagonist to do away with the person who comes in the way of his ambitions. This is the story of American tragedy and this is what happens in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*. In these tales madness for material success enables one to adopt unscrupulous and evasive strategies to achieve so-called success in life.

Adiga presents the phase of urbanization and modernization of Indian cities such as New Delhi and Bangalore under the impact of globalization. The half-baked Balram from India of Darkness witnessed that the city was growing, yet it had slums behind the malls where the construction workers of the malls were living and defecating in the open. The influence of Globalization and urbanization is simply seen in the Indian cities:

Ten years ago, they say, there was nothing in Gurgaon, just water buffaloes and fat Punjabi farmers. Today it's the *modernist* suburb of Delhi. American Express, Microsoft, all the big American companies have offices there. The main road is full of shopping malls—each mall has a cinema inside! So if Pinky Madam missed America, this was the best place to bring her. [WT 122]

The Indian agricultural lands, its animals and farmers are displaced by the corporate companies in the name of globalization. The farmers mobilise to the cities in seeking jobs.

Places like Gurgaon have been glorified in the novel as being the ‘modernest’ of suburbs in Delhi with the establishment of the offices of giant American companies like American Express and so on. Not only that there are very big shopping malls like the ones in America. All these are proof enough to show India is becoming globalized in the true sense of the world:

Today it's the modernest suburb of Delhi. American express, Microsoft, all the big American companies have offices there. The main road is full of shopping malls—each mall has a cinema inside! So if pinky madam missed America, this was the best place to bring her. [WT 122]

There is a reference to Bangalore also flourishing with signboards of American shops and technology companies. Not only that, the fast pace at which our nation is aping America



not only in constructing malls and dance floors, but Indians are aping the west even in one's dress codes. The writer holds:

I sat outside the mall and wondered what he was doing there. There was a flashing red light on the top floor, and I guessed it was a disco. Lines of young men and women were standing outside the mall, waiting to go up to the red light. I trembled with fear to see what these city girls were wearing. [WT 198]

Bangalore, New Delhi and Mumbai feature as city backdrops in this new fiction and of Bangalore, Nair (2005) writes: "Bangalore, . . . has struck a metropolitan path that is remarkably different than older cities such as Calcutta or Bombay. In this sense, it may indeed be the city of the future" [Nair 21]. The focus of Bangalore as a 'new city' appears in the analysis of Usha K.R.'s *Monkey-Man* (2010), as well as alongside the analysis of *Neti, Neti, Not This, Not This* (2009) by Hasan. In her Bangalore novel, Hasan writes of the three cities, Mumbai, New Delhi and Bangalore:

. . . Bombay, where the bombs could go off any time and the commuter train rides were interminable; Delhi, in whose buses girls carried open safety pins to ward off lecherous, groping men; Bangalore, where too many people killed themselves and where everyone was on his way to getting rich. [Hasan 33]

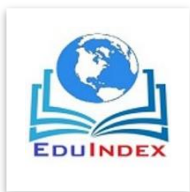
Hasan highlights the differences across these urban centres, the role of the residents' associations as a key middle-class component of urban living in India.

Anjum Hasan's novel *Neti, Neti, Not This, Not This* (2009) charts the life of 25-year-old Sophie Das, born to Bengali parents and brought up in Shillong. Sophie Das has acquired a job in Business Process outsourcing company (BPO) 'Star Titles'. Bangalore, a city awash with BPO activity, results in a struggle for identity and Sophie is not alone in this struggle, as it is also evident that other characters of Hasan's novel are struggling with the same issues. Sophie's boyfriend, Swami, works in a call centre, managing calls from America, problem-shooting credit card terminal and payment service failures. Here, Swami laments the 'unreal' life of BPO activity in Bangalore:

But I *want* their damned credit card terminals and their payment services to work. I want no one in America who calls me to feel like – heck, this guy is useless. The rotten thing is that if there's a real problem, we can't fix it. We can only tell them to wait while the technical guys do their bit. It's not real, what we're doing. That's why it's frustrating – because it's not real. [Hasan 66]

Alongside the assortment of the city's BPO work, another dominant motif of Hasan's novel is the unrealness of Bangalore and its identity as a transient city. Hasan (2008) writes of Bangalore:

And all the while, the little and large squares of land filling up like an animated film with beauty salons, game parlours, jewellery shops, bakeries, clothes stores, cafes, apartment buildings and then, often in just the space of a year, morphing into



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something else – bungalows torn down to make way for office blocks, gift shops becoming travel agencies, internet parlours converted to coffee shops, everything succumbing to this fantastic flux. [Hasan 80]

The catalogue of buildings, services and occupations listed here describe a temporary, often ephemeral Bangalore, an idea that is also embodied in the characters of the novel. Sophie, Swami, Ringo Saar, Maya and Anu are all looking for something in their lives and living in Bangalore is part of this quest. The lives of these characters are in themselves transitory, in the sense that they do not live, settled, routine-like lives. Most BPO activity is synchronized with the time zones of America and the UK, which means that the characters' days begin in the evening in India, resulting in their sleeping through most of the Indian day. In one scene, Sophie asks Rukshana why she is eating cornflakes at night: "Because my day is just beginning, darling", she said, touching her face pack gingerly. "I do the midnight to eight in the morning shift" [Hasan 117].

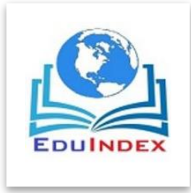
The transitory reality of Bangalore is captured in other parts of the narrative too; at Sophie's employment 'Star Titles', if an employee performs consistently well, they can be promoted to the position of coordinator, a role that is often unoccupied. Hasan (2009) writes:

. . . the coordinator positions were often vacant; coordinators routinely quit because there was no room for them to move up (if they tried they would bump into Maya). And they were too smart to be content with their positions for more than a year or two. All these girls and boys were set to apply to universities abroad; in their minds they were already in Boston or New York or Berkeley . . . [Hasan 41]

Bangalore's inherent commitment to the identity of a changing city and as Nair (2005) writes: ". . . the city of Bangalore has, over the past forty years, been swiftly remapped as a territory for accumulation of economic power on an unprecedented scale" [Nair 345] the diversity of Bangalore is not simply in its various BPO activities, the people and cultures are equally varied and diverse. Moreover, so are the objectives for arrival in Bangalore as Hasan (2009) writes:

Boys from smaller towns in the state coming to study in engineering and medical colleges; girls from the Northeast coming to work as waitresses or run tiny beauty parlours; men and women from one or another big city moving here because Bangalore seemed to urgently need designer boutiques and five-star hotels and architectural firms and advertising companies; couples from the North relocating for software jobs; whole clans moving from neighbouring states to work on construction sites and live in their flimsy plastic tent homes; wave after wave of people arriving and at once establishing their own passage through the city. And the city, as if it were a living thing with a generous heart, taking them all in uncomplainingly. [Hasan 163]

In Bangalore, Sophie mixes with a group of friends, whose activities are mainly visiting malls, drinking in pubs, smoking grass and holding house parties. The pub scene in particular is a large part of Sophie and her friends' lives. Sophie has lived in Bangalore only a



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year and yet her life has been transformed considerably. In Bangalore, she is free in the sense that her life is her own. Hasan (2009) writes:

Sophie possessed all this – the view from the window, the tiny flat and every particle of air in it. She could cook what she liked, smoke to her heart's content . . . For the first time in her life she was free. She stopped pacing around and stood under a fan, sweating and still. [Hasan 30]

In mid-2000s India, it is evident that life for many Indians was changing rapidly, especially Indian youth. 'Young India' is a considerable part of the identity of post-millennial India. Thanks to globalization, urbanization, privatization, off shoring, outsourcing etc. Indian youth has diverse opportunities in the economic world. It gets reflected in Indian English fiction. The themes of new Indian fiction in English take a new turn in this post-millennial era. The caprice of New India is often fixed in a sense of economic growth and prosperity.

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