

REFLECTING HUMANITY: UNIVERSAL ETHICS IN INDIAN ENGLISH WRITINGS

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Abstract

The universal moral values of compassion, justice, equality, and resilience form the ethical framework for various societal and cultural narratives. The current paper attempts to analyse the reflection of these values in Indian English literature by studying Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, and Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. This is a qualitative work, purely based on textual analysis wherein methods of cultural criticism and ethical theory have been applied to showcase how writings mirror universality in norms against the socio-political realities of caste oppression, gender discrimination, and ecological destruction. It will evoke folk storytelling traditions and philosophical legacies of India in making these values relevant for confronting contemporary global challenges. Findings highlight that Indian English literature is not a mirror of global principles but an expression that confronts those morals as a motivation for personal change and social development. By integrating universal values in stories that question established hierarchies, this literature clarifies the transformative power of literature as an avenue for ethical exploration and social transformation. While continuing existing dialogues within the realms of ethics, cultural studies, and literary criticism, this paper reaffirms the ability of Indian English writings to foster common awareness around humanity's collective moral principles.

Keywords: Universal Values, Ethics, Transformative Literature, Environmental Ethics, Philosophical Influences, Indian Scriptures

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Introduction

Universal ethics refer to the core values that guide human actions. These form the foundational bases of moral and cultural frameworks in various societies. Compassion, justice, and integrity remain pertinent beyond geographical and temporal confines. They open up paths for individual growth and societal harmony. Literature is an expression of human experience; it captures these universal values and presents them for evaluation, revealing their many forms and manifestations in diverse cultures. Indian English literature occupies a significant place among writings that foster a dialogue between native ethos and elements of global thought, expressing ethical concerns born of tradition and modern existence.

The ethical underpinnings of Indian English literature lie in the mosaic of India's culture and its diverse heritage, unfolding folklores, oral traditions, and sacred scriptures like the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Upanishads*. Such tales become repositories of eternal values when they address moral dilemmas and socio-political issues rather than just revealing human nature. In Anand's *Untouchable*, caste-related discrimination is presented through an experience-based exposure to systemic inequality (Anand, 2001). *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy interrogates gender and class hierarchies while rendering the silence of the oppressed voices palpable (Roy, 1997). *The Hungry Tide* is a voyage into what it means to coexist alongside human life with great interest in the well-being of the environment, diving deep into environmental ethics (Ghosh, 2004).

While universal values remain essential at all times, prevailing socio-political structures primarily resist their implementation in real life. Indian English literature provides an incisive analysis of these conflicts. It demonstrates the shifting power of values, particularly equality, compassion, and justice, in addressing global inequality, identity crisis avoidance, failure inauthenticity, and environmental degradation. The present study discusses how the stories presented go beyond cultural particularity to remind people of shared moral principles. This makes the role of literature clear, reflective, and active in the search for ethical understanding.

This paper explores the portrayal of universal ethics in Indian English literature through a qualitative approach that combines textual analysis with thematic interpretation. This critique aims to answer the following questions: How do Indian English authors express and discuss the concept of universal values? In what ways do these texts subvert societal norms and provoke moral contemplation? This study engages with these questions to contribute further to

existing academic dialogue regarding the overlaps and interactions between ethics, culture, and literature, placing Indian English writing against an enormous universal human values discourse.

Literature Review

The question of universal human values in literature has long intrigued researchers because of the close ties formed with discussions on ethics, culture, and philosophy. Indian English literature provides more than enough back material for studying how universal ethical principles like compassion, justice, and equality are woven into stories that reflect India's inimitable socio-political and cultural complexities. This section critically engages with some of the key texts within the field and situates this research among a broader academic discourse.

Universal Human Values and Literary Expression

Universal values are those long-lasting principles that guide people's actions. According to Schwartz (2012), such values constitute an essential foundation of human identity beyond cultural boundaries. As one of the artistic products, this literature mirrors these values and can be considered a critical reflection and documentation of social morality. In this context, Meenakshi Mukherjee (2001, p. 47) sharply declares "Indian English literature has always spoken from universal concerns which challenge social conventions and silence marginalised voices." Books like *Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand very powerfully bring out what literature can do in the fight for equality and dignity by exposing the caste system. Anand shows Bakha's problems as issues that justice must morally resolve; thus, justice is pertinent to present-day ethical conversations (Anand, 1935).

Postcolonial Perspectives on Universal Values

Postcolonial theory is an essential tool through which Indian English literature grapples with the question of universal values. According to Edward Said (1993, p. 87), postcolonial narratives play a twofold role, including resisting the dominant ideological constructs of empire and reclaiming the rightful cultural ethos of the subjugated people. Rao's *Kanthapura* captures this duality as it interweaves Gandhi's philosophy with traditional storytelling in pursuing themes of social justice and moral courage (Rao, 1938). Saccidānandan (1999, p. 72) argues that such writings bridge the local and the

universal, employing ethical norms to critique colonial and caste-based oppression. This coalescence highlights that while universal values are concretely grounded in particular cultural contexts, they rise above the boundaries of time and place.

The Role of Folklore and Ancient Scriptures

Indian English literature is full of myths and stories from ancient folklore and traditional scriptures, which give the stories high moral values. In his work *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie (1981) uses myth and history to question the ethical problems faced by India after independence. The same focus on selflessness and duty in the *Bhagavad Gita* shapes the *Kanthapura* text's ethical frameworks. Raja Rao (1938, p. 89) has written that Kamala Subramaniam speaks for the Mahabharata as a "timeless guide to ethical decision-making," still influencing literary exploration today. These tales remind one of the age-old relationship between conventional ideals and modern moral dilemmas.

Psychological and Socio-Political Dimensions

Indian English literature reflects the universal values in a psychological and socio-political context. *Cry, the Peacock* by Anita Desai explores Maya's inner conflict while telling the story of an existential universal desire for compassion and emotional resilience (Desai, 1963, p. 112). On a larger canvas, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* speaks against imposed hierarchies, where caste and gender oppression are blended with the essence of love and solidarity (Roy, 1997). Mukherjee (2001, p. 103) observes that in "*Cry, the Peacock*," love's transformative power is foregrounded amidst systemic injustice.

The socio-political dimensions are not less in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. While exploring identity, resistance, and ecological harmony, these texts highlight the blend of private and social moralities (Ghosh 2004, p. 163). This reveals how trans historical values form a stage for confronting personal psychological dilemmas on one side and societal crises on the other.

Contemporary Scholarship on Indian English Literature

Recent criticism has focused universal values on adaptability in the face of contemporary challenges. The moral compromise that capitalist societies force on individuals becomes the central theme of

Adiga's *The White Tiger*, which also reveals how the human qualities of empathy and integrity are sacrificed for wealth acquisition (Adiga, 2008, p. 137). As Saccidānandan (1999, p. 85) puts it, "Contemporary Indian English literature is a rich and vibrant corpus that continues to innovate, incorporating insights from global discourses into local traditions for an expanded scope of ethical inquiry." The works reaffirm the universal value of having relevance in navigating globalisation's complexities, environmental degradation, and cultural hybridity.

The current critical context makes Indian English literature a significant exercise against human values worldwide. Postcolonial views are integrated with the traditional moralities and contemporary concerns that make these texts relevant to the discourse of values like compassion, justice, and equality. This review speaks of the importance of Indian English literature in connecting the local with the global, confirming its relevance to deconstructing universal ethics.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative, interpretive research methodology to explore the engagement with universal human values in Indian English literature. Qualitative is the most appropriate approach because it captures literary works' ethical and cultural nuances, thus providing deeper insight into themes, stories, and socio-political contexts (Creswell, 2013, p. 45). The primary texts addressed herein are Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, and Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. These texts were explicitly engaged with the values of compassion, justice, and equality. Critical essays, journal articles, and theoretical studies add interpretive perspectives and contextual richness. Data collection was thus ensured from reliable academic databases to certify the authenticity of sourced materials.

The analysis includes text interpretation, theme determination, and context evaluation. Postcolonial theory, narrative ethics, and cultural studies will reveal how particular stories shape perceptions of universal values and how those values interact in a grand socio-political context (Said, 1993, p. 87). This methodology foregrounds the dialogue between classical moral frameworks and pressing global issues like justice and environmental sustainability. While not engaging human subjects for research purposes, ethical integrity is observed through proper adherence to academic norms regarding citations and crediting works duly.

Ethical Foundations in Indian English Literature

Indian English literature, with its rich tapestry of narratives, serves as a profound medium for articulating universal ethical principles. These principles—compassion, justice, resilience, and harmony—transcend individual cultures and traditions, finding resonance across temporal and spatial divides. Rooted deeply in India's philosophical traditions and cultural ethos, the ethical foundations of Indian English literature emerge from an interplay of ancient scriptures, folklore, and the socio-political realities that shape modern India. This section discusses these ethical foundations, investigating their philosophical roots, literary manifestations, and the change they have wrought in the more extensive debate over universal values.

Philosophical Origins: The Intersection of Tradition and Universality

The ethical framework of Indian English literature is influenced by the age-old philosophical traditions of India, especially the teachings found in texts such as the Bhagavad Gita and Upanishads. These works highlight the values of duty (*dharma*), truth (*satya*), and selflessness (*nishkama karma*) that constitute the moral compass for humanity. The *Bhagavad Gita* discourses Arjuna's struggle with moral dilemmas on the battlefield, thus offering an intricate discussion on how to make ethical choices. It claims that proper actions are not based solely on duty but stem from the realisation of higher spiritual truths aligned (Shunmugam et al., 2024).

Indian English literature often takes these philosophical meditations as the starting point for its stories. *Kanthapura* by Raja Rao is a perfect embodiment of tradition and universality. The novel presents nonviolent resistance and truth, as Gandhian principles form part of the tools to confront colonial oppression by weaving these principles into the spiritual context of the villagers (Rao, 1938, p. 89). Through his narration, Rao connects the local with the global by highlighting how time-honoured moral ideals are pertinent in tackling contemporary socio-political problems.

Folklore and Oral Traditions: Ethical Narratives in Cultural Memory

The ethical foundations of Indian English literature are further enriched by India's diverse folklore and oral traditions. These narratives, transmitted across generations, encapsulate timeless

moral lessons, often using allegory and symbolism to convey their messages. Folklore is a repository of collective wisdom, reflecting the community's shared values and aspirations.

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* masterfully integrates myth and history, drawing upon folklore to critique the socio-political complexities of postcolonial India. The novel's magical realism is a metaphorical canvas for exploring ethical dilemmas, emphasising resilience and hope amidst chaos (Rushdie, 1981, p. 145). Similarly, Ruskin Bond's *The Blue Umbrella* employs the simplicity of rural life to depict values such as kindness and generosity, illustrating the enduring relevance of ethical narratives rooted in folklore (Bond, 1974, p. 64).

The cultural resonance of folklore is not confined to the past but continues to inspire contemporary literary explorations. Indian English writers preserve and reinterpret moral narratives by retelling ancient tales in modern contexts, ensuring their relevance to present-day dilemmas.

Ethical Engagements with Colonial and Postcolonial Contexts

Much of the moral context in Indian English literature was shaped by the colonial encounter and its aftermath. Postcolonial discourses challenge the imperial ideologies of the past while asserting their lost values; they make universal ethics a tool of resistance and resilience. According to Edward Said (1993, p. 87), postcolonial literature serves at least two purposes: opposing cultural domination and expressing a different conception of ethics based on indigenous traditions.

Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* is an ethical engagement text that directly confronts the dehumanising caste hierarchy. Through Bakha's story, Anand calls for rejecting established social conventions favouring dignity and equality as basic human principles (Anand, 1935, p. 36). Similarly, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* critiques societal frameworks that uphold discrimination, and ethical considerations are intertwined with love, forgiveness, and reconciliation themes (Roy, 1997, p. 256). All these texts are testimonies to the systemic oppression they challenged while giving hope through universal values from law to justice in transformation against oppression.

Literature as a Catalyst for Ethical Reflection

Indian English literature reflects universal ethical principles and

actively engages readers in ethical inquiry. Literature fosters a deeper understanding of moral complexities through its characters, narratives, and conflicts, encouraging introspection and empathy. Martha Nussbaum's concept of "narrative ethics" highlights literature's capacity to evoke moral imagination, enabling readers to navigate ethical dilemmas through the lens of lived experiences (Nussbaum, 1992, p. 123).

For instance, Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* explores the ethical tensions between human survival and ecological preservation. By drawing on the folklore of the Sundarbans, Ghosh bridges the local and the global, presenting environmental ethics as a universal concern (Ghosh, 2004, p. 163). Similarly, Rabindranath Tagore's *The Home and the World* juxtaposes material progress with spiritual values, critiquing the ethical compromises inherent in nationalist movements (Tagore, 1916, p. 83). These narratives exemplify how literature transcends cultural boundaries, offering profound insights into shared human values.

Bridging the Local and the Universal

One of the local and universal aspects of Indian English literature is its universality. While claiming the works' moral principles cultural specificity, they indeed portray the universality of moral principles by evidence of India's rich ethical traditions within global discourses. This epitomising synthesis of unity, compassion, and self-realisation themes in Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali*, is celebrated univocally (Tagore, 1912, p. 54). Through the play of tradition and universality, Indian English literature reiterates the timeless relevance of moral values in tackling present-day problems. It exemplifies the transformative power of literature, providing options for personal and collective development through the perspective of global ethics.

"Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;
Where knowledge is free;
Where the world has not been broken up
into fragments by narrow domestic walls;" (Tagore, 1912)

Universal Values in Social Critique and Advocacy

Indian English literature criticises the prevailing social hierarchies and puts forward the commitment to change. In its stories, writers highlight the core values of humanity, such as equality, justice,

compassion, and dignity, when they write about ethical principles and expose the need for change in the system by pointing out unjust inequalities. This chapter discusses universal values embedded in Indian English literature's criticism of caste oppression, gender discrimination, and environmental degradation by examining narrative strategies that challenge existing societal norms while advocating for equity and inclusion.

Caste Oppression and the Quest for Equality

Caste-based discrimination, as part and parcel of Indian social structures, finds regular expression in Indian English literature. Writers such as Mulk Raj Anand use universal principles to challenge caste disparities and promote parity. In his novel *Untouchable*, Anand chronicles the commonplace struggles that Bakha, a Dalit boy, encounters, thereby revealing how the caste system dehumanises people systematically (Anand, 1935). The vividness with which Anand (1935, p. 36) captures the humiliation of Bakha addresses the moral call for justice and compels the readers to stand against the ethical failure involved in oppressing people based on caste.

The critique of caste is not limited to individual suffering but extends to institutional structures that perpetuate inequality. Though not fiction, B.R. Ambedkar's seminal work, *The Annihilation of Caste* resonates profoundly with literary narratives addressing caste oppression. Ambedkar's assertion that "justice is another name for liberty, equality, and fraternity" (Ambedkar, 1936/1945, p. 67) echoes in Anand's and Arundhati Roy's works, foregrounding marginalised individuals' resilience against systemic discrimination.

Roy's *The God of Small Things* delves into caste and class oppression through the forbidden love story of Ammu, a Syrian Christian woman, and Velutha, a Dalit man. The tragic consequences of their relationship critique the rigid social structures that devalue human connections in favour of maintaining hierarchy (Roy, 1997, p. 256). Roy underscores the transformative potential of ethical principles in dismantling oppressive systems by juxtaposing universal values of love and dignity against the harsh realities of caste.

Gender Justice and Feminist Advocacy

Another prevailing issue is gender inequality, which several Indian English literary works tackle while promoting justice and fairness through an exposé of patriarchal systems that marginalise women.

Kamala Das's autobiographical text, *My Story*, presents a scathing discourse against the societal constructs governing women. That need for justice and dignity to be reclaimed by women becomes prominent in her open reflection on identity and freedom, as she captures the essence of women's equality worldwide (Das, 1973, p. 78).

In much the same way, *Sultana's Dream* by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain dreams of a feminist utopia in which the roles of the genders are reversed and brings out the power equality has in transforming. By setting women as central figures in a peaceful and thriving community, Hossain hammers on institutionalising women's disqualification from education and public life, thus calling for inclusivity as a universal value (Hossain, 1905, p. 23).

Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* takes the discourse further by illustrating how gender, caste, and sexuality intersect (Roy, 2017). It challenges the dominant narratives around identity and belonging by centring the stories of those marginalised in society, like trans women and Dalits. Roy (2017, p. 345) exemplifies that classical values can be redefined to embrace new voices as they stretch the parameters of justice and equality.

Environmental Justice and Ethical Stewardship

The closeness of human survival to ecological health is a common concern in Indian English literature, reflecting the broad values of compassion and responsibility. In *The Hungry Tide*, Amitav Ghosh addresses the moral complexities involved in the stalking of environmental preservation against human livelihoods. Using the myth of Bon Bibi, a god celebrated in the Sundarbans, Ghosh highlights the coexistence between humans and nature and calls for equal harmony above an anthropocentric perspective (Ghosh, 2004, p. 163).

Similarly, in Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*, rural farmers' struggle against natural and economic forces is depicted. The main character, Rukmani, personifies hope and resilience against the backdrop of ecological decline, which derives its strength from India's spiritual traditions. In her writing, Markandaya criticises all forms of exploitation that upset the balance between humans and nature, pointing out the moral obligation of stewardship (Markandaya, 1954, p. 97).

These works resonate with the growing global discourse on environmental justice, which posits that the rights of marginalised

communities and ecological preservation are interdependent. By drawing attention to the ethical dimensions of environmental crises, Indian English literature underscores the universality of values like compassion and equity in addressing contemporary challenges.

Social Justice and Economic Equity

Indian English literature also critiques economic disparities, aligning with universal principles of justice and equity. Premchand's *Godan*, though originally written in Hindi, holds significance in its English translations as a poignant critique of the feudal system. The novel's depiction of the struggles of peasant farmers against oppressive landlords underscores the moral imperative of justice and human dignity (Premchand, 1936, p. 205).

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* offers a modern perspective, critiquing the erosion of ethical values in capitalist societies (Adiga, 2008). Adiga's protagonist, Balram, navigates the stark economic divide between the affluent and the marginalised, exposing the moral compromises accompanying unbridled ambition. By interrogating the failures of compassion and honesty in pursuing wealth, Adiga (2008, p. 137) highlights the ethical contradictions of contemporary India.

These narratives demonstrate the enduring relevance of universal values in challenging economic inequities and envisioning more equitable social structures. They serve as reminders of the transformative potential of justice and dignity in addressing systemic disparities.

Advocacy Through Narrative Ethics

Indian English literature critiques societal inequities and engages readers in moral reflection, fostering empathy and ethical awareness. Narrative ethics, as theorised by Martha Nussbaum, emphasises the role of storytelling in exploring moral dilemmas and inspiring ethical action (Nussbaum, 1992, p. 123). Literature bridges the gap between individual experiences and collective responsibilities through character-driven narratives, encouraging readers to envision equitable futures.

Rabindranath Tagore's *The Home and the World* exemplifies this ethical engagement by juxtaposing nationalist fervour with spiritual values. The novel critiques the ethical compromises inherent in political movements, advocating for a moral vision prioritising

collective well-being over individual ambition (Tagore, 1916, p. 83). Similarly, Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* blends Gandhian philosophy with local traditions, portraying the villagers' struggle for independence as a collective endeavour rooted in universal principles of justice and truth (Rao, 1938, p. 89).

Through these narratives, Indian English literature reaffirms the capacity of universal values to inspire transformative social action, bridging the personal and the political in the pursuit of justice. By embedding universal values within its narratives, Indian English literature critiques systemic injustices and advocates for equitable futures. Whether addressing caste oppression, gender inequality, or environmental degradation, these works illuminate the ethical principles that underpin social critique and advocacy. Through their nuanced portrayals of human struggles and resilience, Indian English writers challenge readers to confront societal inequities and embrace values that transcend cultural and temporal boundaries.

Literature as a Medium for Individual and Collective Resilience

Indian English literature frequently delves into the complex interplay between individual struggles and collective resilience, reflecting universal values such as compassion, perseverance, and psychological well-being. These narratives act as mirrors of human endurance and as blueprints for navigating personal and societal adversities, blending intricate emotional landscapes with broader social contexts.

Psychological Dimensions of Resilience

As a psychological and moral construct, resilience is vividly portrayed in works such as Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock*. Desai explores the psychological turmoil of Maya, a woman grappling with existential despair and alienation, highlighting the universal need for understanding and empathy in overcoming emotional crises (Desai, 1963, p. 112). Through Maya's internal conflicts, Desai illuminates the fragility and strength inherent in human experience, inviting readers to confront their vulnerabilities while drawing on the transformative power of empathy.

Similarly, Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* navigates the psychological challenges of cultural dislocation and identity formation. Gogol Ganguli's journey as a second-generation immigrant underscores

the universal value of belonging, depicting resilience as a process of reconciling fragmented identities (Lahiri, 2003, p. 144). The narrative's exploration of emotional turbulence fosters a deeper understanding of the human capacity to adapt and thrive amidst change.

Collective Resilience in the Face of Adversity

Collectively, Indian English literature portrays communities that embody resilience through solidarity and shared values. R. K. Narayan's *The Guide* exemplifies this through Raju's transformation from a self-serving individual to a spiritual leader who sacrifices himself for the greater good (Narayan, 1958, p. 152). The villagers' collective faith in Raju symbolises the redemptive power of altruism, underscoring the communal aspect of resilience.

The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy adds another dimension to individual pain by anchoring it to larger injustices. The intergenerational trauma that Ammu and Estha go through is parallel to the caste and gender hierarchies that pour salt on societal wounds. Roy's story captures that grit is about surviving and overthrowing the oppressive systems that turn collective agony into paths toward justice and equity (Roy, 1997, p. 256). Indian English literature portrays resilience through its stories, emphasising individual strength and collective unity in combating common human problems.

Contemporary Relevance of Universal Values

The need for universal values continues to matter amid globalisation, environmental challenges, and changing socio-political contexts. Indian English literature keeps engaged with concerns that echo the world by reinterpreting classical moral principles in modern contexts.

Globalisation, Migration, and Identity

The universal relevance of empathy is reaffirmed in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*, exploring the complexities involved in migration and cultural hybridity. Gogol Ganguli's struggle with his dual identity epitomises the difficulties experienced by immigrants when reconciling their ancestral heritage with the realities of modern life (Lahiri, 2003, p. 112). The story discusses inclusivity and mutual respect as critical for building cross-cultural understanding.

The White Tiger by Aravind Adiga takes globalisation and its moral compromises under capitalism as the backdrop of the narrative. Adiga Balram Halwai, the protagonist of the novel, is a character that brings to light significant disparities that exist and those heightened by international economic systems while calling for a reassessment of values involving fairness and honesty in dealing with these forces (Adiga, 2008, p. 137).

Environmental Ethics and Modern Challenges

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* exemplifies the contemporary relevance of environmental ethics. By juxtaposing the ecological fragility of the Sundarbans with human resilience, Ghosh emphasises the need for a harmonious relationship between humanity and nature (Ghosh, 2004, p. 163). This narrative resonates with global environmental movements, which increasingly prioritise sustainability and ethical stewardship.

Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* further emphasises the bond between human survival and ecological preservation. The main character, Rukmani, experiences how environmental degradation destroys rural livelihoods, yet she embodies the overall notion of persistence against the manifold adversities imposed by society (Markandaya, 1954, p. 97). Indian English literature reaffirms the timelessness of universal values once it involves itself with current matters. It gives an important glimpse into the moral sides of globalisation and responsible environmental management.

Challenges in Realising Universal Values

While universal values set an ideal standard, their actual application is often faced with incredible difficulty. Indian English literature mirrors the difference between moral ideals and social realities and shows the challenges and opportunities in realising these values.

Persistence of Inequalities

Despite the universal values of equality and justice, protracted systemic prejudices exist within the frameworks of caste, gender, and economic hierarchies. In Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, he shows how deep-rooted it is to have caste-based discrimination and how those structures are not/cannot be changed even when there is a moral need to do so (Anand, 1935, p. 36). On the other hand, in

Kamala Das's *My Story*, patriarchal discourses are challenged at every step while that struggle continues (Das, 1973, p. 78). Such narratives highlight the prevailing tension between the universality of moral principles and the particularity of socio-cultural contexts, thus emphasising the continued need for advocacy and reform.

Bridging Ideals and Realities

Indian English literature also shows much hope in filling these gaps through dialogue and empathy. In *Kanthapura*, Gandhian principles embrace the villagers' collective mindset, which reflects the shifting phenomenon governed by moral principles once activated as a mass movement (Rao, 1938, p. 89). On this note, however, the novel simultaneously recognises the difficulty in holding such ideals against deep-seated opposition. It thus demands a constant struggle to make social norms congruent with world values.

Opportunities for Cross-Cultural Solidarity

Indian English literature is transnational and, thus, can be easily applied to the principles of global solidarity. Universal themes in literature, like migration, environmental justice, and human resilience, become particularly relevant in the case of cross-cultural understanding that encourages people to act together. The potential is seen in works like Lahiri's *The Namesake* and Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, which transcend cultural divides toward a common vision of moral responsibility (Lahiri, 2003, p. 112; Ghosh, 2004, p. 163).

Conclusion

Indian English literature is a profound source of universal human values, interweaving principles like compassion, justice, equality, and resilience in its text. Such values are firmly rooted in India's cultural and philosophical traditions and go beyond geographical and temporal limitations; they provide a perspective to discern the intricacies of personal and collective life. The paper emphasises the ability of Indian English literature to express, analyse, and recreate thoughtless values amid the present's changing socio-political and ecological contexts.

The moral frameworks canvassed in such texts as *Kanthapura* by Raja Rao and *Gitanjali* by Rabindranath Tagore point to the prevailing legacy of age-old philosophical systems and mythic traditions. These

stories act as moral compasses, bringing the local into the global to find solutions for universal problems (Rao, 1938, p. 89; Tagore, 1912, p. 54). The questions that literature poses about caste-based discrimination, gender-related issues, and ecological degradation prove its indispensable significance in the battle for social justice. While Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* brings out how literature can challenge deep-rooted hierarchies, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* celebrates the transformative power of dignity and empathy over those represented as marginalised (Anand, 1935, p. 36; Roy, 1997, p. 256).

Moreover, the narratives of resilience and ethical stewardship reflected in works like Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and Kamala Mark Andaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* underscore the interconnectedness of humanity and nature, advocating for a more sustainable and compassionate world (Ghosh, 2004, p. 163; Markandaya, 1954, p. 97). These texts resonate with global discourses on migration, environmental ethics, and cultural hybridity, demonstrating literature's potential to inspire collective action and cross-cultural solidarity.

However, the realisation of universal values remains fraught with challenges. The persistence of socio-economic inequities and cultural rigidities, as critiqued in works like Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, reveals the gap between ethical ideals and lived realities (Adiga, 2008, p. 137). Yet, Indian English literature continues to offer pathways for bridging these divides, fostering dialogue, empathy and shared understanding.

This study contributes to the academic discourse by reaffirming the significance of Indian English literature as both a mirror and a catalyst for ethical inquiry. By engaging with universal values, these narratives reflect society's moral fabric and inspire transformative possibilities for addressing global challenges. As humanity grapples with unprecedented crises, the ethical imagination embedded in Indian English literature offers timeless insights, reaffirming its role in envisioning a just, inclusive, and harmonious world.

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