

## BRIDGING WORLDS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF WESTERN AND INDIAN LITERATURE

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### Abstract

Influence and intersexuality scholars will find a wealth of material in India's colonial past and post-colonial present. Although India's literary impact on the West may be traced back to the development of "orientalism," this trend was quickly reversed once colonial power was established on the subcontinent. While some Indian critics were either too quick to accept or dismiss Western influence, the varied responses of Indian writers provide richer evidence of this impact and of intersexuality at work. Various Western and Indian intellectual writings The Panchatantra, a collection of fables written in Sanskrit in the fifth century A.D. and afterwards translated into Middle Persian, Arabic, Greek, Hebrew, and Latin, has also been translated into a broad variety of modern European languages, such as Czech (1528) and Italian (1533). It seems that the "EzourVedam" remained an outlier until Voltaire identified it at the end of the eighteenth century.

**Keywords:** Indian Literature, Western Literature, Colonial Influence, Response and Reception.

### Introduction

Charles Tinsley, a brilliant young intellect, is introduced to the literary world of Virginia Woolf through the benevolent Mrs. Ramsay, who drafts a proposal on "anyone's influence" and, later in the narrative, reminds Tinsley of the theme of "anyone's effect on anything." Similarly, David Hotel, another inquisitive scholar, and Persse McGarrigle, whose dissertation examines Shakespeare's influence on T.S. Eliot, play a witty prank on some pretentious academics in *Little World* by claiming, "it is about T.S. Eliot's impact on Shakespeare," and then argue, "then we cannot prevent Shakespeare from reading T.S. Eliot's work." In both instances, the notion of "impact" is treated ironically, pointing to the same conventional scholarly exercises that young academics continue to undertake cautiously—activities that might be called "impact," research, or higher scholarly inquiry.

However, it would be misleading to assume that the so-called “influences” (or “traditional” influences, as they are often labelled) have simply evolved into “intersexuality.” Influence need not be confined to the text itself; as Roland Barthes famously stated, “Each text is a tissue of quotations,” emphasizing the author’s presence alongside the text’s residual “capacity” (as explored in the Barthes-Foucault dialogue). More broadly, influence can be understood as “ideas imbued with the thoughts of the subject,” encompassing intersexuality. Intersexuality thus functions as a metaphor for networks and modes of social life, reflecting how texts operate within broader cultural and intellectual contexts.

### **Western Literature and Indian Literature**

Even though Sanskrit literature and the closely related ancient dialects, Prakrit and Pali, have thrived in India since around 1500 B.C., Indian languages have continuously interacted with major Asian tongues and cultures, including Turkish, Arabic, and Persian, as well as Dravidian languages like Tamil, which dates back to approximately 250 B.C. Although English belongs to the Indo-European family, it differs significantly from Indian languages in grammar, social practices, values, and worldview. Exposure to English literature, as the language of the colonizers, exerted a profound influence on Indian writers. Among the most enduring impacts on Indian literati has been the English literary tradition, although British colonial dominance constituted only a part of India’s broader historical and cultural experience. Literary and cultural hegemony was just one dimension of subjugation.

Sir William Jones, in the preface to his translation of Kalidasa’s *Abhigyan Shakuntalam*, described the Sanskrit dramatist as the “Shakespeare of India.” Numerous accounts highlight the parallels between Shakespeare and Kalidasa (1789). In 1913, Rabindranath Tagore, a Bengali poet and Nobel laureate, reflected that the “Spirit of Europe” awakened and unsettled him during his youth, while the impetuous longing of romantic poets such as Byron moved the “veiled heart-bride” in his secluded inner world. Tagore, though firmly rooted in India’s devotional poetic tradition, demonstrated how Western literature could inspire reinterpretation of Eastern literary expression.

Critically, Indian literary discourse initially regarded Western influence with caution. Academic narratives in English often emphasized uniformity and social hierarchy, yet exposure to English literature also introduced diversity, intellectual depth, and modern awareness. Indian writers no longer needed to remain confined to the obscurity and isolation of medieval native

traditions. Sisir Kumar Das notes that the younger generation of Indian writers experienced a dual dynamic: adopting Western literary forms while simultaneously resisting full assimilation of foreign ideals, resulting in a dialectic between indigenous and Western sensibilities. The literary encounter was not merely a negotiation between texts but a cultural meeting of East and West.

While Western literature introduced genres such as the novel, essay, and tragedy, Indian writers retained links to traditional forms such as *katha*, *akhyān*, and *dastan*. Das emphasizes that encountering Western works prompted Indian authors to re-evaluate their own literary heritage, leading to reflection, criticism, and reinterpretation. The Indian response was not passive imitation; it was dialectical, engaging with the past while negotiating new modes of expression.

In Hindi literature, scholars like Bharat Bhushan Agrawal analyzed the influence of Western literature on modern writers, including Premchand. Agrawal highlighted parallels between Hindi narrative and Western prose, noting, for instance, structural similarities with D.H. Lawrence while also respecting the unique moral and cultural frameworks of Indian writers such as Jainendra Kumar. Subsequent critical studies, including Jaidev's *The Culture of Pastiche: Existential Aesthetics in the Modern Hindi Novel* (1993), explored the assimilation of Western modernist and existentialist influences in Hindi literature. Jaidev observed that Hindi authors selectively integrated Western techniques while preserving indigenous literary codes, illustrating a careful balance between adoption and resistance.

Overall, the influence of Western literature on Indian writing has been complex, multi-dimensional, and deeply interwoven with native traditions. Indian writers adapted, resisted, and reinterpreted Western forms, producing a rich literary landscape that reflects both global currents and indigenous heritage. The dialogue between East and West, tradition and modernity, remains central to understanding India's literary evolution.

### **Conclusion**

Krishna Baldev Vaid (1926–), who earned his Ph.D. from Harvard in 1961, initially taught English literature at Delhi University before relocating to the United States. His doctoral dissertation focused on the short stories of Henry James, a writer more established than Vaid and initially overlooked by the critic Jaidev. For nearly twenty years prior to returning to India, Vaid taught English at Potsdam State College in New York. During this period, his name

became associated with the American publication and distribution of a wide array of works, including his own novels, short stories, and plays, as well as translations of major literary figures such as Samuel Beckett (*Waiting for Godot* and *The Unfinished*) and Lewis Carroll (*Through the Looking-Glass* and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*).

It can be argued that both Vaid and Rushdie possess differing cultural sensitivities: Vaid's prolonged immersion in the West provided him with deep familiarity with Western literary traditions, whereas Rushdie left India as a young teenager. Unlike Vaid, there is little evidence to suggest that Rushdie could attempt to translate his own works into Hindi, Urdu, or Hindustani. The concept of intertextuality, therefore, extends beyond merely referencing other works within the same culture (as James Joyce does) or offering sensationalized portrayals of "the Other." Rather, it emerges from the interaction of two culturally distinct traditions, each sharing its sensibilities and artistic nuances. In this sense, Vaid's engagement with Western literature parallels the complexities seen in Salman Rushdie's literary positioning.

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