



One Nation, Many Narratives: Ek Bharat, Shreshth Bharat in Indian English Literature and Vernacular Writing

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Abstract

India's national identity has never been shaped by cultural uniformity; rather, it has evolved through the coexistence of multiple languages, regions, traditions, and social experiences. The vision of Ek Bharat, Shreshth Bharat reinforces this idea by promoting cultural integration, mutual respect, and dialogue among India's diverse communities. Literature plays a vital role in articulating and sustaining this vision because it gives voice to regional realities while simultaneously constructing a shared national imagination. This paper examines how Indian English literature and vernacular writing together reflect and strengthen the ideals of Ek Bharat, Shreshth Bharat. Through a qualitative and comparative analysis of selected works by Rabindranath Tagore, Amitav Ghosh, Premchand, and Mahasweta Devi, the study explores how "many narratives" collectively shape the idea of "one nation." The paper argues that Indian English and vernacular literatures are not competing traditions but complementary cultural forms. While vernacular literature preserves rooted local experiences and foregrounds subaltern voices, Indian English literature functions as a bridge across regions, languages, and global audiences. By fostering empathy, ethical reflection, and cultural dialogue, literature actively contributes to national integration. The study concludes that the literary imagination offers a more inclusive understanding of nationhood than political or administrative frameworks alone, thereby reinforcing the cultural philosophy of Ek Bharat, Shreshth Bharat.

Keywords: Ek Bharat Shreshth Bharat, Indian English literature, vernacular literature, unity in diversity, national identity

Introduction

India represents one of the most complex and enduring models of nationhood in the modern world. Unlike nation-states founded upon linguistic, racial, or cultural homogeneity, India has evolved as a plural and heterogeneous society. Multiple religions, languages, castes, ethnicities, and regional identities coexist within a single political framework. This diversity has frequently been interpreted as a challenge to national unity; however, India's historical and cultural experience suggests that diversity has functioned as a source of strength rather than fragmentation. Indian nationhood has been sustained not through uniformity but through dialogue, accommodation, and coexistence.



The contemporary cultural initiative Ek Bharat, Shreshth Bharat seeks to reaffirm this foundational principle by encouraging cultural exchange, mutual understanding, and emotional integration among different regions and communities of India. While administrative policies and institutional programmes play an important role in strengthening national cohesion, cultural forms—particularly literature—perform a deeper and more lasting function in shaping collective consciousness. Literature enables individuals to encounter unfamiliar lives, empathise with difference, and imagine belonging beyond immediate social or regional boundaries.

Indian English literature and vernacular writing together constitute a rich literary ecosystem that reflects India's plural identity. Indian English literature often addresses pan-Indian and global concerns, allowing narratives to travel across linguistic and geographical borders. Vernacular literature, on the other hand, remains closely rooted in local cultures, oral traditions, and lived social realities. This paper argues that when read together, Indian English and vernacular literatures embody the spirit of Ek Bharat, Shreshth Bharat by presenting India as a nation sustained by multiple, interconnected narratives rather than a singular, centralised story.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws upon three interrelated theoretical perspectives—unity in diversity, cultural pluralism, and comparative literature—to examine how literary narratives contribute to national integration.

Unity in Diversity

The principle of unity in diversity has long been central to Indian philosophical thought and nationalist discourse. Rather than viewing difference as a threat, this principle recognises diversity as the foundation of collective identity. Literary texts embody unity in diversity by representing varied cultural experiences within shared ethical, emotional, and imaginative frameworks. Literature allows multiple voices to coexist without enforcing sameness, thereby nurturing tolerance and mutual respect.

Cultural Pluralism

Cultural pluralism emphasises the coexistence of multiple cultural identities within a shared political and social space. Indian literature reflects this pluralism by accommodating regional, marginalised, and subaltern voices within the broader national narrative. Vernacular literature, in particular, resists cultural homogenisation by foregrounding local traditions, dialects, and social realities. Cultural pluralism ensures that nationhood remains inclusive and participatory rather than exclusionary.



Comparative Literature

The comparative literary approach facilitates dialogue between texts written in different languages and cultural contexts. By comparing Indian English and vernacular writings, this framework avoids hierarchical valuation of languages and instead highlights their interdependence. Comparative reading enables an understanding of the nation as a mosaic of narratives that together shape collective imagination.

Literature Review

The relationship between literature and nationhood has been extensively examined in literary and cultural studies. Benedict Anderson's concept of the nation as an "imagined community" emphasises the role of cultural narratives in enabling individuals to imagine collective belonging beyond direct interaction (Anderson, 2006). Literature provides shared symbols, stories, and emotional experiences that sustain national consciousness.

In the Indian context, Partha Chatterjee (1993) argues that nationalism first emerged within the cultural domain before acquiring political form. During the colonial period, literature became a site for articulating identity, resistance, and moral community. Post-independence Indian literature continues this tradition by interrogating social hierarchies and ethical responsibilities.

Indian English literature has been analysed as a transregional and transnational literary form. Writers such as R. K. Narayan, Salman Rushdie, and Amitav Ghosh employ English as a link language to narrate Indian experiences across cultural boundaries. English enables regional stories to circulate nationally and globally, fostering cross-cultural understanding.

Vernacular literature, meanwhile, has been studied for its deep engagement with local realities. Writers such as Premchand and Mahasweta Devi foreground issues of caste, class, gender, and marginalisation. Their works reveal social realities often absent from elite narratives. However, limited scholarly attention has been given to reading Indian English and vernacular literatures together within the cultural framework of Ek Bharat, Shreshth Bharat. This study addresses this gap through a comparative approach.

Objectives of the Research

- To examine how Indian English and vernacular literatures represent the idea of unity.
- To analyse the role of literature in shaping and sustaining national consciousness in India.
- To explore the complementary relationship between regional narratives and transregional literary forms.



- To establish literature as a cultural practice that supports and strengthens the vision of *Ek Bharat, Shreshth Bharat*.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and comparative methodology. Primary texts are selected from Indian English and vernacular traditions based on their engagement with national, regional, and ethical concerns. Rabindranath Tagore, Amitav Ghosh, Premchand, and Mahasweta Devi represent diverse linguistic, cultural, and ideological perspectives within Indian literature. Secondary sources include critical works on nationalism, literary theory, and Indian cultural studies. Close textual analysis is employed to identify themes of coexistence, social justice, ethical responsibility, and national integration.

Indian English Literature and the Imagination of National Unity

Indian English literature plays a crucial role in articulating a transregional imagination of the nation. Rabindranath Tagore's translated works, particularly *Gitanjali*, articulate a vision of India grounded in universal humanism. Tagore rejected aggressive nationalism and advocated spiritual unity, ethical coexistence, and compassion. His literary vision aligns closely with the cultural ideals of *Ek Bharat, Shreshth Bharat*, which emphasise harmony rather than domination.

Amitav Ghosh's fiction further complicates and enriches this vision. *The Shadow Lines* challenges rigid notions of borders and nationality by foregrounding emotional and historical connections across regions. The novel suggests that political boundaries are fragile constructs when compared to shared memories and relationships. Similarly, *The Hungry Tide* portrays the Sundarbans as a liminal space where human, cultural, and ecological narratives intersect. Ghosh highlights coexistence as both necessary and fragile, reflecting the complexities of national integration in a diverse society.

Vernacular Literature and Rooted National Consciousness

While Indian English literature enables transregional circulation, vernacular literature anchors national consciousness in lived social realities. Premchand's *Godaan* offers a powerful depiction of rural India, exposing caste oppression, economic exploitation, and moral struggle. His portrayal of peasant life generates empathy across linguistic and regional boundaries, reinforcing the idea that national unity must be grounded in social justice.

Mahasweta Devi's writings further extend this ethical dimension. Her stories foreground tribal and marginalised communities whose voices are often excluded from mainstream discourse. Although deeply rooted in specific regions, her works raise national questions



about power, resistance, and human dignity. By foregrounding subaltern experiences, vernacular literature ensures that national integration remains inclusive.

Research Findings

The study finds that Indian English and vernacular literatures together construct a plural and inclusive national identity. Vernacular literature strengthens grassroots representation and ethical awareness, while Indian English literature enables cultural circulation across regions and global platforms. Literature fosters emotional integration beyond administrative frameworks, and the ideals of Ek Bharat, Shreshth Bharat find authentic expression in cultural narratives.

Challenges

A key challenge of this study is the uneven availability of translated vernacular texts, which restricts comprehensive comparative analysis across India's linguistic spectrum. Linguistic mediation also poses interpretive difficulties, as culturally embedded meanings and regional idioms may lose nuance in translation. Additionally, the institutional dominance of English within academic discourse risks overshadowing regional literary traditions, necessitating careful critical balance to avoid hierarchical valuation of languages.

Outcomes

Despite these limitations, the study demonstrates that Indian English and vernacular literatures operate as interdependent cultural forms. Vernacular writing contributes social rootedness and ethical depth, while Indian English literature enables interregional and transnational circulation of narratives. Together, they sustain a plural literary imagination that reflects the ideals of *Ek Bharat, Shreshth Bharat*. The findings affirm literature's role as a cultural medium through which unity in diversity is continuously articulated and experienced.

Suggestions

The study recommends promoting translations of vernacular texts, integrating comparative literary studies into curricula, encouraging literary festivals aligned with Ek Bharat, Shreshth Bharat, and supporting interdisciplinary research linking literature, culture, and policy.

Conclusion

The vision of Ek Bharat, Shreshth Bharat finds rich and meaningful expression in Indian literature. Indian English and vernacular writings together demonstrate that India's unity is sustained not by uniformity but by dialogue among diverse narratives. Literature emerges as a



living cultural practice that nurtures empathy, ethical awareness, and pluralism. By celebrating many narratives, Indian literature continues to imagine and sustain the idea of one nation, offering a humane and inclusive model of national identity.

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