

Globalizing Culture, Localizing Narratives: Glocalization in the Fiction of Anita Nair and Kiran Desai

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Abstract

The dynamics of globalization and localization have profoundly shaped contemporary Indian English literature, creating new spaces for hybrid cultural expressions. This paper examines the fiction of Anita Nair and Kiran Desai through the theoretical lens of glocalization, highlighting how their works negotiate the tension between global cultural flows and local rootedness. Both writers employ narrative strategies that combine Indian cultural specificities with global literary techniques, thereby producing texts that resonate across diverse readerships. The study investigates themes such as gendered dimensions of globalization, national identity versus global aspirations, and the negotiation of cultural spaces where traditional practices intersect with modern values. It also explores their stylistic and linguistic choices, including the use of Indianisms, multilingual inflections, symbolism, and irony as tools to portray cultural hybridity. By comparing the narrative voices and characterizations in Nair's and Desai's fiction, the paper argues that their works exemplify how Indian women writers have created a distinctive glocal narrative form that reflects both individual identity struggles and larger socio-cultural transformations. Anita Nair and Kiran Desai reveal the complex interplay of local traditions and global influences, offering valuable insights into the evolving discourse of postcolonial literature in the age of globalization.

Keywords: *Glocalization, Indian English Fiction, Cultural Identity, Gender and Globalization, Narrative Strategies, Postcolonial Literature*

Introduction

Background of the Study: Indian English literature has long been a fertile site for negotiating questions of identity, culture, and belonging. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, writers such as Anita Nair and Kiran Desai have played a significant role in shaping contemporary narratives that engage with themes of globalization, gender, and cultural transformation. These writers are part of a broader literary movement that reflects the intersection of local traditions and global influences, producing what scholars often describe as “glocal” texts—simultaneously embedded in local contexts and informed by global realities (Ranasinha 5). Women writers in particular have used fiction to challenge patriarchal structures and to voice the complexities of female subjectivity in a rapidly transforming cultural milieu. Anita Nair's novels foreground Indian women's struggles with social conventions, while Kiran Desai's fiction highlights the displacement, hybridity, and fractures created by migration and globalization (Nagarajan and Mary 92). Both writers illustrate how contemporary Indian literature negotiates tradition and modernity while reaching international audiences.

Concept of Globalization and Glocalization: Globalization refers to the increasing interconnectedness of cultures, economies, and societies across the world. While it often emphasizes homogenization, glocalization captures the dual process whereby global forces are adapted and reinterpreted within local contexts. In literary studies, glocalization highlights how narratives maintain local cultural specificities while addressing global concerns (Panthi 76). Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* is particularly illustrative of this framework, as it depicts how global migrations reshape local identities while also showing how local resistance redefines globalization itself. Panthi even suggests that “true globalization

should be renamed as glocalization” to capture this two-way dynamic (77). Similarly, Anita Nair’s works such as *Mistress* explore how traditional cultural practices, including dance and storytelling, are reconfigured for global consumption while retaining their indigenous roots. Thus, the study of glocalization in Indian women’s fiction reveals the fluid dialogue between the universal and the particular.

Relevance of Anita Nair and Kiran Desai in Contemporary Indian English Literature: Both Anita Nair and Kiran Desai have made substantial contributions to Indian English literature by addressing gender, culture, and identity through innovative narrative strategies. Nair’s fiction often situates women within traditional social frameworks while simultaneously offering them avenues of self-assertion, a literary strategy that resonates with contemporary feminist thought in India (Nagarajan and Mary 94). Kiran Desai, on the other hand, reflects diasporic and transnational concerns. Her Booker Prize-winning novel *The Inheritance of Loss* interrogates issues of cultural displacement, colonial legacy, and the contradictions of modern globalization. Scholars have emphasized that Desai’s work embodies the “emergent global dynamics of migrant narratives” while still being deeply anchored in Indian social and cultural realities (Kaushik 115). Together, these authors represent how contemporary Indian English literature negotiates both local relevance and global reach.

Research Problem and Questions: Despite abundant scholarship on Indian English fiction, relatively little attention has been paid to the comparative analysis of glocalization in the works of Anita Nair and Kiran Desai. Most studies examine them separately—Nair through the lens of gender and culture, and Desai through diaspora and globalization. This research attempts to bridge that gap by asking:

- How do Anita Nair and Kiran Desai engage with the dynamics of globalization and glocalization in their novels?
- In what ways do their narratives simultaneously reflect local cultural contexts and global concerns?
- How do gender and identity function as intersecting themes in their glocalized literary spaces?

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- 1) To analyze how globalization and glocalization are represented in Anita Nair’s and Kiran Desai’s fiction.
- 2) To compare the narrative strategies of both writers in negotiating global and local cultural dynamics.
- 3) To examine the intersection of gender, identity, and cultural hybridity in their works.
- 4) To contribute to postcolonial and feminist literary discourse by situating these writers within broader debates on global literature.

Globalization

Understanding Globalization in Literature: Globalization in literature refers to the circulation of narratives, themes, and cultural imaginaries across national and linguistic boundaries. It emphasizes not only the transnational movement of texts but also how literature responds to the economic, cultural, and political realities of globalization. As Gupta notes, South Asian fiction in English reflects the tension between cultivating a global readership and maintaining local rootedness, thereby demonstrating the impact of global cultural capital on literary production (140). In the Indian context, globalization has enabled writers like Kiran Desai and Anita Nair to enter international literary circuits while still foregrounding specifically Indian themes such as caste, gender, and cultural tradition. Their works exemplify how literature participates in what Rumina Sethi and Letizia Alterno describe as a “transnational era” where the boundaries of the nation-state dissolve into larger global frameworks (Sethi and Alterno 22). This means that Indian English fiction is not merely national in scope but also globally resonant, carrying both regional authenticity and universal appeal.

Glocalization: From Sociology to Literary Studies: Originally coined in sociology and business studies, glocalization refers to the adaptation of global processes to local contexts. Robertson, who popularized the term, defined glocalization as the simultaneous presence of universalizing and particularizing tendencies in globalization (Robertson 30). In literary studies, glocalization helps explain how texts employ global literary forms while embedding them in local traditions. Indian popular fiction has become a significant example of glocalization. Chawla and Mittal argue that works by writers such as Amitav Ghosh and Kiran Desai draw on global storytelling formulas but infuse them with regional textures and local sensibilities, thus redefining the canon of Indian English writing (4). Similarly, Gupta highlights how “glocalized” narratives balance readability for international markets while maintaining their cultural specificity (150). In this way, glocalization as a theoretical framework enables us to analyze Anita Nair’s focus on Indian women’s issues within globally comprehensible literary structures, and Kiran Desai’s diasporic narratives that juxtapose local experiences against global backdrops.

Postcolonial and Cultural Theories (Appadurai, Robertson, Bhabha): The framework of postcolonial theory is crucial for examining how globalization and glocalization interact with literature. Pramod K. Nayar emphasizes that postcolonial studies often address the cultural power dynamics shaped by globalization, particularly the unequal flows of capital, culture, and knowledge between the Global North and South (Nayar 87). Appadurai’s concept of “scapes”—ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideoscapes—provides a useful lens for analyzing how narratives such as Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* capture the fractured realities of migration, labor, and cultural displacement (Appadurai 33). Robertson, as noted earlier, provides the conceptual grounding for glocalization, a key term in this study. Homi Bhabha’s ideas of hybridity and the “third space” further illuminate how literature like Anita Nair’s *Mistress* negotiates between tradition and modernity, creating hybrid cultural forms that resist binary categorizations (Bhabha 56). Amardeep Singh, in his study of Mira Nair’s films, underscores how cultural productions from South Asia operate within these postcolonial dynamics by depicting the entanglement of geopolitical shifts and localized narratives (Singh 12). By extending this perspective to literature, we see how authors such as Nair and Desai negotiate between local specificity and global visibility, embodying what Bhabha terms the ambivalence of cultural identity.

Language, Identity, and Global-Local Negotiations: Language is a crucial site where globalization and glocalization intersect in literature. English, as both a colonial legacy and a global lingua franca, has been appropriated by Indian writers to articulate local realities while reaching international audiences. As Sethi and Alterno observe, the transnational use of English often creates “a virtual absence of the nation” in literary representation, shifting focus to broader human experiences (25). Yet, Indian English literature retains distinct markers of local identity through the infusion of Indian idioms, cultural references, and linguistic hybridity. For Anita Nair, language serves as a medium to portray women’s negotiations with patriarchal structures in ways that resonate across cultures. Kiran Desai, similarly, employs irony, satire, and multilingual inflections to highlight diasporic struggles and cultural contradictions. This reflects what Chawla and Mittal identify as the “glocalization of narrative voice,” wherein global readers encounter an authentically local voice framed within a globally legible structure (6). Thus, language in their works not only mediates between the global and the local but also becomes a tool of resistance, identity formation, and cultural negotiation.

Anita Nair: Glocalization and Cultural Identity

Anita Nair’s fiction embodies the dynamics of glocalization by weaving global concerns with local realities, particularly in the context of cultural identity, gender roles, and shifting social landscapes. Her works navigate between tradition and modernity, creating a narrative space where local rootedness intersects with global modernity. Through her novels, Nair addresses how individuals—especially women—

negotiate personal and cultural identities within the context of globalization, hybridity, and postcolonial realities.

Women's Agency and Local Realities in Ladies' Coupé: In *Ladies' Coupé*, Nair explores women's struggles within the patriarchal fabric of Indian society while situating their narratives in a global discourse on female autonomy. The novel portrays women from diverse social classes who use storytelling as a means of reclaiming agency. As Chelliah observes, Nair's characters embody a diasporic sensibility in their negotiation between tradition and modern expectations, revealing the fractured yet plural nature of identity (Chelliah 92). Food, travel, and professional aspirations become metaphors for transcending localized domestic restrictions, aligning with global feminist discourses (Vinai, Prasuna, and Hazarika 4). Thus, *Ladies' Coupé* illustrates glocalization by grounding women's lived experiences in Indian socio-cultural contexts while resonating with transnational feminist struggles.

Memory, Trauma, and Cultural Crossroads in Lessons in Forgetting: *Lessons in Forgetting* foregrounds the interplay between personal trauma and cultural negotiation. Sontakke emphasizes that Nair's narrative reveals how women confront modernity while bearing the burden of tradition and cultural expectations (Sontakke 37). The protagonist's journey demonstrates how globalization creates opportunities for mobility and independence but also fractures cultural continuity. Trauma in the novel is not solely personal but collective, reflecting how social transformations produce new anxieties while opening alternative futures. Chatterjee and Chigurupati suggest that Nair's fiction represents historical trauma and postcolonial identities within the larger frame of global modernity (26). By situating memory and trauma at a cultural crossroads, Nair dramatizes the glocal condition where the local experience is inseparably tied to global transitions.

Tradition and Modernity in Mistress: In *Mistress*, Nair engages directly with hybridity through her use of Kathakali as both theme and structure. Menon highlights how the novel positions Kathakali at the center of cultural hybridity, dramatizing the tension between rooted traditions and global influences (Menon 416). The narrative itself becomes a "third space" where local art forms are reinterpreted through global cultural flows, resonating with Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity. By embedding the protagonist's personal and artistic identity in this in-between zone, Nair illustrates how glocalization operates not as a binary of tradition versus modernity, but as a dynamic process of cultural negotiation. The novel's intertextuality and performative aesthetics emphasize how global readers can access and reinterpret localized art, thereby enacting glocalization through literature.

Negotiating Rural and Urban Spaces in The Better Man: Nair's debut novel, *The Better Man*, situates its narrative in a small Kerala village, yet the concerns extend to broader global questions of migration, aspiration, and belonging. As Chelliah notes, identity in Nair's works is "plural and partial," reflecting both rootedness in local cultures and exposure to global ideas (95). The village space becomes a microcosm of glocalization, where rural traditions intersect with urban modernity through characters who traverse between the two worlds. The protagonist's search for belonging demonstrates how rural life is no longer isolated but interwoven with global networks of migration and cultural exchange. This negotiation underscores the inevitability of glocalization, as even the seemingly remote spaces are redefined by global cultural and economic flows.

Kiran Desai: Global-Local Intersections

Colonial Legacies and Global Modernity in The Inheritance of Loss: Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) demonstrates how colonial legacies continue to shape postcolonial identities while also intersecting with the pressures of global modernity. The novel juxtaposes the lives of Sai, a young girl raised in the remnants of colonial privilege in Kalimpong, and Biju, an undocumented Indian immigrant in the United States, whose precarious life reflects the exploitative underside of globalization. As Margarida

Martins argues, “all stories require borders and border crossings (...) Identity is simultaneously constructed and fractured in the negotiation between global and local spaces” (Martins 67). Desai presents colonial institutions—such as English education, law, and property ownership—not only as vestiges of domination but also as filters through which global modernity enters local life. The judge Jemubhai Patel embodies this inheritance, caught between his Anglicized self and alienation from both colonial Britain and independent India. Thus, the novel dramatizes the double bind of colonial legacies and global aspirations in shaping individual and collective futures.

Satire and Local Color in Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard: In *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998), Desai turns to satire to critique the intersections of local traditions and global consumerist desires. The protagonist, Sampath Chawla, retreats into a guava tree, where he is ironically celebrated as a spiritual guru despite his disengagement with social responsibilities. This narrative reflects what Biman Mondal calls “the inevitable intersection of cultural postcolonialism and global modern absurdities” (Mondal 59). The novel employs humor, exaggeration, and local imagery—parched summers, gossiping townsfolk, guava orchards—to mock both blind reverence for spiritual authority and the intrusion of global capitalist aspirations into rural India. In its blend of folkloric motifs with satirical critique, the text reveals how “local color” becomes a space for resisting as well as adapting to globalizing cultural shifts.

Diasporic Identities and Transnational Tensions: Desai’s fiction frequently interrogates the instability of diasporic belonging and the precarity of migrant lives. Biju’s experiences in *The Inheritance of Loss* capture what Ileana-Mihaela Motroc terms the “hybridity of the self between desh (home) and pardesh (abroad)” (Motroc 70). His life in New York’s restaurant basements reflects the “shadow class condemned to movement” (Ranasinha 240), a marginalized migrant population that remains excluded from both the host nation and the homeland. Similarly, Desai’s depiction of diasporic characters highlights the fraught intersections of class, race, and labor in global economies. These transnational tensions underline the paradox of globalization: while capital flows freely across borders, laborers like Biju endure rigid boundaries, precarious legality, and cultural alienation. By intertwining diasporic narratives with local struggles, Desai reveals the costs of belonging in a globalized world.

Language as a Marker of Cultural Hybridity: Language in Desai’s fiction serves as a crucial marker of both colonial inheritance and global-local hybridity. In *The Inheritance of Loss*, characters frequently shift between English and Indian vernaculars, reflecting social hierarchies, educational access, and cultural belonging. E. Boehmer and D. Davies observe that Desai “moves beyond a global/local dialectic by employing language as a metaphor to interrogate the intersection of complex hierarchies” (Boehmer and Davies 239). For instance, Sai’s command of English signifies both privilege and alienation, while the judge’s adoption of English exposes his estrangement from Indian culture. Meanwhile, Biju’s fractured English in the diaspora underscores his marginalization and struggle for identity. Language thus becomes both a medium of global communication and a reminder of cultural dislocation, reflecting the hybridity at the heart of Desai’s glocal narratives.

Comparative Perspectives

Gendered Dimensions of Globalization in Nair and Desai: Both Anita Nair and Kiran Desai foreground the lived experiences of women in a rapidly globalizing world, where the promises of modernity often clash with entrenched patriarchy. Nair’s *Ladies’ Coupé* explores female subjectivity against the backdrop of traditional Indian social structures, suggesting that globalization does not automatically dismantle gender hierarchies but often exacerbates women’s existential crises (Ramamurthy 134). Similarly, Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* situates women characters like Sai within a global-local framework, where education and exposure to Western culture create aspirations but simultaneously reinforce dependency on patriarchal institutions (Ranasinha 102). Gender thus becomes a site of negotiation in globalization, where women’s voices oscillate between empowerment and silencing.

National Identity vs. Global Aspirations: The tension between rootedness in the nation and the lure of global opportunities is central to both writers. Desai's depiction of Biju, an undocumented worker in New York, dramatizes the harsh underside of globalization where dreams of mobility clash with systemic exclusion (Ranasinha 118). Conversely, Nair's characters, such as Akhila in *Ladies' Coupé* and Meera in *Lessons in Forgetting*, grapple with redefining their roles in an India that is increasingly cosmopolitan yet rigidly nationalistic (Dash 96). These narratives suggest that globalization, while promising universality, reinforces national and cultural boundaries that characters must continuously negotiate.

Negotiating Cultural Spaces: Local Traditions and Global Influences: Nair and Desai reveal that cultural spaces are not simply erased by globalization but transformed into hybrid zones. Nair often reworks local traditions—be it culinary, mythological, or social customs—into modern settings, demonstrating how Indian women seek freedom within familiar cultural frameworks (Ramamurthy 135). Desai, on the other hand, highlights how diasporic characters constantly oscillate between home and abroad, embodying the “in-betweenness” of glocal identities (Ranasinha 120). Both writers underscore that cultural negotiation involves neither total assimilation nor total preservation, but a fluid interplay between the local and the global.

Glocal Characters: Negotiating Identity in a Hybrid World: The concept of “glocal characters” emerges vividly in both writers' fiction. Desai's characters in *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* embody a satirical critique of global modernity filtered through provincial Indian life, where local color resists global homogenization (Ranasinha 124). Meanwhile, Nair's protagonists often represent women who localize global ideas of freedom and individuality into their everyday contexts, thereby creating hybrid identities that reflect the complexities of modern Indian womanhood (Ramamurthy 138). These characters underscore that identity in a globalized world is not linear but multilayered, simultaneously shaped by global modernity and local rootedness.

Language and Narrative Strategies

The fiction of Anita Nair and Kiran Desai demonstrates a complex interplay of language and form that reflects the glocalized realities their characters inhabit. Their narrative strategies foreground hybridity, linguistic experimentation, and the use of satire, irony, and cultural symbolism to capture the fragmented yet interconnected nature of contemporary identity.

Stylistic Choices: English, Indianisms, and Multilingual Influences: Both Anita Nair and Kiran Desai deploy English as a global literary medium but infuse it with Indianisms, cultural idioms, and vernacular influences. This technique situates their narratives within local contexts while ensuring international intelligibility. Nair frequently uses colloquial speech patterns and Indian cultural markers, allowing her female protagonists to express their struggles in a linguistically authentic voice. Similarly, Desai's fiction, especially *The Inheritance of Loss*, incorporates Hindi, Nepali, and Gujarati words within English narration, producing what Yogini Kelaia calls “a global-local linguistic mosaic” (Kelaia 3). This stylistic hybridity reflects the diasporic condition—rooted in locality yet moving across global circuits of communication.

Symbolism and Cultural Imagery: Symbolism in both Nair and Desai's works emerges as a narrative device that bridges the local and global. Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupé* draws on everyday cultural imagery—such as trains, food, and mythological references—to symbolize women's mobility, self-discovery, and negotiation with tradition. In contrast, Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* uses the guava orchard itself as a symbol of both rootedness and absurdity, critiquing provincial life while situating it within a universal human search for meaning. Neeru Tandon observes that Anita Desai's narrative legacy—continued through her daughter Kiran—lies in using symbolic landscapes to anchor existential crises in

tangible, culturally specific settings (Tandon 142). Thus, symbolism enables both writers to weave global discourses into culturally embedded narratives.

Humor, Satire, and Irony as Glocal Devices: Satire and irony function as crucial glocal devices in Desai and Nair's storytelling. Desai's *Hullabaloo* in the Guava Orchard employs satire to mock bureaucracy, superstition, and the absurdities of Indian provincialism, while simultaneously echoing global traditions of satirical literature. Nair, on the other hand, often uses irony to highlight gendered oppression, juxtaposing women's dreams of autonomy with the stark realities of patriarchy. R. Nagarajan and Sugantha Ezhil Mary emphasize how contemporary Indian women's literature—including Nair's—uses humor and irony not merely as aesthetic techniques but as strategies of cultural resistance (Nagarajan and Mary 92). This fusion of local humor with global literary forms reveals how glocalization reshapes narrative aesthetics.

Narrative Voice and Shifting Perspectives: Both authors experiment with narrative voice and perspective to reflect fragmented identities in a globalized world. Nair frequently adopts a polyphonic narrative style, where multiple women's voices in *Ladies Coupé* create a collective yet diverse account of female experience. Desai, especially in *The Inheritance of Loss*, shifts between the perspectives of characters in India and the diaspora, exposing the simultaneity of local struggles and global aspirations. As Kelaiya notes, Indian English writers such as Desai use narrative multiplicity to "bridge the historic and the contemporary, the local and the universal" (Kelaiya 4). This oscillation of voices mirrors the unsettled and hybrid identities of their characters, rendering glocalization not merely a theme but a structural feature of their fiction.

Conclusion

The linguistic and narrative strategies in the works of Anita Nair and Kiran Desai illustrate how contemporary Indian English fiction navigates the dual demands of global readership and cultural rootedness. By integrating Indianisms, multilingual elements, and colloquial registers into English, both writers successfully embody what scholars describe as a glocal literary idiom—one that is at once particular to Indian cultural life and accessible to international audiences (Kelaiya 3). Their symbolic use of imagery, whether in Nair's depiction of trains and domestic spaces or Desai's evocation of landscapes and absurdist settings, allows for the articulation of local experiences within broader global frameworks. The use of humor, satire, and irony positions their narratives as critical engagements with both tradition and modernity. As Nagarajan and Sugantha Ezhil Mary point out, women's literature in India often uses such stylistic devices to voice resistance and interrogate entrenched hierarchies (92). This dynamic is evident in Nair's ironic portrayals of women's struggles for independence and in Desai's satirical critiques of provincialism and bureaucracy. Their narrative voices—polyphonic in Nair's *Ladies Coupé* and transnationally shifting in Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*—highlight the fractured yet interconnected realities of glocalized existence. These shifting perspectives reinforce Neeru Tandon's claim that Anita Desai's influence on her daughter Kiran is visible in the continued experimentation with narrative technique and symbolic resonance (142). Together, Nair and Desai demonstrate that Indian English fiction is not simply an imitation of Western forms but a vibrant site of negotiation where global literary traditions are localized and reimagined through culturally resonant voices. The fiction of Anita Nair and Kiran Desai underscores the broader phenomenon of glocalization in literature: a cultural dialogue where the local and global do not merely coexist but constantly reshape one another. Their novels remind us that storytelling in the postcolonial and globalized era is as much about preserving identity as it is about engaging in an ongoing conversation with the world.

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