

## ENG 9508: South Asian Literature in English

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### Major Contemporary Bangladeshi Writers Writing in English:

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**African Literature:** Colonization > identity

**Caribbean Literature:** Hybridity > identity

**South Asian Literature:** Diaspora > identity

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### Civilizations: The Birth of South Asia

#### Asian civilizations

South Asia is the center of one of the great ancient civilizations of the world—the Indus Valley civilization in present-day Pakistan and northwestern India.<sup>1</sup> The **Indus civilization** was the earliest known urban culture of the Indian subcontinent—one of the world's three earliest civilizations, along with Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt.

#### What are the 5 ancient civilizations?

Mesopotamia, Ancient Egypt, Ancient India, and Ancient China are believed to be the earliest in the Old World, while the Caral-Supe civilization of coastal Peru and the Olmec civilization of Mexico are believed to be the earliest in the New World.

#### What is the oldest South Asian country?

The fact is that Nepal is the oldest nation-state of Southasia (though nation-building is just beginning some would say), and therefore has probably some level of national self-confidence that can (or should) make it amenable to internalising regionalism more than others. Nepal was officially formed in September 25, 1768

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<https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/ht/02/ssa.html#:~:text=South%20Asia%20is%20the%20center,an%20early%20form%20of%20writing.>

and India was officially formed in August 15, 1947, here you can clearly see the fact that Nepal is 178 years, 10 months, 21 days older than India.

**South Asia includes such countries as** Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and The Maldives. Some people have included Afghanistan and Iran in this list.

**South Asian Literatures in English are also known as** ‘New Literatures in English’, ‘Commonwealth Literature’, or ‘Third World Literature’. The **newer literatures** (both post-1947 and contemporary) fight against the pressures of literary nationality.

### **South Asian Literatures: Periods of Indian Literature in Focus**

Ancient (= the Vedic period: 1500 BC-500 BC: the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*), Late Ancient (= the Epic period: 500 BC-400 AD: the *Mahabharata*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and the *Ramayana*), the Classical period (400-600: the lyrics of Kalidasa), Mediaeval (600-1200), Late Mediaeval (1200-1400), Modern (1860-1947), Postmodern (post-Partition till 1990s), and Contemporary (1990s-present).

### **History of South Asian literatures in English: Choice of Language in Focus**

Thus, in “An Introduction”, Kamala as sums up the Indo English writers' dilemma:

". . . **I am Indian**, very brown, born in Malabar, **I speak three languages, write in / Two, Dream in one**. Don't write in English, they said, / English is not your mother-tongue . . . **Why not let me speak in / any language I like? The language I speak /becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses**, / All mine, mine alone. . . ."

### **Choice of Language among South Asian Writers: Chinua Achebe's "The African Writer and the English Language" (1962)/Imitation followed by Appropriation vs. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's "On the Abolition of the English Department" (1972)/Rejection followed by Resistance**

British historian and politician Thomas Babington Macaulay's "Minute on Indian Education" (1835) had a shaping influence on South Asia. Pre-1835 context was influenced by Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833), whereas post-1835 context influenced Peary Chand Mitra (1814-1883), Ishwar Chandra

Vidyasagar (1820-1891), Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873), Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838-1894), Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Rai Bahadur Dinesh Chandra Sen (1866 – 1939), and Jibanananda Das (1899-1954). For example, Michael Madhusudan Dutt's *Captive Ladie* was published in 1849. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Rajmohan's Wife*, which appeared in 1864, is generally regarded as the first Indian English novel. [Introduction, xiii]

## **Postcolonial Paradigm of South Asian Literatures in English: The Question of the Margin**

The **postcolonial background of South Asian Literature** is visible in its “tension with the imperial power” and its “differences from the assumptions of the imperial center” (Ashcroft et al., 1989, p. 1). The fiction, poetry and drama of many writers bear the imprint of the tensions of the colonial relationship while expressing an incipient nationalism and proclaiming development of a distinct identity.

## **History of South Asian literatures in English: Literatures in Focus**

In fact, the first published book in English by a South Asian was *Travels* (1794) by an Indian Muslim Sake Deen Mohammed.

Drama in South Asian literatures in English is a bit uncultivated area. The number of authors and texts in this case is remarkably less and, mostly, unpopular.

Like in other colonized areas, the early literature from Sri Lanka in English show the limitations of emulation and blind imitation. The writer in Sri Lanka faces the problem of a limited readership/audience.

Any mapping of the terrain of the Sri Lankan novel starts paradoxically with the work of an Englishman Leonard Woolf, whose work *A Village in the Jzingle* (1913) demonstrated its closeness to the local idiom and to the habitual rhythms of Sinhalese expression. It has since been translated into Sinhalese as *Baddeganna*.

As Bruce King comments in his introduction to *Indian English Poetry*:

Indian English poetry is part of the process of modernization which includes urbanization, industrialization, mobility, independence, social change, increased communication ( in the form of films, television, radio, journals and newspapers), national and international transportation networks, mass education and the resulting paradox that as an independent culture emerges it also participate in the international, modem, usually westernized world. (kng, 1987, p3).

**The phases of South Asian Literatures in English:** (a) imitation followed by resistance, (b) rejection followed by realization, and (c) appropriation followed by ‘disalienation’ (Ashcroft et al., 1989, p. 39).

**Certain Common Themes in South Asian literatures in English:** the colonial and East-West encounter, the development of a sense of pride in one's own culture, a preoccupation and experimentation with language and a continuing concern with issues of identity and nationhood.

South Asian Literatures are highly influenced by European Modernism and Avant-gardes Movements as well as European realism.

### **History of South Asian literatures in English: The Proliferation of South Asian Literatures in English at Present**

South Asia now has global audience for their distinctive philosophy, literature, art, film, and music. Like African Literatures, “South Asian culture has become highly popular around the world.” (Brians, 2003, 3)

South Asian writing in English has recently received unprecedented critical and popular attention. [Jaina C. Sanga, 1961, “Introduction”, xiii]

**South Asia is now chic in the West** in the way that Japan was a decade ago. Edward Said, in *Orientalism* (1978), has mentioned that “The East is a career.”

Names like Salman Rushdie, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Amitav Ghosh, Jhumpa Lahiri, Arundhati Roy are familiar to all.

The political history followed by the trauma of partition made post-1947 Indian Literature, post-1947 Pakistani Literature, as well as post-1971 Bangladeshi Literature different from pre-colonial and colonial literatures.

**South Asian Literatures in English are the products of** such complex determinants as the colonial encounter, internal conflicts, birth of new nations, postcolonial experiences, trauma of partition, formation of national identities, political instability, new sensibilities, economic crisis, globalization, migration, imagination, cultural hybridity, digitalization, and mediatization.

Sri Lanka was under the domination of the Portugese (1505-1640), the Dutch (1640-1796) and the British from 1796 until 1948, when it gained freedom on 4 February, 1948. Sri Lanka is linked to the South Asian region by strong ties of history, culture, religion, language and literature.

The growing visibility and presence of the Indian English novel now is tied up to a large extent, with the increasing influence of postcolonial theory and **'third world' intellectuals** on the American academy. The increasing numbers of the **'Third World' cosmopolitan intellectuals** in the U.S. universities has helped in the dissemination and circulation of theories based on newly emerging literatures in English from former colonies. What makes intellectuals like **Gayatri Chakravarti Spivak** and **Homi K. Bhabha** successful is their "mastery over the current idiom of the metropolitan metalanguage of narrative".

## **South Asian Literature in English/Translation: A Booming Industry**

South Asia is not merely a geographical region. The peoples of this area once shared a common civilization and a common historical experience. They also continue to share similar problems of social cohesion and the development of viable authority structures. Contributions to South Asian Studies will publish papers articulating these experiences of the peoples of South Asia, as also on their contemporary problems of authority, cohesion, and development. [Gopal Krishna, 1979, Preface]

It's common knowledge that we live in a boomtime for translations. [Bronner & Hallisey, 2022, 2]

The situation is particularly dire for English translations of texts from South Asia: there is finally a growing body of such works, from masterpieces brought out by the Murty Classical Library of India to contemporary poetry and prose, but hardly any guidance on how to read them and especially how to enjoy them. [Bronner & Hallisey, 2022, 2]

## **South Asianness: Then and Now**

Self-contradictory South Asian Literature: Though 'colonial' and 'postcolonial' are used as well, the idea of "new" literatures also seems to de-emphasise the colonial past and might therefore be preferable to other descriptions.

Questions and problems of address, language and 'Indianness' persist and percolate through to the twentieth century novel as well.

The authors discussed also became internationally famous writing in English (an exception was made for Tagore, who — although he wrote primarily in Bengali — was the first South Asian author to become well known abroad for writing in English). This is to some degree a paradox, for — to give just one example — **perhaps 3 percent of India's population can read English with enough fluency** to enjoy these works in their original form, and relatively few of these books are translated into the national languages of India. They are more likely to

be translated into German, French, or Spanish. The result is that such writing has a much larger audience abroad than at home.

Although many South Asians are proud of the international prominence of writers from their region, many also are resentful that talented authors writing in Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Malayalam, Sinhala, and the other languages of the region remain mostly untranslated and unknown abroad.

Discussions of the role of English in South Asia are endless and often heated. ... People who speak primarily English in South Asia have often been criticized as rootless, inauthentic, and generally unfit to represent their cultures. [Brians, 2003, 4]

It is often claimed that writers creating fiction in English are simply cashing in on a Western appetite for exotica, and perhaps the charge has an element of truth. [Brians, 2003, 4]

The fact is that South Asia has produced an impressive crop of very talented authors who benefit by having an eager international audience for their work. In the long run, their books sell not just because readers abroad are interested in South Asia; those readers often became interested in South Asia in the first place because they liked the books its authors produced. [Brians, 2003, 5]

### **South Asian Politics: Internal Politics of Representation vis-à-vis Delimitation of Knowledge in South Asia**

This is South Asian internal political tendency not to foreground Bangladesh. For example, Modmodern Indian Poetry: An Anthology has included Jibanananda Das (1899-1954), but has excluded Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976).

### **Teaching-learning materials**

<b>Primary texts</b>	<b>Mid</b>  Arundhati Roy, <i>The God of Small Things</i> Salman Rushdie, "Shame" <i>Niaz Zaman, 1971 and After: Selected Stories</i> (Selections) Jibanananda Das, <i>Selected Poetry</i> (Selections) Wimalaratne Kumaragame, "Herat Hami" Choden, Kunzang, <i>Bhutanese Tales of the Yeti</i> (Selections) Alice Spencer (ed.), <i>Folk Tales of the Maldives</i> (Selections)  <b>Final</b>  Khaled Hosseini, <i>The Kite Runner</i> Rabindranath Tagore, "The Cabuliwallah" Amitav Ghosh, "The Fruits of the Nutmeg Have Died" Valmiki, "Rama and Sita"
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	<p>Mirabai, “Guide this little boat”  Kamala Das: “The Looking-Glass”, “The Invitation”  Badiuzzaman (ed.), <i>Lok-Shahitya (Vol. 13): Mantra</i> (Selections)  Fakir Lalon, “In alif, laam, mim”  Muhammdad Iqbal, <i>The Secrets of the Self</i> (Selections)  Laxmiprasad Devkota, <i>Nepali Visions, Nepali Dreams: The Poetry of Laxmiprasad Devkota</i> (Selections)</p>
<b>Recommended Texts for further study</b>	<p>Alamgir Hashmi, <i>Pakistani Literature: The Contemporary English Writers</i> (1987)  Ingemar Grandin, <i>Modern Nepali Literature: Nepalese Progressive Songs Under Panchayat Democracy</i> (1994)  James Fisher, <i>Folk Literature of South Asia: Three Nepalese Jokes</i> (1975)  Lakdasa Wickramasinha, <i>The Poetry of Sri Lanka: Recipe for a Sinhalese Novel</i> (1976)  Rabindranath Tagore (author), Fakrul Alam (editor), Radha Chakravarty (editor), <i>The Essential Tagore</i> (2011)  Rabindranath Tagore, <i>Selected Stories of Rabindranath Tagore</i> (2014)  Reynolds - An Anthology of Sinhalese Literature of the Twentieth Century (2004)  Sir Ranulph and Fiennes Douglas, <i>House of Snow: An Anthology of the Greatest Writing About Nepal</i> (2001).  Waqas Ahmad Khwaja, <i>Cactus: An Anthology of Pakistani Literature</i> (1985)  Waqas Khwaja and Iftikhar Arif, <i>Modern Poetry of Pakistan</i> (2011)</p>
<b>References</b>	<p>Aliva Mishra, <i>Islamic Fundamentalism in Pakistan and Bangladesh, 1980-2005</i> (2009)  Ania Loomba and Ritty A. Lukose (eds.), <i>South Asian Feminisms</i> (2012)  Anindya Raychaudhuri, <i>Narrating South Asian Partition: Oral History, Literature, Cinema</i> (2018)  Bill Ashcroft, <i>The Post-Colonial Studies Reader</i> (1995)  Bronner and Hallisey, <i>Sensitive Reading: The Pleasures of South Asian Literature in Translation</i> (2022)  Dimitrova, D. (2014). <i>The Other in South Asian Religion, Literature and Film: Perspectives on Otherism and Otherness</i>. Routledge.  Eagleton, T. (2013). <i>How to read literature</i>. New Haven: Yale University Press.  Goutam Karmakar and Zeenat Khan (Eds.), <i>Narratives of Trauma in South Asian Literature</i> (2022)  Karn, Sanjan Kumar, <i>This is How I Can Write: Towards Nepalese English Literature</i> (2013)  Mehrotra, A. K. (2003). <i>A History of Indian Literature in English</i>. Columbia University Press.  Minoli Salgado, <i>Writing Sri Lanka: Literature, Resistance and the Politics of Place</i> (2007)  Raychaudhuri, A. (2018). <i>Narrating South Asian Partition: Oral History, Literature, Cinema</i>. Oxford University Press.  Sirājula Isalāma Caudhurī, Fakrul Alam, Firdous Azim, <i>Politics and Culture: Essays in Honour of Serajul Islam Choudhury</i> (2002)  Toshie Awaya and Kazuo Tomozawa, <i>Inclusive Development in South Asia</i> (2022)</p>