



A Brief Study Of ‘Six Science Fiction Writers’ In Indian English Literature

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Abstract:

Science fiction, often abbreviated as sci-fi, is a genre of speculative fiction that explores imaginative and futuristic concepts that are often based on scientific principles, discoveries, and technologies. It is a genre that allows authors and creators to envision and explore alternate realities, future societies, advanced technologies, and the consequences of scientific advancements. Science fiction can be found in various forms, including literature, film, television, comics, and video games. Here are some key elements commonly found in science fiction - *advanced technology, space exploration, alternate realities, dystopian and utopian societies, alien life: Extraterrestrial life forms, time travel, cyberpunk, post-apocalyptic worlds, AI and Robotics, ethical and philosophical questions*. Science fiction in Indian English literature has a growing presence and is gaining recognition for its unique blend of Indian culture, traditions, and futuristic concepts. While Indian literature is rich in mythology, folklore, and historical narratives, modern Indian authors have embraced science fiction as a means to explore contemporary and future-oriented themes. This paper will try and chart the growth of Science Fiction in Indian English Literature by analyzing the works of six prominent Sci-Fi writers in IEL.

Keywords: Science Fiction, Indian English Literature, Extraterrestrial life forms, Futuristic Concepts, Advanced Technology.

Science fiction in Indian English literature is a growing and vibrant subgenre that has gained prominence in recent years. In India, Science Fiction is usually received as a study of the impact of Science and Technology on humanity. It is a literature of change brought out by the arrival of new Science gadgets or technological developments. Often, Indian Science Fiction is linked with a number of fabulous elements. They are mainly, space, time travel to the far of lands, and the attempts made for the prolonged existence of human beings. Indian English literature continues to evolve and diversify, and science fiction plays a vital role in expanding the literary landscape by offering fresh perspectives on India's past, present, and future. It provides a platform for authors to engage with complex issues and to imagine innovative solutions through the lens of science and technology. Indian authors writing in English have embraced science fiction to explore a wide range of themes, including social issues, technology, identity, and the future. If we really think about it, haven't the last nineteen months felt like we were playing a character in a dystopian sci-fi novel, fighting to stay alive as a deadly virus constantly mutated to gain entry into our body? That should be enough evidence to prove that the genre isn't all that outlandish and many sci-fi plots are just prophecies biding their time. All the ominousness aside, here are

six Indian writers we should add to our to-read list, all of whom are very different from one another and continue to write top-notch science fiction.

Manjula Padmanabhan:

Manjula Padmanabhan is an Indian playwright, journalist, comic strip artist, and children's book author. Her works explore science, technology, gender, and international inequalities. She is not a full time SF writer but some of her works are essentially SF in nature and have enriched the genre significantly. She is a playwright, poet as well as author and her play *Harvest*, is about futuristic Mumbai where organ selling is rampant, poor Indians selling various parts of their anatomy to rich Americans shopping for spare parts to replace theirs in a cannibalistic quest to hang on to youth and focuses on a protagonist who has agreed to sell his organs but how loses control of his self as well as his family as everything he does is monitored. The idea behind this play was to focus on the incessant capitalist ideals that are destroying India and how Indians have become the victims of materialistic values that they are even ready to sell their own body organs. Manjula Padmanabhan in *Harvest* presents battle a war between machine and man for possession human beings have to wage in future if not learn to control machines. Where machine will succeed at the initial ground, but final victory will lie with a (wo) man. Apart from *Harvest*, Manjula Padmanabhan's *The Island of Lost Girls*, is another SF tale. This is the story of Meiji – the only girl who has remained untouched and unmitigated in a country that has savaged its entire female population. Having saved her from certain death in the new Dark Age that has come upon the world, her guardian, Youngest, has transported her to the only place where she can remain safe – an Island where wounded girls are, sometimes literally, stitched back together and given a new life. But the Island itself is a menacing place and Meiji may be in more danger than ever before. To see what has become of his beloved girl, Youngest must find a way to infiltrate its odd environs while keeping the constantly assaulting voice in his head at bay. His struggles against the surreal inhabitants of a world gone wrong and with his own transformed identity only serve to steel his efforts to find the girl and escape once more. The *Island of Lost Girls* showcases, yet again, Manjula Padmanabhan's genius at creating searing landscapes and alternate, sometimes brutal, worlds while reaffirming the beauty and the ugliness, the cruelty and the tremendous compassion that essentially make us human. In both her SF works Manjula Padmanabhan tries to chart up a course for India as nation with feminist ideals along with the problems of the subalterns who are pressured into submission. Though *Harvest* reveals the identity of the nation as India, *The Island of Lost Girls* only implies it.

Samit Basu:

Basu burst onto the scene in 2004 with *The Simoqin Prophecies*, the first book in a fantasy trilogy called *GameWorld*. Samit Basu can be regarded as the foremost science fiction writer in India and his writings have been both a mix of science fiction as well as fantasy. He started out with the fantasy series *Gameworld* which has been dubbed by many the first authentic English fantasy series to come out from India and it received a lot of international acclaim. Post-*Gameworld*, Samit Basu started working on *Turbulence*, a science fiction book about Indian superheroes again a first of its kind for Indian science fiction writing in English that was a postmodernist take on various tropes of superhero genre. A sequel, *Resistance* is awaited eagerly by his fans The *Gameworld* series is a fascinating tale that more or less absorbs ideas from different mythologies all across the world along with numerous pop culture references that is the trademark style of Samit Basu. Basu's chief strengths as a novelist are character development, lively dialogue and a pleasingly off-kilter sense of humor. Apart from these, Basu's *Turbulence* too picks up a lot of ideas from the comic book genre fusing it with science fictional ideas. Alan Moore's seminal classic *Watchmen* along with comic book stories featuring Justice League of America and The Avengers all inspired him to weave up this tale of Indian superheroes.

Vandana Singh:

Singh is the author of the 2018 collection *Ambiguity Machines and Other Stories* (Zubaan Books) and *The Woman Who Thought She Was a Planet* (2009, Penguin/Zubaan Books). The latter includes ‘Tetrahedron’, still one of my all-time favourite science fiction stories to come out of India. Discernibly about the titular ‘Tetrahedron’, a mysterious object that suddenly materialises in Delhi (where the story is set), the story actually has a different heart: the protagonist Maya’s reluctance to marry a boring, inconsiderate man her parents have chosen. Exceptional events of the speculative fiction variety ensue, forcing us to take stock of our own lives more than anything else.

Gautam Bhatia:

The Wall, Gautam Bhatia’s 2020 debut, has quickly become one of my favorite dystopian works. Planned as the first book in *The Sumer Chronicles*, *The Wall* is set in the city-state of Sumer, surrounded on all sides by a massive, circular—you guessed it—wall. Bhatia’s cacotopia is that of a perfectly regimented order: people do not go hungry, as a rule, and most of them appear to have made their peace with a paternalistic government. As the novel progresses, however, we see how the wall and its divisions are manifestations of the way Sumerian society is strictly regulated—class and caste hierarchies are rigidly maintained, dissent is extinguished with an iron fist and histories are destroyed and rewritten if they challenge the status quo in even the smallest of ways. Bhatia’s memorable protagonist, Mithila, embarks on a daring quest to go beyond the wall in search of answers, and her story arc goes beyond the Campbellian ‘journey of the hero’ archetype into truly mind-bending territory. *The Horizon*, a sequel to *The Wall*, will be released on October 26.

Priya Sarukkai Chabria:

Clones have featured in some of the most fascinating, multifaceted works of science fiction in the last few decades; Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* and Christopher Priest’s *The Prestige* come to mind instantly. Allow me to add an Indian name to that list: Priya Sarukkai Chabria. Chabria’s *Generation 14* (2008) and its sequel, *Clone* (2019), feature ‘Clone 14/54/G’, named so by virtue of being the 14th copy of an ‘Original’. However, in *Generation 14*, 14/54/G begins to mutate by collating memories or ‘visitations’ as Chabria calls them. This ‘ghostly’ nomenclature also makes the clone’s presence seem borderline supernatural, an effect that Chabria plays out for the rest of the novel. Both *Generation 14* and *Clone* feature long, gorgeous stretches of lyrical, stream-of-consciousness prose that interrogate some pressing problems faced by any society today—the division of power, the preservation of culture and history, the role played by literature and the line between individual agency and collective responsibility.

S.B. Divya:

Technically, I’m cheating here since Divya is an American citizen (her parents moved there while she was a child). However, two things swayed me: the fact that she is of Indian parentage and that *Machinehood*, her brilliant new novel, was released in an Indian edition recently (Hachette India) and is now available in a bookstore near you. Released in America in March, *Machinehood* is a classic ‘novel of ideas’. The line between man and machine, the human brain and artificial intelligence, the power imbalance between gigantic corporations and their employees (or their customers, for that matter); these are just some of the themes this novel evocatively spotlights. Humans and AIs fighting over the same gig economy jobs in a world where

super-pills are helping humans enhance their physical capabilities to unheard-of standards—this is the backdrop against which *Machinehood* unfurls its central thriller plot. I don't say this lightly: if you have even a passing interest in technology and the rapidly changing nature of the workplace, this is a novel you simply have to read.

Conclusion:

In summary, the evolution of science fiction in Indian English literature has been marked by the blending of traditional Indian themes with speculative elements, the exploration of contemporary social and political issues, and the emergence of a diverse group of authors contributing to the genre. As India continues to evolve, so too will its contributions to the world of science fiction literature. Indian SF is finally a genre that has international attention and with the current situation where SF is trying to break free of American and British hegemony and welcoming new writers from across the world. SF has become not only popular around the entire world but many works are being translated so that the readers have a variety of options. Recently, Cixin Liu became the first Asian to win the prestigious Hugo awards and this gives us the understanding that Science Fiction from different parts of the world can really do well. There is a chance, an opportunity that has to be grabbed and with Indian SF writers already creating a niche for themselves it is only time that SF in India will become even more popular

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