

# Literary Representations of Popular Indian Festivals in Indian English Fiction

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**Abstract:** The paper examines how Indian English novel writers use Indian festivals as a contextual backdrop and storytelling tool to go beyond the traditional rituals and festivities by introducing complex characters that have to deal with emotional complexities of moral, emotional, and social change. Drawing on postcolonial theory, symbolic anthropology, and cultural aesthetics, the paper shows how festival rituals become signs of identity, conflict, and renewal in the hands of authors like Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan, Arundhati Roy, Salman Rushdie, Jhumpa Lahiri, Amitav Ghosh, and Rohinton Mistry. For example, Holi and Diwali show different ideas about freedom and inequality, while Durga Puja celebrates the strength of women and cultural pride. These festivals combine religious and everyday life, which you can see in modern India's mix of faith, shopping, nostalgia, and criticism. The paper also discusses how Indian communities overseas reinvent festivals to foster a sense of belonging and remembrance of their homeland despite displacement. The paper examines festivals as part of India's moral and cultural calendar, an interactive mix of myth, ritual, and storytelling. To conclude, the paper argues that Indian English novels celebrate and renew Indian culture through festivals, embodying a flexible, strong, self-renewing culture as described by Kapila Vatsyayan.

**Keywords:** *Indian English Fiction, Festival Representation, Cultural Identity, Postcolonial Aesthetics, Sacred and Secular, Narrative Symbolism.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. Background and Context

Festivals in India also serve as important social, spiritual, and emotional reference points, impacting communal life while summing up mythic content, memory, and moral vision. They integrate religious fervour, creative manifestation, and communal involvement, and so influence both rural and urban settings. In Indian English writing, festivals also often act as narrative structures which give voice to themes of identity, placement, and individual transformation. Ashis Nandy presupposes that the festivals in India “contain the codes of resistance and reconciliation which are at the core of Indian civilisation” [52]. Since the early twentieth century, novelists like Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan, Anita Desai, Salman Rushdie, and Arundhati Roy have metaphorically employed festival-based stories. In these stories, they point to the contradictions and strains between science and religion, old traditional society and new age, and local culture and universal culture. Their depictions of the festivals Holi, Diwali, Durga Puja,

Janmashtami, Pongal, and Onam provide us with an insight into the workings of present-day Indian culture.

### B. Research Problem and Rationale

Whereas Indian English fiction has comprehensively been read in terms of postcoloniality, feminism, and diasporicity, festival depictions as cultural negotiation spaces have scarcely been explored. More scholarship presents festivals in the background or ethnographically than holds them central to symbolic meaning in relation to narrative and plot. Most scholarship engages with identity and hybridity to the neglect of analyzing how festivals function in initiating social transformation, individual change, or moral understanding. This research bridges that gap in examining festivals in terms of narrative function that exhibits continuity and transformation in Indian culture. By exploring Hindu festivals in Indian English fiction, the paper aims to understand how writers turn ritual and celebration into metaphors of cultural introspection. As Homi Bhabha notes, cultural symbols “gain vitality through their translation into new contexts of meaning” [7]. Indian

English novelists reimagine festivals as a space where modernity, memory, and identity meet.

### C. Objectives of the Study

The objective of this paper will be to:

- Analyze the cultural representation of significant Hindu festivals in Indian English texts.
- Study how these depictions depict the moral, emotional, and political dimensions of Indian existence.
- Understand how the symbolism in festivals intersects with issues of gender, class, ecology, and spirituality.
- Observe the development of festival depiction from early nationalist writings to present-day diasporic accounts.

By these targets, the research endeavors to contextualize the festival both as a cultural product and narrative mode that allows writers to engage with questions of identity and transformation.

### D. Research Questions

The following questions guide the research:

- How do Indian English novelists employ festivals to depict moral, social, and emotional conflicts?
- In what ways do these representations reveal the transformation of Indian cultural identity across time and geography?
- How does the festival serve as a symbolic framework for exploring the sacred and the secular dimensions of modern life?

These questions frame the analysis within a broader dialogue on how Indian fiction internalises and reinterprets indigenous cultural experiences through English literary forms.

### E. Methodology

The study uses a qualitative and interpretative methodology founded upon textual examination and cultural hermeneutics. A set of novels by leading authors, including Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan, Arundhati Roy, Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Amitav Ghosh, has been taken into account, and how they depict Hindu festivals has been investigated. A postcolonial and cultural model of analysis has been carried out on each text to see how ritual practice and religious symbolism complete character development, evolution in the narrative, and ideological examination.

It draws on theory from postcolonial criticism [7] [67], symbolic anthropology [31] [74], and cultural aesthetics [60] [52]. This interdisciplinary framework allows the text to understand festivals as live cultural events that draw attention to the intercrossings of belief, authority, and sentiment in Indian society.

### F. The Festival as a Cultural Signifier

Festivals in Indian narratives also depict varying aspects of societal life. They depict conflict between feelings of devotion and passion, and between disorder and order. In Arundhati Roy's setting of the vibrant festival of Holi in "The God of Small Things" [65], issues of gender

and caste hierarchies come to the fore. In Aravind Adiga's "The White Tiger" [1], the conflict between development and personal morality appears in the setting of Diwali, the festival of lights. Such depictions depict festivals in an ever-changing light and respond to contemporary social and cultural issues. They also address India's religious diversities, such as in Raja Rao's Janmashtami in "The Serpent and the Rope" [64], where religious play and philosophical reflection blend, and in Lahiri's Durga Puja in "The Lowland" [41], in which issues of political violence, disintegrating family life, and feminine power figure.

### G. The Role of Exploring Festivals in Literary Contexts

Looking at how Indian English writers describe festivals helps us understand how they balance cultural memories with current experiences. In the text-based tradition, festivals become discursive domains where several perspectives co-exist. They exemplify writers' reinterpretation of native rituals into artistic innovations that have significance both to Indian and international readerships.

Moreover, such examination promotes the debate on cultural sustainability at large. With the nation undergoing fast urbanization and exposure to global culture, imagined festivals become cultural texts of tradition, endurance, and change in literature. They record how the sacred gets reconceptualized under a secular setting and how public euphoria endures amid societal disintegration.

By placing research in this tradition of interpretation, the essay not only adds to the scholarship of Indian literary criticism but also points up the resilience of Indian cultural identity. Festivals, in the Indian English context, then become potent signs of survival, transformation, and the continuing negotiation between tradition and newer life.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### A. Symbolism of Culture and Religion in Indian English Novels

Indian English writing often analyzes the religious by revivifying festivals into expressions of collective feeling. In his Indian novel, Raja Rao mentions how festivals embody the metaphysical rhythm in Indian cultural existence [63]. Writers like R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, and Salman Rushdie incorporate festivals into their storylines to highlight the everyday nature of religiosity. Commentators, such as K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, note that Indian writers in English utilize cultural symbols to define both inward and outward experiences [34]. A. K. Ramanujan suggests that the dependency on ritual and narrative schema in literature betrays a concealed moral aspect in which festivals function as fundamental rhythmic units of narration rather than rhetorical frills [60].

### B. Anthropological and Literary Approaches to Ritual and Festival

The anthropological study of ritual has provided critical tools for literary scholars to interpret festivals. Victor Turner's concept of "liminality" [74] and Clifford Geertz's

“thick description” [31] make it possible to view festivals as performance events that create meaning by participation and emotion. In describing Holi or Diwali, authors create a cultural text that must be interpreted. Indian scholars T. N. Madan and Milton Singer explain how ritual achieves social unity in a number of contexts. Rituals influence literary narratives of festivals, particularly in contexts with multiple castes or religions, where conflict between communal identity and personal freedom informs the scene.

Recent scholarship bridges anthropology and literary studies. For instance, Vasudha Dalmia argues that the narrative use of festivals mirrors “the dialectic between the performative and the textual” [19]. Similarly, Arvind Sharma notes that the symbolic repetition of mythic acts in fiction renews ethical discourse within secular spaces [71]. This convergence of anthropology and literary hermeneutics has encouraged re-readings of Indian English novels as modern ritual performances.

#### C. Festivals and the Formation of Indian Cultural Identity

Festivals in Indian literature symbolize the making of national and cultural identity. Meenakshi Mukherjee observes that post-Independence novels utilize native symbols - rituals, festivals, epics to proclaim a unique identity away from colonial aesthetics [50]. Rushdie’s “Midnight’s Children” uses Diwali to illustrate the tenuous birth of a new nation, while Roy’s “The God of Small Things” transfigures Holi into transgression against caste. Critics such as A. Chaudhuri and Dey illustrate how the representation of festivals in fiction illustrates both continuity and break in Indian modernity, mediating between spirituality and materialism, and illustrating India’s hybridity, where devotion, consumption, and nostalgia converge [15] [23]. Diasporic narratives such as Lahiri’s “The Lowland” and Mukherjee’s “The Middleman” represent festivals as bearers of cultural memory and sense of home abroad, confirming their function as permanent identity markers in changing socio-cultural landscapes [41] [48].

#### D. Feminine Archetypes and the Festival of the Goddess

Feminist scholars explore gender, religion, and culture in Indian fiction, connecting Durga Puja and Navaratri to female power [21] [26]. Jain notes that goddess invocation symbolizes recovering suppressed feminine energy [35]. In Lahiri’s “The Lowland,” Durga Puja parallels Gauri’s assertion against societal constraints [41], while Divakaruni’s “The Palace of Illusions” presents Draupadi as Shakti during Navaratri [27]. Bordia and Loomba highlight festivals as spaces where the personal becomes political and myth critiques power, sexuality, and autonomy [10] [44]. Consequently, feminist analysis broadens festival interpretation beyond rituals to issues of power and morality.

#### E. Agrarian and Regional Festivals in Indian Fiction

While critical attention has been given to urban and pan-Indian festivals, scholars have increasingly shown interest in regional celebrations like Pongal, Onam, and Baisakhi, which reflect India’s ecological and labor ethos

[63] [68]. In literature, Pongal in R. K. Narayan’s “The Vendor of Sweets” symbolizes domestic reconciliation [55], and Onam in Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai’s “Chemmeen” signifies sea fertility and desire’s moral toll. Studies by S. Devadasan and P. N. Bhaskar emphasize how these festivals preserve memory and survival amid industrialization [22] [8]. These views broaden festival studies beyond religion to include ecology, labor, and regional diversity, often overlooked in mainstream criticism.

#### F. Theoretical Frameworks: Postcolonialism, Cultural Aesthetics, and Symbolic Interactionism

The study of festivals uses diverse theories. Postcolonial theory views festivals as cultural assertions and hybridity. Cultural aesthetics, based on Coomaraswamy and Vatsyayan, place festivals within India’s worldview where art, religion, and ethics meet [18] [75]. Symbolic interactionism, by Blumer, explains how rituals create shared, evolving meanings through social interaction [9]. Combined, these views see literary festivals as living semiotic systems, with authors navigating individual creativity and cultural codes. Nahal notes, “The Indian English novel, in translating ritual into fiction, performs an act of cultural continuity” [51].

#### G. The Identified Gaps in Existing Literature

The literature survey shows an increasing fascination with Indian English fiction, particularly its cultural and religious symbolism. Yet, no systematic examination has been made of the festivals as unifying thematic structures. Rituals, in the available analyses, are treated in isolation as a social context or as an exotic garnish, not considered in their structural, psychological, and moral roles across various writers and genres. The current study attempts to incorporate festival representation in an overarching interpretative framework, assimilating anthropological, feminist, and postcolonial readings. Festivals are presented as vibrant dialogues of culture, shaping contemporary Indian awareness, rather than lingering artifacts of tradition.

### III. THE FESTIVAL AS A NARRATIVE AND SYMBOLIC DEVICE

#### A. The Festival as a Cultural Text

Festivals in Indian English fiction serve as structural and symbolic events shaping narratives, presenting society’s values and anxieties. Clifford Geertz’s idea that “culture is an ensemble of texts to be read” [31] frames festivals as performative texts, storytelling acts merging myth, memory, and moral order. Authors show this performative aspect through festivals like Holi, Diwali, and Durga Puja, where characters change. Victor Turner believed that rituals reflect social life [74]. For instance, Rao’s Janmashtami in “The Serpent and the Rope” represents deep self-reflection [64], while Narayan’s Pongal in “The Vendor of Sweets” shows family reconciliation [55]. These festivals serve as essential story elements that connect the sacred and the everyday.

#### B. Ritual, Myth, and Temporality in Fictional Form

Ritual and myth serve as organising principles of time and meaning in literature. Eliade refers to the concept of

sacred time [30], which shows how festivals disrupt linear time by allowing the past to re-enter the present. Novelists incorporate festivals to suspend historical time, fostering collective memory and spiritual renewal. In Rushdie's "Midnight's Children," Diwali links national independence with cosmic renewal, illuminating moral ambiguity in postcolonial freedom [66]. Roy's "The God of Small Things" uses Holi to mark a threshold between innocence and transgression, collapsing social boundaries through color [65]. The festival acts as a transformative axis for personal and political change. Ramanujan describes this as a "feedback loop where myth informs life and life rewrites myth" [60]. This shows how festivals in India emphasize a circular view of time, unlike Western ideas of progress. Every ritual renewal reflects both personal and societal renewal, a theme that is also seen in the structure and themes of the novel.

### *C. The Festival as a Space of Transgression, Reconciliation, and Renewal*

Anthropologists and critics see festivals as liminal spaces where boundaries blur, with Turner's "communitas" describing temporary egalitarian states during rituals [74]. During Holi in Indian English fiction, Roy's festival scene symbolizes rebellion against caste and gender norms, while Desai's portrayal in "Fire on the Mountain" reflects alienation through the absence of festivity [20]. Lahiri's Durga Puja also depicts transgression and renewal, with divine triumph mirroring inner struggles and moral reflection [42]. Overall, festivals in literature expose societal fault lines, caste, economic disparities, and gender issues while fostering hope through fleeting moments of collective harmony, creating moral drama without preaching.

### *D. The Role of Festivals in Character and Plot Development*

Festivals in Indian English novels are sites of social or psychological change, being both narrational sites of punctuation as well as initiators of character development. The stories reveal the underlying conflicts, either leading to change or catastrophe. In Adiga's "The White Tiger," Diwali contrasts the protagonist's moral decline amidst lights and fireworks [1]. As Balram's ethical darkness deepens, he symbolizes how capitalism corrupts virtue. The festival becomes ironic, with light representing moral blindness. In R. K. Narayan's "The Guide," a festival during Raju's spiritual change becomes a communal ritual [54]. The story shows how the local villagers expect divine intervention, thereby blurring the line between actor and saint, while turning redemption into spectacle. In contrast, Rohinton Mistry in "A Fine Balance" uses Diwali lamps amid poverty to highlight resilience [47]. The festival makes people think about themselves, showing how light and darkness exist together. It shows how feelings can change from being innocent to mature, from not knowing to knowing, or from being divided to being united.

### *E. Festivals as Instruments of Social Commentary*

The literary festival reveals the novelist's ethical engagement with society. Writers often critique the erosion of spiritual values under modernity through festivals. P. Lal

noted that Indian fiction reinterprets the sacred to show moral decay as civilizations forget their myths [43]. Adiga's Diwali satirizes how sacred rituals become consumerist spectacles, while Rushdie's scenes reveal political fragmentation behind national celebrations. Roy's Holi shows social liberation constrained by prejudice, turning festivities into symbols of contradiction [65]. These portrayals suggest that festival beauty often masks moral ambiguity. Conversely, Rao and Narayan depict festivals to reaffirm Indian ethics, emphasizing renewal through introspection [62] [53]. The contrast between early spiritual introspection and contemporary irony traces India's evolving cultural consciousness.

### *F. The Interplay of the Sacred and the Secular*

Indian festivals, based in religiosity, come up against contemporary secularity, and literature documents the meeting. Ahmad points out that "the sacred in Indian fiction survives by adapting to secular idioms" [2]. Festivals in foreign lands typically attempt to maintain all ritual, yet they gain new significations such as nostalgia, displacement, or commodification. Ghosh's "The Hungry Tide" juxtaposes Durga Puja's religious imagery against an environmental sense of concern, recasting the goddess's prowess as green ethics [32]. Lahiri's "The Namesake" positions Bengali festivals in the migrant existence, where ritual provides solace as well as alienation [42]. These redefinitions show that sacred and secular are connected and constantly change through stories, proving that cultures can adapt over time. In modern literature, rituals in Indian festivals bring people together and reflect shared values. Novelists maintain tradition's effervescence while critiquing its paradoxes.

## **IV. HOLI: COLOR, CHAOS, AND CARNIVALESQUE FREEDOM**

### *A. Holi as Celebration and Assertion*

Holi is a popular Indian festival, full of color and fun with gay abandon. It also celebrates the victory of faith over unfair rulers. During Holi, people play with colors, music, and jokes, often breaking social rules. Literature uses Holi as a metaphor for freedom, moral inversion, and emotional release. Victor Turner's concept of liminality describes these moments as "betwixt and between" daily structures [74]. Indian novelists since the mid-20th century, like Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai, and Kiran Desai, depict Holi as revealing submerged emotions and tensions, aligning with Bakhtin's 'carnavalesque' idea of chaos and subversion [6]. Its connection to Krishna's playful subversions in Vrindavan, where the divine joins worldly delight, adds theological legitimacy to its liberating nature. A. K. Ramanujan notes, "The festival of color is India's annual permission to dissolve boundaries, between caste and gender, god and man, self and other" [60], making it a potent metaphor for self-realization and rebellion in fiction.

### *B. Holi and the Feminine Expression*

Several feminist readings view Holi as a festival of embodied freedom, where women temporarily reclaim autonomy over their bodies and emotions. Jasbir Jain notes that "Holi allows female characters to articulate desire in a



culture that silences it” [36]. In Roy’s novel and Deshpande’s “That Long Silence,” Ammu and Maya embody this reclaiming, using the festival as a silent rebellion against patriarchy [65] [21]. In her book “Sister of My Heart” (1999), Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni presents Holi as a symbol of female friendship and rebellion where colors represent unity and challenge traditions [24]. These scenes demonstrate how Indian English fiction rewrites rituals through gender perspectives, turning colors from symbols of male power into signs of closeness and self-assertion. However, feminist critics like Meena Alexander warn that “The freedom of Holi remains fleeting; it exists within the ritual’s temporary suspension of patriarchy but rarely transforms it” [3]. This struggle between freedom and re-establishment is seen in women-focused stories, where acts of resistance are often brief and within reasserted limits.

### C. *The Carnavalesque and the Collapse of Hierarchies*

Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the carnivalesque resonates with how Indian storytellers portray Holi as a celebration in which authority is ridiculed and social inequalities ignored [6]. In Holi, people tend to leave aside caste, class, or gender mores through collective laughter, music, and parody. In Roy’s narrative, Holi’s sex and social transgression demonstrate the spirit of carnival [65]. Likewise, R. K. Narayan’s tales in “Malgudi Days” employ the festive and playful Holi to demonstrate social absurdity, wherein the prankster character exposes hypocrisy in the form of comedy [53]. However, the celebration anarchy doesn’t persist; society reasserts order soon after Holi, at times by using violence or guilt. This highlights the fleeting nature of freedom during the festival, a common theme in Indian modernist literature. So, in literature, Holi represents a brief moment of utopia that is soon pushed back by law.

### D. *Symbolism of Color and Fire*

Holi’s colors are both aesthetic and theological. The burning of Holika symbolises purification through destruction, while the next morning’s hues represent creation after annihilation. In fiction, fire and color serve as moral symbols. Roy’s novel uses red to signify passion and blood [65]; Desai’s features grey ash, indicating spiritual death [20]. In Adiga’s “The White Tiger,” festival colors depict economic disparity, vibrant for the rich, grim for the poor [1]. Writers use Holi to visualize moral and emotional polarities, transforming its sensory vividness into moral allegory. As Coomaraswamy noted, “Indian art does not describe but symbolises; every image is a form of thought” [18]. Holi’s colors in fiction become tools of philosophical reflection, illustrating India’s blend of beauty and morality.

## V. **DIWALI: LIGHT, RENEWAL, AND MORAL AMBIGUITY**

### A. *The Mythic and Symbolic Foundations*

Diwali stands out for its celebration with lights. The festival marks the triumph of intelligence over darkness and good over evil, both vital to Indian festivals and culture. The rituals of lighting, cleaning, and renewal have drawn literary expressions. In Indian art, light represents both physical brightness and awareness, according to Kapila Vatsyayan

[75]. In various novels, Diwali is presented as both a visual celebration and a symbol of moral significance. While Holi is lively and chaotic, Diwali is more organized, ceremonial, and reflective. Where older notions of good and evil, purity and impurity tend to come in sharp focus, contemporary literature presents a blurrier scenario. Novelists such as Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, and Aravind Adiga employ Diwali as an occasion for commentary upon society, irony, and social conditions in India in the contemporary world. In these novels, the festival’s conception of renewal is tempered by irony and social commentary.

### B. *Gender, Domestic Space, and Diwali’s Inner Light*

Many contemporary narratives depict Diwali within the domestic sphere, mediated through women’s labor and emotion. Feminist critics note that “while mythic Ram returns to Ayodhya, it is Sita’s unseen endurance that sustains the lamp”. Indian English fiction often re-centers this invisible feminine agency. In Deshpande’s “Small Remedies” (2000), Diwali rituals by women symbolize generational continuity, binding fractured families through tradition [21]. The cleaning and lighting of lamps are acts of care resisting emotional entropy. Divakaruni’s “The Mistress of Spices” (1997) transforms Diwali into a diasporic ritual of self-healing, where light connects women to ancestral memory [26]. The diya becomes a metaphor for identity, fragile yet luminous in foreign darkness. These representations expand Diwali beyond its masculine mythology, framing it as an ethics of nurture. The domestic lamp becomes political: a symbol of resilience within patriarchal and migratory constraints.

### C. *Urbanisation and The Spectacle of Light*

The urban modernity of twenty-first-century India has commodified Diwali into spectacle. Electric bulbs replace oil lamps; advertising supplants mythology. Writers respond by contrasting genuine illumination with artificial glitter. Take Amit Chaudhuri’s “Freedom Song” (1998), where he portrays Kolkata’s Diwali lights as “a consumerist glare that neither warms nor guides” [15]. The festival, when stripped of transcendence, becomes a performance of aspiration. For diasporic characters in Jhumpa Lahiri’s “The Namesake” (2003), Diwali occurs in muted imitation: fairy lights in American suburbs stand in for the lost blaze of home [42]. The ritual survives, but its emotional charge is diluted, producing what Sanjay Krishna terms “melancholic illumination” [39]. The contrast between electric light and inner darkness encapsulates the migrant’s divided self. Literature thus records the metamorphosis of Diwali from sacred celebration to globalised signifier, its glow refracted through the prism of modern displacement.

### D. *Diwali as National and Cultural Representation*

Diwali remains part of the Indian identity through personal and cultural celebration. The idea of lights returning to the country is similar to stories of political awakening and change. Yet writers remain sceptical of easy illumination. As Bhabha remarks, “The nation’s narrative is always a negotiation between the pedagogical and the performative” [7]. Diwali is beautiful, but it also reminds us of important issues like inequality and memory. Modern

stories, whether in Adiga's bitter tone, Lahiri's nostalgic feel, or Mistry's kindness, use Diwali to show the country's moral state. The festival becomes a reflection: each lamp shows not just victory but also struggle and perseverance. It is such realism of light based on imperfection that provides Diwali with lasting literary potency.

## VI. DURGA PUJA: THE FEMININE DIVINE AND CULTURAL ASSERTION

### A. *The Myth, Modernity, and Cultural Continuity*

It celebrates India's worship of Shakti, exemplifying strength, not submission, as A. K. Coomaraswamy clarifies [18]. In prose, it examines female agency, social rejuvenation, and group identity in mythic mode, depicting the travels of the females between duty and liberty, and reconceptualizes womanhood as strength, not victimhood. Durga Puja has evolved from a modest local celebration in Bengal to an emblem of cultural pride nowadays. Authors like Amitav Ghosh, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Dominique Lapierre demonstrate how it has evolved from being purely religious to a social and cultural fest. Bordia describes the Puja pandal as "a theatre where myth meets modernity" [10]. It demonstrates how India blends tradition with contemporary values. Durga's form depicts both power and compassion, signifying the goddess's functions in destruction and creation. The music, sculptures, and lights of the festival illustrate the merging of various cultures in Bengal and India. In literature, the plenitude symbolizes moral, political, and familial strife.

### B. *Dominique Lapierre's City of Joy*

Lapierre's *City of Joy* (1985) shows the Durga Puja in Kolkata as an all-inclusive festival. He contrasts the urban celebrations with the slums of Anand Nagar, where people come together to create idols from recycled materials as a way of setting aside their hardship and poverty. Lapierre writes, "In the dust and din, they created a goddess from the debris of their lives". The Puja symbolizes human dignity and solidarity, with the goddess's victory paralleling the people's triumph over hunger and humiliation. Scholars note that Lapierre's depiction goes beyond observation to celebrate the spirituality of the marginalized. The festival's light is democratic, shining on all. Through an outsider's empathy, Lapierre highlights its universal message: faith can transform suffering into beauty, making the festival a moral covenant of endurance and hope.

### C. *The Goddess as Political Symbol and Cultural Assertion*

Durga Puja serves as a political metaphor in Indian English fiction, symbolizing nationalism and social critique. Meenakshi Mukherjee notes it reflects the nation's conscience, highlighting wounds and glories [50]. Ghosh's idol, immersed in turbulent waters, echoes India's struggle with morality amid corruption, while Lahiri's silent Durga symbolizes the silencing of women within patriarchal systems. In modern stories, Durga's image also signifies postcolonial cultural assertion, transforming Puja from a domestic ritual to a community symbol of resistance, as Partha Chatterjee states, "The home became the site where the nation reinvented its sacred self" [13]. Literary

portrayals depict devotion as religious faith and cultural resistance.

### D. *Gender and the Reclamation of Shakti*

Feminist readings of Durga Puja see the goddess as an archetype of agency, not just a patriarchal ideal. Deshpande and Divakaruni use Durga's image to depict women reclaiming moral and emotional sovereignty. Jain states that "Durga Puja in literature re-centres woman as creator of order amidst chaos" [35]. In Divakaruni's "The Palace of Illusions" (2008), Draupadi's voice reflects the spirit of Shakti, mirroring Durga's myth where destruction enacts justice [27]. Lahiri's fiction portrays female endurance as quiet Shakti, not rebellion. Durga is lived through women's moral clarity and resilience, dismantling binaries opposing spirituality and feminism, and symbolizing both transcendence and immanence, with empowerment arising from faith internalized rather than abandoned.

Durga Puja in fiction also facilitates intercultural communication. In diasporic contexts, it bridges East and West by inviting participation beyond religion. Writers depict non-Indian observers drawn to its color and compassion, affirming what Homi Bhabha terms "the third space of cultural translation" [7]. In New York, London, or Toronto, the Puja pandal becomes both temple and theatre, where immigrant communities negotiate belonging [39]. The goddess's universal appeal, her victory over evil, transcends cultural boundaries, turning fiction into a global ritual of empathy.

## VII. JANMASHTAMI: DIVINE PLAY AND PHILOSOPHICAL JOY

### A. *The Spiritual and Aesthetic Essence of Janmashtami*

Janmashtami, the birthday of Lord Krishna, is amongst the richest philosophically of the festivals of India. It combines devotional elements of bhakti, playful action of leela, and deep metaphysical reflection. His own life of contrasts, of youthful mischief, of godhead, and cosmic insight, supplies us with an inexhaustible material of literary exploration. Ananda Coomaraswamy touches briefly on the subject, declaring "Krishna is joy embodied; his play is the dance of being itself" [18].

During narratives soaked in Indian English, the occasion of Janmashtami represents self-consciousness, where everyday life intersects with spiritual understanding. Unlike the stories of moral dualism experienced usually during Durga Puja or the moral lessons related to Diwali, the celebrations of Janmashtami focus on balancing the different concepts of desire and submission, rationality and faith towards the divine. This intense philosophical reflection has influenced writers like Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan, and T.N. Madan, who view Krishna not only as a god but also as a symbol of consciousness.

### B. *Mythic Symbolism and Literary Adaptation*

The myth of Krishna's birth, amid darkness and tyranny, symbolizes spiritual awakening within bondage. His birth in prison, protected by divine intervention,

represents emerging from ignorance. Eliade's notion of "mythic renewal through repetition" summarizes Janmashtami's circular re-enactment in writing [30], whereby every re-telling of the tale conjures the divine within the human. Authors deploy Krishna's guises: the mischievous child, lover of Radha, and the Bhagavad-Gita philosopher. Festival re-enactments such as Ras Leela, Jhulan Yatra, and devotional songs are allegories of inner converse and moral combat. As Ramanujan said, "Indian myths live by translation, from ritual into art, from legend into conscience" [60]. Janmashtami in literature thus becomes an inward festival, celebrated mentally.

#### C. Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope: Philosophy of Divine Play*

His novel, "The Serpent and the Rope" (1960), looks at Janmashtami's deep spiritual meaning. The main character, Ramaswamy, often reflects on spirituality and starts connecting Krishna's playful actions with his own life. Rao's writing, based on Advaita philosophy, matches Krishna's teaching that being detached is not giving everything up but enjoying life as a divine game. The scene marks Ramaswamy's move from knowledge to devotion. Shyamala Narayan notes that Rao internalizes Krishna's leela, transforming the novel into a metaphysical dialogue. She explains how Janmashtami signifies realization and divinity in relationships, represented by the serpent and the rope, symbolizing illusion (maya) and truth, echoing Krishna's teachings on perception [56].

#### D. Philosophical Dimensions: Karma, Dharma, and Freedom

The depth of Janmashtami comes from the Bhagavad Gita, believed to be Krishna's discourse to Arjuna. Many Indian English writers incorporate these principles into stories. Celebrating Krishna's birth symbolizes the birth of wisdom. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan claimed in his writings that "The Gita is not a sermon for withdrawal but for right action in the midst of conflict" [59]. Raja Rao shows his characters achieving freedom by doing their duty without attachment, following the path of karma yoga. This outlook remains true even among works of diaspora literature; the idea of the struggle between fate and individual effort remains present, and this mirrors the ethical outlook of Krishna. Such currents make Indian English fiction a reflection on agency, duty, and grace.

### VIII. DISCUSSION AND SYNTHESIS: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF FESTIVALS IN INDIAN ENGLISH FICTION

#### A. Inter-festival Symbolism and Narrative Convergence

Indian festivals are major cultural events that fascinatingly blend the tales of mythology, morality, and modern life through creative storytelling. Festivals like Holi, Diwali, Durga Puja, and Onam each have their own meaning. Holi is about colors, Diwali is about light, and Durga Puja is about power. These festivals tell stories that show the different religious beliefs of India. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar argued for the existence of a sacred calendar in the Indian novels written in English, where every festival

represents a chapter of their moral tales [34]. These celebrations go through times of breaking apart and coming together again, with feelings of chaos and relief. This shows that turbulence is temporary and helps create good conditions for growth. This idea appears in the works of writers like Raja Rao and Arundhati Roy. Their characters go through figurative deaths and come back to life during festivals.

#### B. From Myth to Modernity: Continuity and Transformation

Early authors like Rao and Narayan used festivals to reaffirm moral order. Rao's Janmashtami leads to self-realisation, whereas Narayan's Pongal restores family balance. Later novelists like Rushdie, Adiga, Roy, Lahiri, and Mistry have included festivals to reveal varied social expressions woven within complex human relationships. Their stories draw the reader's attention to the transformations from simple rural lives to the complexities of urban life. These authors have also critiqued and questioned the relevance of ritual symbolism. Meenakshi Mukherjee notes that Indian English fiction modernizes without fully secularizing; myth remains a cultural reflex [49].

#### C. Sacred Time and Historical Time

Festivals suspend linear time and invite sacred repetition, allowing protagonists to relive primordial patterns within contemporary contexts. Mircea Eliade's concept of the eternal return is clarified in "Midnight's Children", showing that Diwali marks the nation's birth with cosmic renewal [29]. Arundhati Roy in "The God of Small Things" presents Holi as a festival that blurs generational boundaries [65]. These scenes break the story into repeats, helping Indian writers use symbols to show trauma. Political violence, caste oppression, or ecological crises seem momentarily redeemable within sacred time. Festivals do not deny suffering but transform it into shared positive remembrances, preserving the "moral surplus of tradition" (Nandy), the ability to find meaning in repetition.

#### D. Diasporic Reconfigurations and Cultural Translation

When festivals travel abroad, they undergo what Bhabha calls "translation rather than transplantation" [7]. In Lahiri, Mukherjee, and Divakaruni, rituals retain emotion but adapt form, with Durga Puja in New Jersey or Diwali in California becoming symbolic of belonging, food, color, and music recreating home in exile. Nostalgia complicates joy, lighting both memory and melancholy. Diasporic festivals extend beyond India, mediating hybridity by fusing sacred with secular, India with the world. Their persistence abroad shows cultural identity is maintained through repetition, allowing Indian festivity to globalise without losing its spiritual essence [19].

### IX. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Towards a Unified Interpretive Framework in Indian Storytelling



This study of Indian literature identified three recurring thematic constants:

- Cycle of Renewal: Each festival symbolizes the cycle of creating and destroying, reflecting India's idea of rebirth.
- Gender and Shakti: Indian festivals strongly reaffirm that the feminine principle pervades all rituals by symbolising continuity through care.
- Ecological Harmony: Agrarian festivals anchor spiritual life in environmental reciprocity.

Together, these motifs form what Kapila Vatsyayan termed "the integrative vision of Indian art, where every act is both celebration and contemplation" [75]. Indian English fiction inherits this integrative vision, transforming the ritual calendar into moral cartography. Through its festivals, the literature of a multilingual nation speaks in one idiom, the idiom of renewal through remembrance.

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