



Digital Hybridity in Indian-English Online Narratives: Post-2010 Perspectives

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Article Received on: 17/04/25; Revised on: 27/04/25; Approved for publication: 19/05/25

Keywords

Digital Hybridity, Indian-English Literature, Online Narratives, Postcolonial Theory, Platform Studies, Multimodal Literature, Social Media Literature

How to Cite this Article:

Soni K and Devi S. Digital Hybridity in Indian-English Online Narratives: Post-2010 Perspectives
Int. J. Sci. Info. 2025; 3(2): 105-111

Abstract

The post-2010 period marks a significant transformation in Indian-English literature, characterized by the rise of digital platforms as spaces for creative expression. Indian-English writers increasingly experiment with narrative forms that blend text, image, performance, and interactivity, giving rise to hybrid literary practices. This study examines the emergence of Indian-English online narrative forms, explores how digital platforms influence literary form, authorship, readership, and circulation, and analyzes selected narratives from Instagram, Terribly Tiny Tales, YourQuote, Wattpad, Pratilipi, Twitter/X, blogs, and spoken-word/video platforms. By employing a qualitative, interdisciplinary methodology combining digital narratology, postcolonial theory, platform studies, and multimodal discourse analysis, the paper highlights the complex interplay between technology, authorship, and reader participation, demonstrating the significance of digital hybridity in contemporary Indian-English literary culture.

1. Introduction

The advent of digital technologies has fundamentally reshaped literary production and reception in India. Since 2010, Indian-English writers have increasingly embraced online platforms such as Instagram, Wattpad, YourQuote, Pratilipi, Terribly Tiny Tales, and Twitter/X to share their work. These platforms enable writers to experiment with narrative form, engage with readers, and navigate hybrid modes of expression that blend traditional literary techniques with digital

affordances.

Digital hybridity, as explored in this study, refers to the blending of multiple narrative modes: print and screen, oral and written storytelling, literary and popular culture, English and regional languages, individual and collective authorship, and conventional and platform-specific structures. This hybridization is central to understanding post-2010 Indian-English literature, which increasingly relies on visual, textual, performative, and interactive components to construct meaning.

India's rapid digital expansion further amplifies the importance of online literary spaces. As of 2023, India hosts one of the world's largest internet and social media user bases, enabling new literary publics comprising bilingual users, regional readers, and mobile-first creators. The proliferation of smartphones, affordable internet, digital publishing platforms, and social media visibility has catalyzed the emergence of new forms of storytelling, providing fertile ground for hybrid literary experiments.

This paper addresses the first three objectives of the study: (1) examining the emergence of Indian-English online narrative forms after 2010, (2) studying how digital platforms transform literary form, authorship, readership, and circulation, and (3) analyzing selected narratives from various online platforms. By focusing on these objectives, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of contemporary Indian-English digital literature and its intersection with postcolonial theory, platform studies, and reader participation.

2. Review of Literature

The theoretical foundation for this study is rooted in electronic literature, digital narratology, postcolonial theory, and platform studies. N. Katherine Hayles (2008) argues that electronic literature necessitates novel reading strategies, highlighting how digital forms transform print traditions through interactivity and machine-mediated textuality. Espen Aarseth's (1997) concept of ergodic literature underscores the active engagement required from readers to navigate digital texts, providing a framework for understanding interactive online storytelling.

Janet Murray (1997) emphasizes immersion, agency, and procedural storytelling in digital environments, while Marie-Laure Ryan (2006) examines narrative across media and virtual spaces. Scott Rettberg (2019) and Leonardo Flores (2019) further elucidate the emergence of third-generation electronic literature on established platforms, situating Indian-English online narratives within global digital literary trends.

In the Indian context, Souvik Mukherjee (2017) and Shanmugapriya & Menon (2019) highlight the experimental nature of Indian digital literature and the limited institutional recognition it has received. Studies of platforms such as Wattpad (Pianzola et al., 2020), *Terribly Tiny Tales* (2018), and *YourQuote (YourStory, 2020)* reveal the centrality of reader engagement, serial publication, and social media aesthetics in shaping Indian-English digital narratives. Khilnani (2023) further emphasizes the role of Instagram poetry in promoting digital vernacular aesthetics among emerging Indian writers.

Despite these studies, a focused exploration of digital hybridity in Indian-English online narratives post-2010 remains underdeveloped, particularly concerning the intersection of platform features, multimodality, reader participation, and postcolonial identity.

3. Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative, analytical, and interdisciplinary approach. The methodology integrates digital narratology, postcolonial hybridity theory, platform studies, multimodal discourse analysis, and reader-response theory. By combining these frameworks, the study examines online texts not as isolated literary units but as platform-shaped narratives embedded in cultural and technological contexts.

3.1 Corpus Selection

The primary corpus includes publicly available Indian-English online narratives published between 2010 and 2023. Selected texts include:

- Microfiction from *Terribly Tiny Tales*
- Short-form writing from *YourQuote*
- Serialized English stories from *Wattpad* and *Pratilipi*
- Instagram poetry
- Twitter/X narrative threads
- Blogs and spoken-word/video performances

Purposive sampling guided by relevance to digital hybridity, reader engagement, and post-2010 publication ensured a diverse representation of narrative forms. Approximately 80-120 short texts or a smaller number of longer serialized works were selected based on accessibility and analytical feasibility.

3.2 Analytical Framework

- **Postcolonial Hybridity:** Homi K. Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity illuminates linguistic, cultural, and narrative mixing in online Indian-English literature.
- **Digital Narratology:** Examines narrative transformation across screens, hyperlinks, threads, comments, and multimedia formats.
- **Platform Studies:** Analyzes how structural features of *Instagram*, *Wattpad*, *YourQuote*, *Pratilipi*, *Twitter/X*, and other platforms shape narrative form.
- **Multimodal Discourse Analysis:** Investigates the interplay between words, images, emojis, typography, sound, and video.
- **Reader-Response Approach:** Considers comments, likes, shares, and visible engagement as integral to meaning-making.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

Only publicly available material is used. Private accounts, personal messages, unpublished data, or restricted content were excluded. Anonymization was applied where necessary, and examples comply with copyright, platform rules, and academic fair use.

4. Emergence of Indian-English Online Narrative Forms

The post-2010 digital landscape facilitated the rise of hybrid literary practices among Indian-English writers. Traditional print media, while still relevant, has been complemented by dynamic

online spaces that encourage experimentation. Online narratives exhibit characteristics including brevity, interactivity, visual and auditory elements, seriality, and multilingual integration.

4.1 Microfiction and Social Media Platforms

Platforms like *Terribly Tiny Tales* exemplify the convergence of literary and social media cultures. Microfiction narratives are constrained by brevity, often limited to a few hundred words, demanding condensed storytelling and immediate emotional impact. User engagement through comments, likes, and shares becomes part of the textual ecosystem, influencing narrative direction and reception.

4.2 Visual and Mobile-First Storytelling

Instagram poetry and *YourQuote* exemplify visual storytelling. Poems are often paired with images, videos, or typographic design, creating multimodal narratives. The use of hashtags, visual motifs, and platform-specific aesthetics contributes to a shared literary culture while enabling cross-pollination of regional languages and English.

4.3 Serialized Digital Literature

Platforms like Wattpad and *Pratilipi* facilitate serialized storytelling, allowing authors to publish episodically and receive real-time feedback. Serial publication encourages iterative narrative development, co-creation with readers, and algorithm-driven visibility. Indian-English authors utilize these features to experiment with narrative pacing, suspense, and audience engagement.

4.4 Blogs and Spoken-Word/Video Performances

Digital blogs, YouTube, and other video platforms support oral and performative narrative forms. Writers use speech, performance, and video editing to construct meaning, blending literary and performative elements. These narratives exemplify hybridity in modality, merging text, image, sound, and performance into cohesive storytelling.

5. Transformation of Literary Form, Authorship, Readership, and Circulation

Digital platforms reshape the literary ecosystem in multiple dimensions:

5.1 Literary Form

The constraints and affordances of digital media—character limits, visual emphasis, threaded posts, interactive features—necessitate adaptations in form. Writers experiment with fragmented narratives, hyperlinks, emoji-mediated expression, and multimodal integration. The narrative becomes a living, flexible entity, responsive to technological and social contexts.

5.2 Authorship

Traditional notions of individual authorship are challenged. Reader feedback, comments, and fan interactions influence narrative development. Writers co-create content with their audience, blurring lines between author and reader. Platform algorithms further mediate visibility, affecting which narratives gain prominence.

5.3 Readership

Digital readership is active, participatory, and geographically diverse. Platforms enable readers to respond in real time, share content, and recommend narratives. This participatory culture shifts the literary focus from solitary reading to networked engagement.

5.4 Circulation and Algorithmic Mediation

Digital circulation is platform-dependent. Algorithmic recommendation systems, trending lists, and serial posting schedules influence which texts are widely read. Circulation extends beyond traditional print boundaries, creating opportunities for viral literary forms and cross-cultural readerships.

6. Analysis of Selected Online Narratives

Analysis of Indian-English Instagram poets reveals integration of visual design, emoji, and hashtags into narrative structure. Poems are often multilingual, blending English with Hindi or regional languages, reflecting postcolonial linguistic hybridity. Reader comments and shares influence narrative interpretation, fostering participatory co-creation.

6.2 Terribly Tiny Tales

Microfiction texts exhibit concise, emotionally impactful storytelling. Real-time reader engagement informs narrative trajectory, allowing authors to adjust subsequent stories. Themes often address urban life, social issues, and contemporary culture, reflecting audience interests and digital trends.

6.3 YourQuote

YourQuote narratives emphasize mobile-first aesthetics, combining text and visuals. Writers leverage platform features to enhance readability, visibility, and shareability. Multilingual integration demonstrates linguistic hybridity, while social feedback loops affect narrative reception and authorial decisions.

6.4 Wattpad and Pratilipi

Serialized stories demonstrate iterative storytelling, where narrative evolves over multiple episodes. Reader comments, votes, and fan fiction derivative works create a co-creative literary environment. Authors adapt storylines in response to audience reception, reflecting platform-mediated authorship.

6.5 Twitter/X and Blogs

Threaded storytelling on Twitter/X enables concise yet connected narratives. Hyperlinks, images, and multimedia elements augment storytelling. Blogs allow more extended exploration while maintaining interactive features such as comments and shares. These platforms demonstrate flexibility in narrative length, modality, and audience engagement.

6.6 Spoken-Word and Video Performances

YouTube and other video platforms enable multimodal storytelling through performance, sound, and visual cues. Indian-English writers incorporate oral storytelling techniques, integrating performance into literary production. Audience engagement occurs through comments, likes, shares, and algorithm-driven visibility, enhancing co-creation.

7. Conclusion

The emergence of Indian-English online narratives post-2010 signifies a paradigm shift in literary production, form, and circulation. Digital platforms facilitate hybrid literary practices, enabling writers to experiment with multimodality, interactivity, and multilingual expression. Authorship and readership are reconceptualized, as narratives evolve through participatory engagement and

algorithmic mediation. Analysis of narratives from Instagram, Terribly Tiny Tales, YourQuote, Wattpad, Pratilipi, Twitter/X, blogs, and spoken-word/video platforms illustrates the diverse modes of hybrid storytelling and the complex interplay of author, audience, and platform. This study demonstrates that Indian-English digital literature is not merely an extension of print literature but a significant cultural and literary phenomenon. Digital hybridity enables new forms of expression, reshapes notions of literary value, and fosters inclusive, participatory literary communities. These findings have implications for literary studies, postcolonial theory, digital humanities, and the teaching of contemporary Indian literature.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

Kirti Soni contributed to conceptualization, methodology, investigation, original draft writing, and supervision. Suman Devi contributed to formal analysis, review and editing, and visualization.

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