

Indian authors in English: What are they writing about?

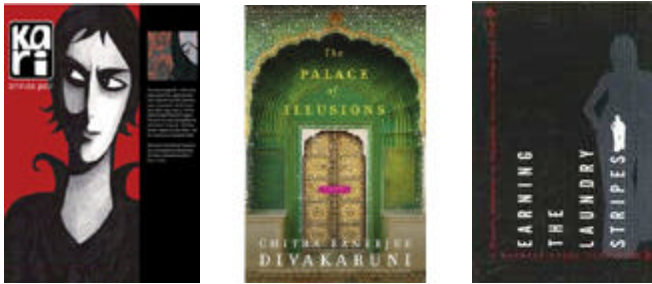


Emerging India is a theme that has held the fascination of Indian authors for years. **Shobha De's** 15th book which she describes as a “passionate love letter to the most beautiful country in the world” is called **Superstar India: from incredible to unstoppable**. The book is a commentary on the minds and moods of a rapidly changing nation that she believes is headed for stardom. Some of the themes include old people, caste, Mayawati, other Dalits, cricket, NRIs, corruption and her Brahmin childhood. **Touching Lives: the little known triumphs of the Indian space programme** by **S.K. Das** while a departure from De's style of writing, is similar in its celebration of India. In this book, Das has written about 13 ISRO projects (Indian Space Research Organisation) across the country and how they have transformed the lives of ordinary people. In **India The Emerging Giant**, **Arvind Panagariya** has written about economic growth from 1951-2006; debated over poverty and inequality; spoken about macro economy and microeconomics covering trade, services and agriculture; government policies and reforms to weave together a comprehensive critique of the Indian economy.



There is also an interesting collection of books written on **modern, urban India**. **Eimona** by **GB Prabhakar** is ‘anomie’ in the reverse and is ‘a tale of the future that is already happening in India’. The characters live in a dystopic world and comprise an urban dysfunctional family. Eimona has been said to belong to those urban professionals who are confused about the world they have conquered. Rupa Gulab's **Chip of the old blockhead** stands out because of how it deals with teenage angst. It is sensitive to the urban Indian youth and the realities of divorce, single parents, working moms, use of foul language etc. It has been called a ‘racy and witty write’,

and while the plot is predictable, the lively character sketches make the book a compelling read. *Séance on a Sunday Afternoon* by **Shinie Antony** is a collection of fictional short stories ‘describing how, in the solitude of skyscrapers, modern man has begun to redefine his need for society. The agony, loneliness and the burden of past memories manifest themselves into a string of fascinating short stories that are macabre, wistful, profound, witty and curiously sad.’ Keeping with this dark theme is the 3rd book from Chetan Bhagat, the investment banker turned biggest-selling Indian novelist writing in English. *The 3 mistakes of my life* is based on the actual events relating to the riots in Gujarat in 2002. The ‘3’ in the title refers to 3 main issues that most Indians obsess over- cricket, religion and business and how these issues collide against the backdrop of Ahmedabad.

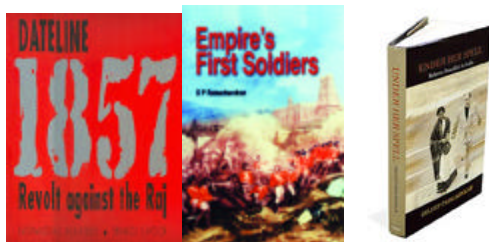


Another discernible theme this year is **women authors taking on bold, new subjects**. *Kari* by **Amruta Patil** is the first Indian graphic novel written by a woman, involving a lesbian protagonist. ‘It looks at the soullessness of urban India and the sexual and professional freedom young, independent women find within it.’ **Chitra B Divakaruni** has attempted a new interpretation of the Mahabharata from Panchaali’s point of view in *The Palace of Illusions*. **Manpreet Sodhi Somesh’s** *Earning the Laundry Stripes: a woman’s adventures in Hindustan Lever’s all boys sales club* is about gender politics from inside a boardroom to the mud walls of a hut as the protagonist Noor Bhalla learns that it is by being herself, i.e. a woman that she can be an effective professional. *Escape* by **Manjula Padmanabhan** is in the pipelines and is a science-fiction set in a country where women have been exterminated and one surviving girl must find her way to a safer land.



Topics related to **social awakening** themes have also been touched upon by Indian authors. In *Jalyatra-exploring India’s traditional water management systems* by **Nitya Jacob**, the author travels through Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Chambal, Shillong, Shekhawati, Goa, Uttarakhand and Bundelkhand in search of traditional water management systems.

The book has been called an informative assertion that we are complicit in the degeneration of these systems and must take responsibility of reviving them to ensure water security. **Transforming Capitalism** by **Arun Maira** discusses the role of corporate social responsibility and how its time for capitalism to become ‘more inclusive and sustainable’. The author uses his experiences in Indian and international businesses to suggest a roadmap for the future. **A Matter of Equity: Freedom of faith in secular India** by **John Dayal** is an analysis of church and society in India and ‘evaluates the nature of a Christian response to the hate campaigns of the Hindutva brigade with an intention to inform and provoke.’



While Indian authors have written about the present and the future, they have not forgotten **about the past** either. **Dateline 1857: Revolt against the Raj** by **Rudrangshu Mukherjee** is an authoritative account of the Great Rebellion, with simple descriptions of the military operations that occurred and rich pictorial representations of the rebellion. **Empire's First Soldiers** by **DP Ramachandran** celebrates the actions and achievements of the pre-Independence Indian Army. The book in its 3 sections, deals with the 17th-18th century wars in South India, wars abroad where the Indian army served British needs and the post independence Indian army in all its roles including peacekeeping etc. **A Sense of The Past: Women's Writings on Partition** edited by **Urvashi Butalia** is a collection of essays that explore the impact and experience of Partition, particularly for women, with contributors from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. In **Under her Spell: Roberto Rosselini in India**, **Dileep Padgaonkar** has taken the ‘hottest Indian scandal of the 1950s as the centre piece of a social narrative of the rise and fall of Nehruvian India.’ The personal histories of Rosselini, his Indian lover-the married Sonali Dasgupta, their children and Sonali’s husband have also been captured.



Neither are Indian authors neglecting **international issues**. **Travelling through Conflict: Essays on Politics of West Asia** by **Hamid Ansari** are essays related mainly to the west Asia region and analyse Islam, democracy and modernity. The Arab/Israeli issue, the global dependence of oil in the Middle East and India’s abiding interest in the

region for the peace, energy, trade and safety of its 5 million workforce in the region is debated and discussed. In the **Blood of the Earth: the battle for the world's vanishing oil resources**, Dilip Hiro traces the history of conflicts over oil, digs into the history of both the Bushes, and also chronicles the role of oil outside the political world and its indispensability. Hiro then talks about the Indian perspective and how oil has reconfigured our foreign policy. **Maritime Counter Terrorism: a pan Asia perspective edited by Swati Parashar** is the first book on this theme to be published from India. An edited compilation of papers presented at a two-day workshop on maritime counter-terrorism organised by the Observer Research Foundation, this book has contributions from leading experts from the Asia Pacific, South Asia and Southeast Asia. Terrorism at sea is a different ball game from terrorism on land. The repercussions are said to be wider, ranging from stunting national economic growth and huge industry losses to chaos in global trade. Lastly there is **Conversations on Russia: Reform from Yeltsin to Putin** by Padma Desai which traces the Russian transition from Communism to the free-for-all market economy and also poses two possible ways in which the country is perhaps headed.

Hence we can trace six interesting themes on which Indian authors seem to be concentrating. While some of these themes are not entirely new, some of them do reflect a gradual change in the times and tastes of Indian readers.