

New Dimensions in Science Fiction



Indian Science Fiction Patterns, History and Hybridity

Suparno Banerjee

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Suparno Banerjee



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For Irabati
You are the future

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Series Editors' Preface

Science fiction (SF) is a global storytelling form of techno-scientific modernity which conveys distinct experiences with science, technology and society to a wide range of readers across centuries, continents and cultures. The New Dimensions in Science Fiction series aims to capture the dynamic, worldwide and media-spanning dimensions of SF storytelling and criticism by providing a venue for scholars from multiple disciplines to explore their ideas on the relations of science and society as expressed in SF.

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A Brief Chronology of Indian Science Fiction

- 1835 Kylas Chunder Dutt's 'A Journal of Forty-Eight Hours of the Year 1945', first Indian future history fiction and one of the earliest Indian English fictions
- 1845 Shoshee Chunder Dutt's 'The Republic of Orissa: A Page From the Annals of Twentieth Century', second future history fiction
- 1882 Hemlal Dutta's 'Rahasya' (Bangla), first narrative of technology and automation
- 1884-8 Pandit Ambika Datta Vyasa's 'Ascharya Vrittant' (Hindi), first adventure science fiction (SF)
- 1892 'Shukra Bhraman' (Bangla) written by Jagadananda Roy, first space travel story; published in 1914
- 1896 'Niruddesher Kahini' (Bangla) written by Jagadish Chandra Bose for a short-story competition, first narrative functioning on exploitation of a specific scientific principle; later published as 'Palatak Tufan' in 1921
- 1900 Keshav Prasad Singh's 'Chandralok Ki Yatra' (Hindi), first lunar-journey story; Hindi magazine *Saraswati* starts publication
- 1905 Begum Rokeya Shakhawat Hossain's 'Sultana's Dream', first feminist utopia
- 1908 Nath Madhav's 'Srinivasa Rao', possibly the first Marathi SF
- 1913 Start of publication of Bangla children's magazine *Sandesh*
- 1915 Anadidhan Banerjee's 'Mangal Graha' (Hindi), possibly the first Mars story
- 1922 Sukumar Ray's 'Heshoram Hushiyarer Diary' (Bangla)
- 1924 Rahul Sankrityayan's socialist utopia *Baisvee Sadi* (Hindi)

- 1925 Hemendra Kumar Roy's first SF, *Meghduter Marte Agaman* (Bangla)
- 1945 Premendra Mitra's first Ghanada story 'Moshā' (Bangla)
- 1946 Kumudeswar Borthakur's 'Atom Boma', possibly the first Assamese SF
- 1948 First publication of Hindi magazine *Dharmayug*
- 1952 William Berke's *Kaadu/The Jungle* (Tamil/English), first partially Indian SF movie
- 1961 Satyajit Ray's 'Byom Jatrir Diary', first Professor Shanku story
- 1963 First publication of *Ascharya* (Bangla) by Adrish Bardhan, the first SF magazine in India
A. Kasilingam's *Kalai Arasi* (Tamil), first Indian SF film
- 1965 Rajshekhar Bhoosnurmath's 'Holiday Planet', possibly first Kannada SF
First SF film club in India starts in Kolkata under the guidance of Satyajit Ray
- 1971 First publication of Pran's Chacha Chaudhary comics (Hindi)
- 1974 Jayant Vishnu Narlikar's first SF 'Krishna Bibar' (Marathi)
The Marathi Vidnyan Parishad launches SF writing competition to promote science education
- 1975 First publication of Bangla SF magazine *Fantastic*
Salman Rushdie's *Grimus*
- 1976 Leela Majumdar's 'Akash Ghanti' (Bangla)
- 1980 Sujatha's *En Iniya Iyanthira* (Tamil)
- 1986 *Space City Sigma*, first Indian SF TV show
- 1987 Shekhar Kapur's film *Mr. India*
- 1989 Narlikar's *Vaman Parat Na Ala* (Marathi)
- 1993 Bal Phondke edited *It Happened Tomorrow*, first collection of regional SF translated into English

- 1995 Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome*
Establishment of Indian Science Fiction Writers Association
- 1997 Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest* wins Onassis International Cultural prize for theatrical plays
Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome* wins Arthur C. Clarke Award
- 1998 Establishment of Indian Association for Science Fiction Studies
Launch of *Indian Journal of Science Fiction Studies*
- 2002 *Vigyan Katha*, Hindi SF magazine starts publication
- 2003 Abhijit Choudhury's SF comedy film *Patalghar* (Bangla), National Film Award in two categories
Manish Jha's dystopian film *Matrubhoomi* (Hindi), multiple international awards including FIPRESCI Award in the Parallel Section at the Venice Film Festival award
Rakesh Roshan's *Koi Mil Gaya* (Hindi), multiple awards including Best Film Award in Filmfare Awards
- 2005 Vandana Singh's 'Delhi' (2004) shortlisted for British SF Association Award in short fiction category
- 2009 Vandana Singh's *Distances* (2008) wins Carl Brandon Parallax Award and on James Tiptree Jr Award Honour List
- 2010 S. Shankar's *Enthiran* (Tamil), multiple awards including in National Film Awards and Filmfare Awards; highest-earning movie of the year
- 2011 Anubhav Sinha's film *Ra.One* (Hindi), multiple awards including National Film Awards and Filmfare Awards; possibly most expensive Indian film ever
- 2012 Vandana Singh and Anil Menon edit *Breaking the Bow*, SF and other speculative fiction inspired by *Ramayana* (nominated for 2013 Locus Award)
- 2016 *Kalpabishwa*, Bangla SF webzine starts
Mithila Review, SF webzine starts

- 2018 Vina Jie-Min Prasad's 'A Series of Steaks' (2017, Best Novelette) and 'Fandom for Robots' (2017) nominated for Hugo Award (Short Story)
- Luminescent Threads: Connections to Octavia E. Butler* (2017), edited by Alexandra Pierce and Mimi Mondal nominated for Hugo Award (Best Related Work)
- Gautam Bhatia (*Strange Horizon* editorial team) and S. B. Divya (*Escape Pod* editorial team) nominated for Hugo Award (Best Semiprozine)
- 2019 *The Gollancz Book of South Asian Science Fiction* edited by Tarun Saint
- Vandana Singh's *Ambiguity Machines and Other Stories* (2018) finalist in Philip K. Dick Award
- Kalpabishwa* (Bangla) publishes special issue on SF by women

Introduction:

To Mark or Not to Mark Territories

In the last twenty years, science fiction (SF) scholarship in Europe and North America has started recognising the links between SF and colonialism and at the same time paying attention to non-western and postcolonial SF. This scholarly trend has produced a number of books and anthologies that expose inherent connections between SF studies and the study of colonial and postcolonial literature – Ralph Pordzik (2001), John Rieder (2008), Patricia Kerslake (2007), Ericka Hoagland and Reema Sarwal (2010, anthology), Masood Raja, Jason Ellis and Swaralipi Nandi (2011, anthology), Eric Smith (2012) and Jessica Langer (2011) to name a few. Although SF found its dominant expression in western cultures, the above-mentioned works amply prove that SF is not only a western phenomenon. Many SF traditions thrive around the world and require extensive studies. In recent years, several scholars have taken on such tasks: for example Rachel Heywood Ferreira for Argentinian SF, Elizabeth Ginway for Brazilian SF and Anindita Banerjee for Russian SF. Indian SF, which probably has one of the oldest SF traditions outside Europe and North America, has yet to see such a broad book-length publication.

Indian SF, though, has seen a rising critical interest in the last two decades, reflected notably in many scholarly articles by Suparno Banerjee, Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay, Bishnupriya Ghosh, Sami A. Khan, Jessica Langer, Anwesha Maiti, Uppinder Mehan and Debjani Sengupta among others, as well as a few dissertations (Banerjee, 2010; Chattopadhyay, 2013; Khan, 2015). In 2016, *Science Fiction Studies* dedicated a special issue to Indian SF. Although these scholarly voices provide some excellent analyses of Indian SF, a unifying and broad discussion of such trends from a 'national tradition' model is still lacking. Such a study will provide a coherent and sustained analysis, and a wider picture of Indian SF, tasks which are not possible within the confines of an article, the multiple voices of an anthology or a journal issue. This book hopes to perform such an undertaking – to delineate the historical

development of the genre over the years and examine major thematic patterns across multiple languages.

Any discussion of SF is accompanied by a dilemma of demarcation: what qualifies as SF and what does not. While too strict a definition of the genre stifles creative and critical vitality and renders a narrow vision of the field, an overly fluid and relativistic approach may lead to the loss of terminological specificity. Consequently, finding a fine balance among the various generic determinants and intergeneric and historically mutable relationships is crucial at the beginning of this project – demarcating a discursive territory that is clear enough for building a cohesive argument, but also fluid enough to indicate the contingent nature of such arguments. This dilemma of demarcation, though, is doubled in the examination of any national tradition. In addition to 'SF', the categories that justify a specific national adjective, 'Indian' in our case, must be examined. While this second definitional task can be performed by pointing at the geographic boundaries of the current Indian nation, geographic boundaries are known to be unstable over any extended period; even at any given point in time, boundaries can be hotly contested. Consequently, in both instances, 'Indian' and 'SF', the definitions emerge out of dilemmas inherent in complex interactions of ideas and historical forces that expose their overdetermined nature. This introduction will work through these problematics to gain an understanding of both 'Indian' and 'SF' that will be useful for engaging with Indian SF.

Defining SF

In his highly influential study *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (1979), Darko Suvin defines SF as a literature of 'cognitive estrangement'. According to him, SF functions on a critical and dialectic interaction of two opposing forces:

It [SF] should be defined as a fictional tale determined by the hegemonic literary device of a *locus* and/or *dramatis personae* that (1) are *radically or at least significantly different from empirical times, places, and characters* of 'mimetic' or 'naturalist' fiction, but (2) are nonetheless – to the extent that SF differs from other 'fantastic' genres, that is, ensembles of

fictional tales without empirical validation – simultaneously perceived as *not impossible* within the cognitive (cosmological and anthropological) norms of the author's epoch.¹

For Suvin, the 'necessary and sufficient' condition of SF is the interaction between estrangement and cognition, an 'imaginative framework' that is alternative to the author's own reality and creation of a 'novum', something completely new, that radically differentiates the universe of the story from the continuation of the author's real world. 'Science', in its generally accepted sense as originator of technology and coming out of the European Enlightenment tradition, is not necessarily essential to the creation of SF. For Suvin, the 'hypothesis' from which SF takes off is not a scientific but a fictional one; it is the estranging device, much like the 'alienation effect' (*verfremdungs-effekt*) in Brecht's epic theatre or the Russian Formalist concept propagated by Victor Shklovsky to defamiliarise (*ostranienie*) an object in order to draw attention to it. From that point on the story is developed with a totalising rigour, which is the 'scientific' element. The estrangement acting as a formal framework allows the detached eye to focus on the tale's cognitive aspect – where the critical gaze is always fixed on the fundamental realities lying underneath the estranged surface. This cognitive approach, according to Suvin, makes SF 'analogous to that of modern science and philosophy'.²

While Suvin's approach distinguishes SF from mimetic literature as well as separating SF from other speculative or non-mimetic works, a strict agreement with this definition, according to Carl Freedman, leads to certain problems.³ Freedman argues that adhering strictly to the meaning of 'cognition' and 'estrangement' would exclude much of the works in the popular pulp SF tradition while including many works that show less affinity with the accepted notion of SF. 'Cognition', used in the context of Suvin's definition of SF, connotes the logical/rational thinking capacity related to acquiring knowledge (science in its broader sense); by extension, this concept indicates a proper logical development within a text that leads to the knowledge of some type of human condition: political, philosophical, scientific and so on. 'Estrangement', used in the same definitional context, suggests a distance produced because of the lack of knowledge, which may signify the mysteriousness of the process that defamiliarises the fictional scenario from our normal world. In his definition, Suvin takes the mystery out of

estrangement and suggests that it is a result of the cognitive process desiring to explore the human condition. Freedman argues that, according to Suvin, many of the early twentieth-century SF stories in the US would not be considered literature of 'cognitive estrangement' as they lack rigorous development of plot, but rather are like fantasies wearing a mask of SF. Thus even modern classics like George Lucas's *Star Wars* movies (1977 onwards) will fall into this category, while Brecht and Dante will be considered proper SF. To solve this dilemma, Freedman modifies the term 'cognition' to 'cognition effect' to include texts that present an appearance of a cognitive approach though without strictly being cognitive; thus he defines SF as the genre that posits 'cognitive estrangement' as its dominant tendency, and interacts with other minor tendencies often associated with other genres.

However, in recent years this dialectical approach has been challenged by critics and authors such as Brian Attebery, John Rieder, China Miéville, Mark Bould, Sheryll Vint and Roger Luckhurst as too formalist and prescriptive. While Attebery uses the idea of 'fuzzy sets' (some shared qualities among varied modes of writings) in place of a dialectical definition,⁴ Rieder⁵ and Luckhurst⁶ prefer to examine SF in a historically mutable context rather than through any type of formalist approach; Miéville, in addition, criticises Suvin and Freedman's emphasis on the notion of 'cognition' from an ideological point of view by asking whose cognition or cognition effect we should prioritise.⁷

According to Rieder, any overtly formal genre definition ignores the historical mutability of generic qualities and even the concept of genre itself. In 'On Defining SF, Or Not' (2010) Rieder proposes,

that understanding the positions and values of SF within past and present economies of genre, or how the history of this shifting and slippery subject fits into the larger context of changes within the system of genres, is the frame in which to put the question, what difference does it make when 'we' point to a text and say that it is SF?⁸

He sees SF through the 'communities of practice' model and argues that at best only an evolving ad hoc definition of the genre can be provided, wherein the various differing practices can come together, not in a final unity but in a 'broad horizon' of affinities. In Rieder's view, this type of definition refers to 'a shared territory that is not a matter of giving up on

arriving at a definition of the genre, but rather is precisely the product of the interaction among different communities of practice using different definitions of SF.⁹ Miéville's critique differs from Rieder's: he focuses on the ideology of 'science' and 'rationality' rather than on genre theory itself. He argues that Suvin (and also Freedman) prioritises a western understanding of these terms and that such understanding leads to the exclusivist attitude to any other fantastic literature displaying less 'rational' quality. Miéville proposes:

Taking alterity as a starting point might allow us to trace structural relations between fantastic genres and the anti-realist avant-garde. It might also allow a revisiting with critical rigour of a traditional – and traditionally denigrated as woolly and anti-theoretical – notion of the 'sense of wonder', as intrinsic to the field.¹⁰

A similar definitional discourse brews in the Indian SF community. The terms or corresponding ideas in some of the Indian languages that stand for SF are roughly translated into English as 'stories of imagined science' ('kalpabigyaner golpo' or often just 'kalpabigyan' in Bangla), 'science stories' ('bigyan-vittik golpo' in Bangla, 'vijñana katha' in Hindi and Marathi, 'ariviyal puñakatai' in Tamil etc.), 'weird' ('ajgubi' in Bangla), 'science fantasy', 'science fiction' and the larger umbrella term 'speculative fiction'. The main conflicting elements in this definitional debate are the allegiance to 'vijñana', the Sanskrit word that stands for 'specialised' knowledge, and translates into English as 'science' in its post-Enlightenment methodological and disciplinary sense, along with the corresponding words and derivatives of 'vijñana' in other Indian languages on the one hand, and the transcending/marginalising of actual 'vijñana' in favour of the more fantastic/sensational on the other. In one of the few serious works of scholarship on this definitional debate in an indigenous language (Bangla), Rabin Bal cites Satyajit Ray in describing the two camps along the lines of Vernians (those who prefer a stronger allegiance to science and logic) and the Wellsians (those who use science only as a device to break through contemporary reality to imagine alterities).¹¹ While Jayant Vishnu Narlikar, an eminent astrophysicist and Marathi SF author, belongs to the first camp, Adrish Bardhan, an eminent Bengali SF author and founder of *Ascharya*, the first SF magazine in India, is part of the second. Narlikar

calls for actual scientific elements in SF and dismisses what he calls 'pseudo-science' in these narratives.¹² Bardhan on the other hand, refuses to be constrained by any such boundaries.¹³ For Bardhan SF and fantasy are rarely distinguishable, even though something akin to Freedman's 'cognitive effect' is often present in Bardhan's own SF writing. These two authors' positions are symptomatic of the larger field. While such influential authors and editors as Bal Phondke, Premendra Mitra and Kshitindranaryan Roy have professed opinions like Narlikar's, authors such as Leela Majumdar and Satyajit Ray take a more ambiguous stance. Majumdar tries to distinguish between SF and weird fiction by the presence of scientific elements for the sake of the primarily juvenile readership, but Ray takes a more liberal attitude.¹⁴ More recently Vandana Singh, an author and theoretical physicist, in her 'Speculative Manifesto' (2008), has called for the primacy of imagination without regard to fidelity to actual science in speculating about alternative possibilities. For her, the finer genre distinctions are of lesser importance than speculatively imagining alterities absent in our mundane reality.¹⁵

Central to this definitional debate in India are the varying connotative associations between 'vijñana' and 'science'. Hans Harder explains that 'vijñana', the Sanskrit word used as an equivalent for 'science', makes the very idea of 'science' 'less well-defined and at the same time more loaded with polarising connotations' in India than it is in the West.¹⁶ He points out similar semantic dissonances existing in other word pairs as 'dharma'/'religion' and 'darsana'/'philosophy', and assigns the difficulties to intercultural transactions of meanings and conceptual associations. In the case of the 'vijñana'/'science' pair, Harder assigns the problem to the proximity of modern techno-science to the industrialised West that invaded India, and the association of religion and philosophy to the pre-colonial native culture. Hence the word 'science' becomes integral to the conception of European colonisers and their technologies, while 'vijñana'¹⁷ retains a looser association with a set of cognitive functions from older Hindu-Buddhist philosophical traditions.¹⁸ Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay also foregrounds the 'jñana' (knowledge)/'vijñana' (science) binary to formulate his idea of 'kalpavigyan'. He highlights the specificity of 'vijñana' against the transcendental holism of 'jñana' and claims that in the Indian context 'vijñana' often provides a pathway to a greater transcendental knowledge of the world, and hence 'science' must be understood in

the context of the specific society in spite of its universalising tendencies while discussing SF.¹⁹ According to Chattopadhyay, the mythical associationism inherent in the 'jnana'/'vijana' binary lends this cultural specificity. I have made similar arguments elsewhere regarding the cultural specificity of 'science' and the diverging understanding between Indian and western concepts and the effect of such understanding on conceiving of SF.²⁰ Thus the sense of wonder in Indian SF often arises from what Miéville calls the 'traditionally denigrated as woolly and anti-theoretical' notion of science.²¹

However, Luckhurst argues that SF is a genre that evolves over time in the context of such culturally specific notions as 'science' and 'modernity', but always imagining alternative possibilities. He claims: 'SF texts imagine futures or parallel worlds premised on the perpetual change associated with modernity, often by extending or extrapolating aspects of Mechanism from [the] contemporary world. In doing so, SF texts capture the fleeting fantasies thrown up in the swirl of modernity.'²² In the Indian context, that swirl is often caught up in the attempts to recontextualise 'modernity' not only within the Enlightenment tradition but also within a mythic rebirth of ancient Indian wisdom, or traditions that question modernity itself by imagining alternative ways of being. India's colonial relationship to Europe, and hence to the very idea of European modernity and progress, thus places Indian SF at a unique and problematic position. Scholars such as Patricia Kerslake (2007) and John Rieder (2008) have extensively shown that SF and European imperialism are intrinsically connected, and that modernity and progress are inherently linked to fantasies of colonialism.²³ Jessica Langer (2011) on the other hand has delineated the role that postcolonial SF, especially from developing nations, plays in responding to such politics of power.²⁴ The history of Indian SF shows that from its very inception the genre has been resisting such fantasies of imperialism resulting from progress and modernity. Therefore, arguably, the imperial relationship between the culture of India and western modernity shaped Indian SF's imagination of alterity. As I will show in the following chapters, almost every aspect of Indian SF is dependent on this relationship between Indian and western culture, making the genre a cultural hybrid *par excellence*.

Evidently, an evolving relationship between Indian culture and modernity and science will inevitably alter the way that SF is conceived in India, as such changes will also affect how Indian SF stands

in relationship with the larger economy of genres. Hence a community of practice and cultural history approach is effective in dealing with texts over a period of more than a century. Yet, in order to decipher such relationships, we must also look for certain characteristics, even if evolving, in these cultural productions that differentiate SF from what is not SF, that is texts that are not productively read as such.

To serve such a purpose, I propose to use Freedman's variation of Suvin's definition of SF as literature of 'cognitive estrangement', wherein a text creates a radical break from the author's empirical reality, and yet at least creates a 'cognition effect' through its attitude to the fictional universe – a universe which even though radically different from the author's empirical world, at least pretends to function within the laws of nature (real or fictional), rather than from any supernatural volition. In this context, such natural laws and mythical and supernatural phenomena are treated as such within the author's social and epistemological orientation. These social and epistemological orientations evolve over time and vary within specific socio-linguistic communities in India, and thus engender a differential and often overlapping relationship with other genres. I tread closer to 'kalpabigyan' (a term first coined by Adrish Bardhan) with its open-ended attitude than to the more rigid specificity of 'vijnana katha'. I find Suvin's taxonomic approach useful to the degree that it creates an identifiable pool of works looking at whose interrelationships and patterns seems to me more productive from historical, social and literary perspectives than to function within an unmanageable chaotic mass. Yet I also appreciate Rieder's and Luckhurst's cultural and historical approach because any taxonomic category must be examined within its own continually evolving socio-historical perspectives. In the above provisional definition of SF, I hope to benefit from both these approaches. I will consequently discuss works that exhibit the above qualities prominently although being aware that such qualities are contingent. I will not include in my analysis works that are obviously mimetic – that is, functioning within the assumed extension of the author's empirical reality and engaging in sincere verisimilitude, or works that are intentionally fantastic and marvellous without any pretension to 'cognition' or 'cognition effect' as explained above. Although both these categories are related to SF as literature of 'cognitive estrangement' at its two poles, they are more productively read within a different context than the works that I will consider under this project.

Defining 'Indian'

As is the case with SF, the national category of 'India', when applied to cultural productions, poses a few problems. 'Indian' in its simplest sense can refer to the adjective of India, the modern nation-state, pertaining to its citizens, without regard to their actual residence within the country's territorial borders. Such a definition, however, will exclude any cultural product originating before the inauguration of the current Indian nation-state in 1947 or created by any individual who has surrendered his/her Indian citizenship or by people born of Indian migrants in other parts of the world. Such exclusions will lead to major problems: on the one hand, SF has existed in the space we now know as India before its independence from the British colonisers, and on the other, many non-citizens of Indian descent write SF that prominently foregrounds an Indian cultural milieu.²⁵ Furthermore, much that was part of British India is no longer in India after 1947, but is now in Pakistan and Bangladesh, although still sharing languages and cultures with what is now India. Thus, even language or culture-based definitions pose certain problems.

Benedict Anderson in his influential *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983) argues that all nations are imagined as limited and sovereign, and as communities of people, even though they be pluralistic in every sense.²⁶ More recently (2016) Neil Davidson has highlighted the oscillating relationship between the collective identity of the citizens and the political structure of the nation-state.²⁷ Both Anderson and Davidson highlight political imagination and its practical implementation, and the gaps existing between the former and the latter. While Davidson focuses on political inequalities as a catalyst of nationalism,²⁸ Anderson proposes that imagination of national consciousness is often language-dependent; that is, nations are often bound by linguistic communities, as in most of Europe or, by 'print' national languages that are often vestiges of colonial power relations and have only a small currency in the living culture, as is the case with most postcolonial African nations.²⁹ Such linguistic formulation of nationalism, though, is problematic in the case of India. On the one hand India, which designates twenty-two languages (including English) as official modes of communication, and in addition has further 101 major languages and 1,513 minor ones, as a nation never existed along a linguistic line.³⁰ Language-based kingdoms

and states existed all along, but by nature empires, from the Maurya (322 BCE–185 BCE) to the British (c.1757–1947 CE), encompass a linguistic plurality. So does the modern Indian nation. India does not have a national language, although Hindi and English generally work as lingua franca. In addition, at least six major languages of India such as Hindi, Bangla, Urdu, Tamil, Punjabi and Kashmiri are also regularly used in neighbouring countries of Pakistan (Urdu, Punjabi, Hindi and Kashmiri), Bangladesh (Bangla), Nepal (Hindi and Urdu) and Sri Lanka (Tamil) and share strong historical-cultural transactions across the borders.

In this regard, Alfred Stepan, Juan J. Linz and Yogendra Yadav (2011) pose a counter-model, 'state-nation', that may also prove useful in defining India.³¹ Stepan, Linz and Yadav argue that 'robustly multinational' democracies often contain groups that think of themselves as a nation in every sense of the word and hence see the nation-state model as oppressive, leading to claims of further newer nations. The 'state-nation' model, the authors claim, provides a better way of imagining and crafting collective identities that are also diverse and intersecting on multiple aspects of polity and socio-cultural identities. Even then, the authors concede that India proves to be a most difficult proposition:

India would seem to present one of the most difficult tests for our argument that multiple but complementary identities and democratic state-nation loyalties are possible even in a polity with robustly multinational dimensions and a plethora of intense linguistic and religious differences ... [T]hat such diversity could not have been molded into a nation-state peacefully and democratically.³²

Stepan, Linz and Yadav argue that the creative and inclusionary discourse of the creators of modern Indian democracy such as Gandhi and Nehru found a political model that is very close to the 'state-nation' model. Evidently, the 'state-nation' model is ideologically more diverse and inherently more democratic than the 'nation-state' model, and while it is still an 'imagined community', the 'imagination' of 'community' is more complex and overdetermined than Anderson originally assumed. However, this 'state-nation' model leads us to another already existing model that often dominates Indian nationalist discourses: the idea of a civilisational collective. Political theorist Bhikhu Parekh claims that India first faced the struggle of self-definition as a nation during

the struggle for independence.³³ Although such identitarian discourses varied widely among the thinkers such as Raja Rammohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, M. G. Renade, G. K. Gokhale, Gandhi and Nehru, the overall agreement that India is a civilisation based on plurality – moral, philosophical, political, ethnic and spiritual – existed across the board. Despite intolerance and internal strife, these multiple cultural streams have over the centuries challenged, intersected and borrowed from each other. This perspective can be seen in independent India's motto of 'unity in diversity'. Thus Stepan, Linz and Yadav's discourse of a current political model refers to something that has been inherent in the South Asian space for a long time: social, cultural, ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity that constantly interact yet maintain their distinctions.

Such discourses as deliberated above illustrate the difficulties of defining 'Indian' on a geopolitical basis. However, the same problem also exists on a transnational and diasporic base. The Ministry of External Affairs estimates that more than thirty-one million people of Indian origin (Non-Resident Indians and Persons of Indian Origin) are living outside the country,³⁴ and according to the United Nations, India is the country with the largest diasporic population in the world.³⁵ Although residing outside the country, this diasporic population has a strong economic and cultural influence within India on the one hand, and on the other, prominently displays cultural affiliations to India within host societies. Consequently, this population cannot be overlooked in the category of 'Indian'. In the context of the Caribbean diaspora in Britain, Stuart Hall writes that cultural identity is often assumed to be fixed at birth, yet in diaspora this identity is fragmented and multiplied through external socio-historical forces, although the nostalgia or cultural connection with 'home' never diminishes in importance.³⁶ However, invoking Heidegger's idea of 'unheimlich' or 'not at home', Hall also exposes this diasporic population's uneasy connection with 'home': 'They are happy to be home. But history has somehow irrevocably intervened.'³⁷ Hall's comments are applicable to the Indian diaspora as well. The fluid and transnational qualities of cultural identity refuse to be bound by geographical boundaries.

In this context, Parvati Raghuram and Ajaya Kumar Sahoo claim that in recent years both the concepts of 'culture' and of 'nation' have come under increased scrutiny from sociologists, anthropologists, cultural critics and historians.³⁸ Raghuram and Sahoo explain, 'Contemporary