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Research Paper

Nationalism in Transition: How Indian Books Show the Change Before and After Independence

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ABSTRACT

This writing looks into how the idea of nationalism changes in Indian books. It checks what things were common in books written before India got free and what things show up after it did. Before 1947, many books helped to push back against British rule. They tried to make people feel like one big group by talking about loving their country, bringing back old customs, and making society better. But after India became independent, the stories in books changed. They started talking about feeling sad because things weren't perfect. They showed how hard it was to split the country during Partition. They also looked closely at how the country was being built, if politics were honest, and how different areas of India had their own identities. By checking out some important books, this writing tries to show how the way people saw India and what it means to be Indian really changed over time.

1. Introduction

1.1 Understanding Indian Nationalism through Books

The idea of nationalism isn't set in stone. It keeps changing as stuff happens in history, because of different political ideas, and as society changes. In India, talking about nationalism is extra tricky. That's because India has a long history of lots of different ways of life, languages, and religions. Plus, there was a long fight to get rid of British rulers. Indian books, in lots of different languages, have been super important for sharing, creating, and sometimes questioning what the idea of India even is. This writing wants to carefully look at pre- and post-independence Indian books and how they talk about nationalism. It says that there was a big change in what they talked about. At first, books shared a hopeful and united idea. Then, they became more critical, broken up, and thoughtful. By looking at some well-known books, we can follow this change and learn how big moments in history have changed the way writers think about the country. Before India was free, books were like loud calls for freedom. They used stories to get people excited, respect the past, and dream about being free. After independence finally came, the joy didn't last. There were tough things to deal with like Partition, tricky politics, and not everything being equal for people. Because of this, people had to rethink what India and nationalism meant. This led to books that were more careful and often critical.

2. Pre-Independence Literature: Making a United Country

In the years before 1947, Indian books mostly showed a strong feeling of wanting to be free. They were a way to wake people up and bring them together. Back then, the main thing was to describe what being Indian meant, especially compared to the British.

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2.1. *Fighting British Rule with Patriotic Feelings*

One big thing that writers talked about was how bad British rule was and how much they wanted freedom. They showed how the British were taking advantage of India's money, controlling politics, and hurting Indian culture. This made people angry and ready to fight back. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya's book *Anandamath* (1882) is a good example. It has the song *Vande Mataram* in it, which became a saying for the freedom movement. Even though some people later had problems with what the song meant, it definitely helped people feel like they could stand up to British rule. Also, Rabindranath Tagore, even though he changed his mind about nationalism later, wrote poems like *Where the Mind is Without Fear* that showed a deep love for India and wanting it to be free. Hindi writers, like Premchand, also showed problems with British plans. He wrote about poor farmers and people and connected their suffering to the unfair British system. In books like *Godaan* (1936), he showed how people were poor and owed money because of British rules about land. This hinted that getting free was the only way to make things better. Other languages had books with similar ideas. For example, Malayalam poet Kumaran Asan wrote about making society better and also about wanting India to be free.

2.2. *Making the Past Look Good and Bringing Back Culture*

To challenge the British view that India was stuck in the past, Indian writers often talked about the country's former greatness. They revisited old texts, celebrated historical figures, and remembered traditional practices. They wanted to prove that India had a rich culture long before the British arrived. The main idea was to instill a sense of pride and self-respect in Indians, which was seen as important for uniting the country. For instance, in Bengal, folks became really interested in ancient Sanskrit writings and Indian philosophies. People like Swami Vivekananda, while not writers in the strict sense, had a huge influence by arguing for India's spiritual superiority. This interest in the past also showed up in tales and plays about Indian heroes like Shivaji and Tipu Sultan. These figures became symbols of resistance and national pride. The rediscovery of old Indian art, music, and philosophies became a key part of this movement. It was a way to push back against British views and show that India had its own unique and valuable heritage.

2.3. *Making Society Better to Help India Become Free*

For lots of folks dreaming of a free India, it wasn't just about getting the British out. They also really wanted to fix the messed-up stuff happening inside the country. They looked at things like the unfair caste system, that awful untouchability thing, how women were treated unequally, and those super strict religious rules and thought, This is not right. They figured India couldn't truly be free unless everyone tackled these problems head-on. Books became a super important way to talk about these issues and push for a society where everyone got a fair shake. Premchand's writings are a big deal here. Books like *Sevasadan* (which means *The Abode of Service*, written in 1919) and *Nirmala* (from 1927) really showed how much women were hurting. And short stories like *Sadgati* (*The Deliverance*, 1931) made it clear just how awful it was to treat people as untouchable. These stories basically said that India's freedom depended on its people being free from these terrible social problems. He once wrote a story describing a poor man, who belongs to a low caste, who died because of hard labor and mistreatment. It showed the cruelty and injustice suffered by those deemed untouchable.

Mahatma Gandhi's teachings, especially his big focus on helping the poor and downtrodden, had a huge on this kind of writing. The idea was that freedom wasn't just about politics; it was about making sure everyone in society had a better life. As Gandhi said, *Be the change that you wish to see in the world*. Gandhi's idea of *Swaraj*, or self-rule, wasn't just about kicking out the British. He was aiming for a society where everyone was treated fairly, equally, and with care, especially those who needed it most. This idea had a big effect on the books being written back then. You'd often see stories about fighting for the country's freedom mixed with stories about trying to fix those old, unfair practices. People would gather and listen attentively to Gandhi's speeches. Gandhi's simple living style became a part of the soul for people at that time. Take Raja Rao's novel *Kanthapura* (from 1938), for example. It shows a village in South India that's all caught up in Gandhi's movement. The book puts together the fight for social change with the fight against British rule. It kind of argues that what's happening locally is all tied up with the bigger goal of Indian freedom. The story makes it clear that wanting freedom was both a fight against colonial rule from the outside and a fight to create a fairer, more equal society from the inside. People in the villages supported those freedom fighters by providing food, shelter and information. The whole village stood together no matter what the situation was and gave their support to the Independence.

3. **Post-Independence Literature: Feeling Let Down, Seeing Differences, and Speaking Out**

When India became free in 1947, it was a happy moment, but it was followed by the sad time of Partition and lots of problems in building a new country. Books written after independence show a more complex and critical idea of nationalism. They don't just tell one simple story.

3.1. *The Sadness of Partition and Feeling Let Down*

Right after independence, many books talked about the violence, people moving, and fighting between religions that came with Partition. This event ruined the dream of a united country. It showed how easily people could be divided and how hurtful politics could be. Writers wrote about loss, people moving, memories, and the emotional pain caused by the killings.

Saadat Hasan Manto's short stories, like *Toba Tek Singh* and *Khol Do*, tell shocking stories about how crazy and cruel Partition was. They made people wonder what the new borders even meant. Amrita Pritam's book *Pinjar* (1950) talks about how women were kidnapped and hurt during Partition. It shows that women suffered in unique ways and how their bodies became symbols for national and religious identity. Khushwant Singh's book *Train to Pakistan* (1956) shows a clear picture of the violence in a village near the border. It tells how regular people's lives were forever changed by political choices. These books showed a deep feeling of sadness about what happened after independence.

3.2. *Saying What's Wrong with Politics and Unequal Society*

As things moved forward, books started to shine a light on the government's flaws, the increasing dishonesty in politics, and the ongoing unfairness in society. The dream of a truly fair society seemed to be fading. This led writers to question what the government was doing. For example, Mahasweta Devi, through her Bengali books like *Agnigarbha* (1978), directly criticized how tribal groups and mistreated people were being exploited by the government and other figures with influence. She showed that the power differences were still causing major issues. Likewise, U.R. Ananthamurthy's book *Samskara* (1965) discusses the rigid rules and insincere actions within the Brahmin caste system. It pointed out that old prejudices were still present, even in a country that was meant to be modern and progressive.

The persistence of poverty, caste discrimination, and gender inequality, even with the constitution's promises of better treatment, became a common theme in literature. This pushed writers to concentrate on internal issues within India, rather than just focusing on the past criticisms of British rule. They started looking at the issues within their own society and holding a mirror up to its problems, pushing for self reflection and progress. They wrote about the daily lives of ordinary people, trying to capture the truth of their current situations and advocate for change from inside. They talked about the struggles and disappointments that people faced when the reality of their country did not match the ideals written in their constitution. They voiced the thoughts of many people struggling with existing inequality. They questioned the country's direction. Writers weren't just recording history, they were urging action.

3.3. *Finding Identity, Showing Regions, and Seeing a Broken Country*

Once India gained its freedom, something interesting happened: people started paying closer attention to their local cultures and languages. This became even more noticeable after the country's states were reorganized in the 1950s. Suddenly, books in various Indian languages began to focus on local stories and traditions. And so the idea of a single, unified Indian identity? Well, that became a bit more complicated. If you were to ask someone, What does it mean to be Indian? you'd likely get a whole bunch of different answers, depending on who you asked and where they were from. Take Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, published in 1981, as a perfect example of this fractured national identity. Through the life of Saleem Sinai, whose fate is intertwined with India's birth, Rushdie explores the chaotic and diverse nature of India following British rule. The novel is filled with a multitude of voices and narratives, painting a broad and complex picture of the country.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, which came out in 1997 and is set in Kerala, looks closely at regional identity, caste, and social class. Roy shows how local stories are connected to bigger national narratives, and she exposes the deep-seated inequalities within Indian society. The book isn't just about Kerala; it uses the local setting to reflect larger issues affecting the entire nation. In addition, Dalit literature, especially in Marathi, played a big part in how marginalized people expressed their identities and demanded change. Writers like Namdeo Dhasal and Baburao Bagul wrote powerfully about their experiences with discrimination and injustice. They challenged the dominant narratives of those in the higher castes, asking for recognition and equal rights within India. Their writings brought the struggles of the Dalit community to the forefront, pushing for a more inclusive and equitable society. They asked people to rethink what it meant to be Indian, including the experiences of those who had long been pushed to the margins.

4. Final Thoughts: How Indian Nationalism Keeps Changing

Looking at how books talk about nationalism before and after independence shows a big change. At first, nationalism was united and focused on getting freedom and showing a common identity against British rule. Books from this time were often hopeful. They made the past look great and dreamed of a perfect future. They emphasized working together and making sacrifices to create one Indian identity, but this had some problems that would show up later.

But when independence came, it brought tough things with it. The pain of Partition, the problems of building a country, the rise of dishonest politics, and the continued unfairness of society made people rethink nationalism. Books became more thoughtful and often spoke out against problems. They talked about the promises of freedom that hadn't been kept, the problems within the country, and the different sides of Indian identity. The focus changed from fighting together to how individuals felt within a country that had problems. It also changed from telling one story to celebrating regional, language, and less-known identities. Basically, books before independence helped to define what India could be. Books after independence have kept asking what India is and who really belongs. This makes sure that the idea of Indian nationalism keeps changing and showing the different realities of the country. The change from a united nationalism before independence to a more critical look after independence shows how books can create and break down the idea of a country.

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