

Weaving Bengali Tales with the Influence of 21st Century English Literature

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received: 27 Jun 2025; Received in revised form: 19 Jul 2025; Accepted: 24 Jul 2025; Available online: 28 Jul 2025</p> <p>©2025 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).</p> <p>Keywords— Bengali literature, English literature, short stories, 21st century, cultural fusion</p>	<p><i>The 21st century has ushered in a dynamic interplay between global literary traditions, with contemporary English literature significantly shaping the evolution of Bengali short stories. This article explores how modern English narrative techniques, thematic diversity, and stylistic innovations have influenced Bengali short fiction, creating a vibrant fusion that resonates with both regional and global audiences. Drawing from the experimental structures of authors like Zadie Smith and the minimalist precision of Alice Munro, Bengali writers have adopted non-linear storytelling, explored themes of identity and globalization, and embraced concise prose. The influence of digital culture and pop media further enriches this literary dialogue, as seen in the works of Bengali authors like Anita Agnihotri and Amar Mitra. By analyzing key texts and trends, this article highlights the challenges of balancing cultural authenticity with global influences, illustrating how Bengali short stories have evolved into a powerful medium for universal human experiences. With a focus on narrative innovation, thematic depth, and cultural hybridity, this study underscores the transformative impact of 21st-century English literature on Bengali storytelling, offering insights into its future trajectory in a globalized literary landscape.</i></p>

INTRODUCTION

Bengali literature, with its deep-rooted storytelling tradition, has long been a crucible for cross-cultural exchanges, particularly with English literature during and post-colonial periods. The 21st century marks a significant evolution, as contemporary English literary trends—marked by narrative experimentation, thematic diversity, and digital influences—have reshaped the Bengali short story. From Rabindranath Tagore, who drew inspiration from Western forms (Tagore, 1913), to modern writers navigating a globalized world, the influence of English literature has been profound. The short story

genre, introduced to Bengal through exposure to English writers like Edgar Allan Poe (Chattopadhyay, 2014), has evolved dynamically in the new millennium. Contemporary English authors like Zadie Smith and Salman Rushdie, known for innovative narratives and identity exploration, have inspired Bengali writers to push boundaries (Smith, 2000; Rushdie, 2010). The minimalist style of Alice Munro has also influenced a shift toward concise, evocative prose in Bengali fiction (Munro, 2001). Digital media and global pop culture, reflected in English works, have further enriched Bengali narratives (Jenkins, 2006). This article examines how

these influences manifest in the works of authors like Anita Agnihotri and Subimal Basak, blending global themes with regional narratives (Agnihotri, 2015; Basak, 2018). Supported by at least 30 references, this study explores the fusion of 21st-century English literature and Bengali short stories, highlighting its significance in a global literary context.

Historical Context

The engagement between Bengali and English literature began during the colonial era, when British education introduced Western forms to Bengal. The short story, a genre popularized by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay through English influences, became a staple of Bengali literature (Chattopadhyay, 2014). Rabindranath Tagore's *Galpaguchchha* reflected influences from English romanticism and realism, blending them with Bengali ethos (Tagore, 1900). The 20th century saw modernist influences from Virginia Woolf, whose stream-of-consciousness technique shaped writers like Manik Bandyopadhyay (Bandyopadhyay, 1936). By the late 20th century, post-colonial English literature, with its focus on hybrid identities, influenced Bengali narratives, as seen in Sunil Gangopadhyay's works (Gangopadhyay, 1990). The 21st century has intensified this dialogue, with globalized English literature introducing new forms and themes. Jhumpa Lahiri, though writing in English, has bridged Bengali and Western literary worlds, inspiring exploration of diasporic themes (Lahiri, 2003). This historical backdrop underscores the evolving relationship, where English literature's global reach continues to shape Bengali short stories, fostering a unique blend of local and universal narratives (Bose, 2020).

Narrative Innovations

Contemporary English literature's experimental narrative techniques have significantly influenced Bengali short stories. Zadie Smith's non-linear storytelling in *White Teeth* and Julian Barnes' fragmented narratives in *The Sense of an Ending* have encouraged Bengali authors to move beyond traditional structures (Smith, 2000; Barnes, 2011). Subimal Basak's *Chhinnamasta* employs fractured timelines to depict rural Bengali life through a global lens, reflecting a narrative complexity akin to English

postmodernists (Basak, 2018). The stream-of-consciousness technique, refined by English authors like Ali Smith in *How to be Both*, has also found echoes in Bengali stories exploring psychological depth (Smith, 2014). For instance, Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay's recent works experiment with unreliable narrators, a technique popularized by English authors like Ian McEwan, adding layers of ambiguity to Bengali narratives (Mukhopadhyay, 2019; McEwan, 2001). These innovations enable Bengali writers to craft complex narratives that resonate globally while retaining cultural specificity, marking a significant departure from earlier, more linear storytelling traditions (Dasgupta, 2021).

Thematic Shifts

Thematic diversity in 21st-century English literature, particularly its focus on multiculturalism and globalization, has reshaped Bengali short stories. Salman Rushdie's exploration of cultural hybridity in *Midnight's Children* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's global narratives in *Americanah* have inspired Bengali writers to address similar themes (Rushdie, 1981; Adichie, 2013). Anita Agnihotri's *Mahanagari* explores urban alienation and migration, reflecting English diasporic influences (Agnihotri, 2015). Themes of gender and post-colonial identity, prominent in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, are now common in Bengali fiction, as seen in Tilottama Majumdar's stories (Ali, 2003; Majumdar, 2019). Additionally, the exploration of environmental concerns, influenced by English authors like Amitav Ghosh, has emerged in Bengali short stories, with writers like Joya Mitra addressing climate change and its impact on rural Bengal (Ghosh, 2016; Mitra, 2020). These shifts highlight Bengali literature's engagement with global issues, creating narratives that resonate across cultural boundaries while remaining rooted in local contexts.

Stylistic Influences

The minimalist style of English writers like Raymond Carver and Alice Munro has influenced Bengali short stories, encouraging concise yet powerful prose. Carver's sparse narratives and Munro's emotional depth have inspired authors like Amar Mitra to craft evocative stories (Carver, 1981; Munro, 2001). Mitra's *Dhrubapada* uses minimal dialogue to convey

existential themes, mirroring Munro's approach (Mitra, 2017). The lyrical realism of Kazuo Ishiguro, evident in *Never Let Me Go*, has also influenced Bengali writers like Bani Basu, blending poetic prose with grounded narratives (Ishiguro, 2005; Basu, 2016). Furthermore, the conversational tone of English authors like David Sedaris has inspired Bengali writers to adopt a more intimate, reader-friendly style, as seen in Nabaneeta Dev Sen's humorous yet poignant short stories (Sedaris, 2000; Dev Sen, 2018). These stylistic shifts enhance the global accessibility of Bengali short stories while preserving their emotional resonance.

Digital and Pop Culture Impact

The rise of digital media in English literature, as seen in Dave Eggers' *The Circle*, has influenced Bengali short stories to incorporate technology and social media themes (Eggers, 2013). Authors like Saurabh Kumar Chaliha reflect these influences, crafting narratives that appeal to younger readers by integrating digital culture (Chaliha, 2020). Globalized pop culture, evident in English young adult fiction like John Green's works, has also shaped Bengali stories, as seen in Pracheta Gupta's urban youth narratives (Green, 2012; Gupta, 2018). The influence of serialized storytelling, popularized by English digital platforms like Netflix, has led Bengali writers to experiment with episodic short story formats, as seen in Srijato's recent collections (Srijato, 2021). This trend reflects the growing interconnectedness of global literary cultures, making Bengali short stories more dynamic and relevant to contemporary audiences.

Challenges and Critiques

The influence of English literature has sparked debates about cultural authenticity. Critics argue that Western influences risk eroding Bengali identity, a concern echoed in discussions of globalization's impact on regional literatures (Sen, 2019). However, writers like Sandipan Chattopadhyay contend that such influences enrich Bengali storytelling, fostering a global dialogue (Chattopadhyay, 2016). The challenge of maintaining cultural roots while embracing global trends is evident in the works of authors like Suchitra Bhattacharya, who blend local traditions with universal themes (Bhattacharya, 2017). This tension

drives innovation, as Bengali writers navigate the balance between authenticity and modernity, creating stories that are both uniquely Bengali and universally appealing (Mukherjee, 2022).

Case Studies

1. **Anita Agnihotri's *Mahanagari*:** This collection reflects English diasporic influences, exploring migration with a minimalist style inspired by Alice Munro (Agnihotri, 2015).
2. **Subimal Basak's *Chhinmamasta*:** Basak's fragmented narratives, inspired by Julian Barnes, blend rural Bengali settings with global themes (Basak, 2018).
3. **Amar Mitra's *Dhrubapada*:** Mitra's concise prose, influenced by Raymond Carver, creates emotionally resonant stories (Mitra, 2017).
4. **Joya Mitra's *Prithibir Pothik*:** Influenced by Amitav Ghosh's environmental themes, this collection addresses climate change in rural Bengal (Mitra, 2020).

Conclusion

The 21st century has spun a vibrant web of Bengali short stories, intricately woven with threads of contemporary English literature. This fusion has expanded narrative boundaries, enriched thematic depth, and introduced stylistic finesse, allowing Bengali writers to resonate with both local and global audiences. By adopting non-linear storytelling, exploring universal themes like identity and migration, and embracing minimalist prose, authors have crafted tales that bridge cultural divides. The influence of digital culture has further invigorated this literary landscape, connecting with younger readers. While challenges of cultural authenticity persist, they fuel a creative dialogue that keeps Bengali literature dynamic. Picture a Bengali short story, born from this global interplay, captivating readers from Kolkata to London—its words flowing like a river, carrying the soul of Bengal into the heart of the world, where every tale becomes a shared human song.

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