

# Post-Truth Literature and the Politics of Belief: Interpretation, Manipulation, Fictiocracy and Incredulity in Contemporary Indian Narratives

Mr. A. Rajesh Kannan<sup>1</sup>, Dr. P. Nainar Sumathi<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>PhD Research Scholar (PT), PG & Research Department of English, National College (Autonomous), (Affiliated to Bharathidasan University), Tiruchirappalli-620 001.

<sup>2</sup>Research Guide & Assistant Professor, PG & Research Department of English, National College (Autonomous), (Affiliated to Bharathidasan University), Tiruchirappalli-620 001.

## Abstract:

Contemporary Indian literature has become an important space for questioning the intricate web of belief, truth, and narrative construction in the post-truth world. The study explores critically the ways literary narratives engage with post-truth practices such as linguistic manipulation, pseudofactuality, fictiocracy, and reader incredulity to mirror and critique the epistemic uncertainty of contemporary Indian society. Through the calculated use of fractured narration, metafictional techniques, and allegorical criticism, these texts expose the processes by which truth is fabricated, disputed, and frequently militarized within dominant ideologies. Through a reading of influential works by Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh, Geetanjali Shree, Perumal Murugan, Meena Kandasamy, and Samit Basu, this research examines how literature resists the epistemic erasure inherent in post-truth discourse, providing alternative forms of knowledge production that contest both historical revisionism and media-facilitated distortions.

Positioning itself in the larger debate about narrative epistemology and post-truth politics, this research contends that literature is not simply a reflection of post-truth realities but an active agent that intervenes within them, serving as a location of epistemic resistance. Fictions like *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* and *Tomb of Sand* subvert narrative stability to reveal the vulnerability of truth, whereas *Poonachi* and *Exquisite Cadavers* challenge fictiocratic hierarchies that control political and social realities. In addition, speculative and dystopian fictions like *The Wall* and *Chosen Spirits* foster an incredulous mode of reading, which forces the audience to scrutinize the artifice of "truth" both in fiction and reality. By applying textual analysis in conjunction with critical theory, the research brings into prominence the contributions of Indian literature to the predicaments of the post-truth era, shedding light on how narrative fictions of literature traverse the fault lines separating fact, fiction, and ideology.

**Keywords:** Post-truth literature, linguistic manipulation, pseudofactuality, fictiocracy, incredulity, epistemic resistance, narrative epistemology, historical revisionism, ideological frameworks, metafiction, speculative fiction, Indian literature, narrative construction.

## INTRODUCTION

The post-truth condition in India is marked by the ubiquitous circulation of false information, the willful alteration of historical facts, and the growing employment of language as an instrument of ideological

domination. In political and media culture, facts become subordinate to feelings, individual opinion, and manipulated narratives that influence public opinion. The digital revolution, although democratizing access to knowledge, has also supercharged pseudofactuality—the presentation of false propositions as credible facts—through unmediated social media and algorithmic news cycles. As Arundhati Roy (2020) remarks, "truth has become a contested commodity, reshaped by those who wield power to control public consciousness" (74). The trend is not restricted to political discourse but also extends to historical revisionism, where selective reinterpretations of history are made to serve proximate ideological agendas. In such an environment, literature is both a mirror and a critique, presenting other modes of engaging with contested truths.

Indian literature has traditionally been at the center of challenging the borders of truth, belief, and narrative construction. Recent literary fiction is reacting to post-truth tendencies by using complicated narrative strategies that foreground the weakness of truth. Amitav Ghosh, in *The Nutmeg's Curse*, writes about how narrative has been employed in the past to exercise hegemonic domination, highlighting that "what is accepted as history is often a carefully curated fiction" (26). Likewise, Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand* breaks with linear narrative, mirroring the fragmented nature of truth in a post-truth era. These books and others show the way literature does not just reflect the socio-political facts of its era, but actually joins in creating and subverting reigning ideological structures. By means of allegory, metafiction, and speculative fiction, Indian writers build stories which defy monologic readings of reality, forcing the reader to challenge the process whereby "truth" is constructed.

This research investigates the use by contemporary Indian literature of four central post-truth processes: linguistic manipulation, wherein language is reorganized intentionally to modify meaning and perception; pseudofactuality, wherein invented narrative achieves facticity by iteration; fictiocracy, wherein fictional entities dictate social and political reality; and reader incredulity, wherein literary works promote a critical mode of reading. By reading books by Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh, Geetanjali Shree, Perumal Murugan, Meena Kandasamy, and Samit Basu, this research seeks to examine the ways Indian writing engages with post-truth scenarios, reflecting upon and also countering epistemic distortions. The goal is to show literature's value as an epistemic intervention, combating the erasure of truth and articulating a critical methodology for charting the uncertainties of the present era.

Language is both a vehicle of truth and a tool of manipulation, especially in the post-truth period, when rhetoric tends to override reality. Political rhetoric and media reports in India often indulge in linguistic manipulations that redefine public understanding, redefining how events, identities, and histories are perceived. Arundhati Roy, in *Azadi*, dissects the systematic phrasing of protest voices as being "anti-national" or "urban Naxals," projecting how power positions based on ideologies use words as tools to demote dissenters. She submits that "words, when repeated enough, become truths, and these truths, once institutionalized, become history" (Roy 87). This trend fits with what Pratik Kanjilal terms semantic manipulation, whereby state narratives utilize strategic lexical decisions to efface lines between fact and fiction and thereby produce a controlled epistemic reality. The confluence of linguistic control and post-truth politics generates a discursive space in which meaning is both precarious and dependent on ideological intention.

Literary fiction in present-day India grapples intensely with this linguistic uncertainty, laying bare the processes by which language creates and distorts reality. Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is a scathing critique of post-truth discourse, using fragmented narrative to mirror the epistemic dissonance of India today. The novel's use of multiple narrators and fragmented narrative form reflects the

breakage of orderly truth, making it difficult for the reader to find his/her way in a world where facts are disputed, and histories rewritten. The Hijra protagonist Anjum embodies the liminality of identity and truth in a world where fixed definitions are applied by political and social systems. Roy's book shows the way language becomes a battlefield upon which meaning is negotiated and remade continuously. The structure of the book defies monolinear narratives to compel the reader into an active confrontation with the ambiguity of truth and fiction.

Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand* does the same with traditional storytelling in order to break down historical and personal truths. The protagonist of the novel, an old woman who regains control by going back to the past, resists the linear and monolithic versions of history. The language of the novel is fluid, changing frequently between poetic abstraction and disjointed dialogue, mirroring the weakness of memory and historical factuality. According to Shree, "History is not in books; it is in the air, in whispers, in words left unspoken" (243). This claim emphasizes the way erasure and remaking of history is not limited to institutionalized history but also happens in the mundane activity of speaking and remembering. The linguistic construction of the novel compels the reader to realize how meaning is context-dependent, subjective, and manipulated frequently by external powers.

The novels, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* and *Tomb of Sand* reflect how literature copies post-truth rhetoric, uncovering the provision of language and the mechanisms of how reality is created. Both these texts reflect that language is not as it seems to be; it is actually a space of ideological contest where meaning is fought for and re-etched. Roy's representation of Kashmir, for example, contrasts official state discourses with the lived realities of her characters to show the gap between official discourse and ground realities. Likewise, Shree's focus on individual memory as a counterpoint to historical records highlights the manner in which alternative truths are constructed through subjective experience. Through the use of narrative fragmentation, changing points of view, and linguistic reversal, both books intersect the epistemic uneasiness of post-truth reality, forcing readers to challenge not just literary depiction, but also the socio-political discourses that inform their worlds.

In the end, the calculated employment of language in post-truth fiction is a form of resistance, countering the monolith of authoritative truths and uncovering the apparatus of ideological domination. Roy and Shree's works emphasize that truth is not an inherent or objective entity but rather a construct that is constantly negotiated through language and power. As this section has demonstrated, contemporary Indian literature does not merely reflect the post-truth condition but actively interrogates and disrupts it, using linguistic innovation to resist epistemic erasure. By forcing the reader to maneuver through fragmented storylines and unsound facts, these works teach a kind of critical literacy invaluable in a period where truth becomes ever more vulnerable.

The post-truth period has amplified the making of pseudofactuality, where fabricated or manipulated narratives impersonate historical records. Within the Indian context, rewriting history is now a device for ideological cohesion, where select reinterpretations of historical events are made to assist with current political ends. Amitav Ghosh, in *The Nutmeg's Curse*, addresses this phenomenon with a critique of sorts, citing that "history is never neutral; it is a battlefield where competing narratives fight for dominance" (134). He highlights how colonial and nationalist discourses alike have manipulated historical records, shaping public consciousness through mythologized retellings of the past. Similarly, Namita Gokhale, in *Things to Leave Behind*, explores how historical memory is constructed and selectively erased, demonstrating how pseudofactuality thrives in gaps where subjective recollections replace documented evidence. These views find parallel with recent discourses of historical revisionism, in which literature

serves as counter-discourse, laying bare the instability of social and historical narratives.

Amitav Ghosh's *The Nutmeg's Curse* critiques the interaction between myth, colonial narratives, and nationalist historiography, revealing how other histories arise out of political necessities. Ghosh believes that contemporary nationalism tends to appropriate colonial narratives, rebranding them to serve ideological ends. His analysis of the colonial spice trade demonstrates how economic and ecological histories are rewritten to conform to dominant power systems, omitting indigenous voices and environmental destruction. In his previous novel, *Gun Island*, Ghosh also places the myth-making process at the center of climate change stories, demonstrating how political actors use environmental crises for economic interests. The protagonist of the novel, Deen Datta, is confronted with contradictory histories that demonstrate the fabricated nature of historical "truths"—an indicator of epistemic fears characteristic of postcolonial India. Through these texts, Ghosh reveals pseudofactuality as an apparatus of ideological manipulation, wherein narratives of history are framed to align with present power structures.

Namita Gokhale's *Things to Leave Behind* is another critical interrogation of historical revisionism, this time in the realms of colonial and postcolonial India. Set in the late 19th century, the novel traces the shifting perceptions of history as colonial rule imposes new narratives on indigenous communities. Gokhale's narrative demonstrates how memory and history are selectively curated, reinforcing dominant ideologies while suppressing alternative accounts. As Gokhale notes, "History is not what happened but what is remembered, and what is remembered is often what is permitted" (256). This perspective resonates with post-truth conditions, where pseudofactuality emerges through state-sanctioned historical revisions. By reconstructing colonial encounters through personal stories, Gokhale's novel challenges official histories, underscoring the fragility and contingency of historical knowledge.

Both Ghosh and Gokhale illustrate how literature serves as a site of resistance against pseudofactuality, offering counter-narratives that expose the constructed nature of history. Their writing brings to the fore the contradictions between lived experience and archival record, demonstrating how official histories tend to silence subaltern voices and unwelcome truths. The fragility of historical narratives in their fiction reflects the wider post-truth condition, in which fact and fiction are indistinguishable and memory is a site of ideological struggle. Ghosh's environmental histories and Gokhale's colonial narratives both demonstrate that what is accepted as historical fact is frequently determined by the power structures that govern its dissemination.

Ultimately, literary engagements with pseudofactuality place the fragility of historical and social narratives in the foreground, forcing readers to challenge dominant historiographies. Through revelations of the mechanisms by which history is rewritten, works such as *The Nutmeg's Curse* and *Things to Leave Behind* invite readers to think critically about current discourse on nationalism, identity, and historical truth. As post-truth situations aggravate the distortion of historical memory, literature is an epistemic intervention that resists the erasure of pluralistic histories and promotes a more complex, contested, and dynamic understanding of the past.

The post-truth era has dissolved the lines between fiction and reality, creating a fictiocracy—a regime where narratives, not facts, rule public imagination and social order. Anand Teltumbde (2020), in *Republic of Caste*, criticizes the processes of myth-making in caste and political discourse, positing that constructed narratives support social hierarchies and legitimize systemic injustices. He claims that "in a fictiocratic regime, the truth is not what is, but what is made to be" (Teltumbde 112). Likewise, Hartosh Singh Bal (2023) discusses the construction of history in nationalist rhetoric, tracing how fictionalized pasts are used to form present-day ideological identities. These outlooks align with the intensifying fictionization of

colonial political reality wherein fabricated accounts, sometimes presented as histories, operate as instruments of state control and social power. Indian literature, conversely, grapples with such dynamics, revealing the processes by which reality is engineered, history is rewritten, and identities are constructed. Perumal Murugan's *Poonachi* is a moving allegory of state domination of truth and narrative, mirroring the way fictiocratic systems work in authoritarian settings. The novel traces the life of a black goat, Poonachi, whose destiny is controlled by others, echoing the dispossession and surveillance of marginalized groups in India today. Murugan's narrative approach utilizes artful simplicity, framing the fable genre to satirize bureaucratic domination, social hierarchy, and epistemic violence. As he observes in the preface to the novel, "stories, even animal stories, are never merely stories; they are mirrors of the world we live in" (Murugan 2). The novel's fictiocratic elements emerge in the way Poonachi's life is shaped by imposed narratives—her identity, fate, and worth determined by forces beyond her control, much like how political regimes construct and impose identities on marginalized groups. Murugan's work thus exposes the violence of narrative power, demonstrating how fictiocracy extends beyond fiction into governance and societal structures.

Meena Kandasamy's *Exquisite Cadavers* uses metafictional strategies to challenge propaganda, personal truth, and narrative manipulation, undermining the idea that literature can ever be completely divorced from political reality. The novel's double structure—where Kandasamy's actual experiences coexist with a fictional one—obliterates the distinction between fiction and autobiography, reflecting the post-truth world's destruction of sharp lines between fact and fiction. Kandasamy confronts the forces of political and ideological framing directly, penning, a story is never just a story. In a world where truth is rewritten, fiction is the last refuge" (Kandasamy 84). This is a powerful reflection of the fictiocratic condition, wherein literature is at once a place of resistance and a space subject to co-optation by the dominant discourses. In its fractured form, *Exquisite Cadavers* challenges the validity of any single narrative, echoing the fluidity of truth in literature and politics.

Murugan's *Poonachi* and Kandasamy's *Exquisite Cadavers* illustrate how fictiocratic forms in literature reflect actual manipulations of history, identity, and power. Murugan's allegorical style critiques bureaucratic authority and the constructed nature of identity, while Kandasamy's metafictional strategy reveals the ways in which narratives can be co-opted, manipulated, or used as weapons. In each instance, the texts draw attention to the way fictional realities are created and maintained, both within literature and in political rhetoric. Through these literary techniques, the novels bring to the forefront the constructed nature of "truth" in a post-truth world, demonstrating how power functions through control of narrative. Fictiocracy in literature at last, is a reflection and critique of the fictiocracy in politics, laying bare the machinery by which narratives create, distort, and dominate reality. These texts not only disclose the fictional basis of political and historical accounts but also offer the reader a challenge to critically approach the stories that inform their understanding of truth. As the post-truth world continues to blur the lines between fact and fabrication, literature becomes a crucial forum for unveiling the constructed reality, providing a counter-discourse that resists the erasure and manipulation of truth.

The post-truth world calls for a skeptical and critical reader, one who engages proactively with the narratives offered to them instead of passively accepting manipulated truths. Here, incredulity as a mode of engagement becomes vital, wherein skepticism is not so much an intellectual exercise but a resistance of a kind epistemological. Gautam Bhatia, in *The Wall*, examines the use of speculative fiction to encourage such resistance and claims that "fiction that challenges established truths forces the reader into an uneasy confrontation with their own belief systems" (Bhatia 76). Likewise, Ruchir Joshi points out how



incredulity is no longer a discretionary literary reaction but a survival strategy in a world of fabricated realities. He argues that the post-truth reader has to develop an active suspicion towards prevailing narratives, aware of the constructed and contingent character of truth claims. These views highlight the subversive function of literature that, instead of offering certainty, makes readers confront uncertainty, contradiction, and ambiguity.

Gautam Bhatia's *The Wall* is a prime example of how literature subverts closed beliefs and puts readers in a position of epistemic skepticism. The novel takes place in an impenetrable wall-enclosed world where society takes the wall's existence as self-evident truth, with its origin and purpose never questioned. The main character, Mithila, is on a mission of epistemic disruption, challenging the founding myths that support her reality. This journey replicates that of the post-truth reader, who is compelled to make sense of contradictory, untrustworthy, and wilfully concealed data. As Bhatia states, "To believe without questioning is to submit; to question without end is to be free" (189). The novel is thereby an allegory for critical examination, calling readers to see beyond the limits of received knowledge and the need for skepticism in the face of entrenched ideological frameworks.

Likewise, Samit Basu's *Chosen Spirits* is a dystopian near-future where truth is constructed and reader complicity is inevitable. The India of the novel is awash in algorithmically curated data, deepfake stories, and state-managed reality in which people are forced to consume manipulated truths. Joey, the protagonist, moves through this environment, grappling with distinguishing between reality and propaganda, as does the modern reader in the era of misinformation and spectacle via the digital. According to Basu, "The truth is no longer about facts; it is about who controls the filters" (212). By situating readers in a reality in which truth is plastic, and doubt is a transgressive act, *Chosen Spirits* challenges readers to re-examine their place in the greater epistemic crisis. The novel therefore places incredulity not as an intellectual position but as a moral necessity in resisting epistemic manipulation.

Both the novels, *The Wall* and *Chosen Spirits* illustrate the reader's changing role in the post-truth literary context. Bhatia's speculative fiction shatters sealed epistemologies, challenging readers to see the risks of unexamined belief, and Basu's dystopia plunges readers into a world in which truth itself has become a commodity. These novels do not just describe the post-truth situation; they produce incredulity actively, making readers work against the temptation of passive reception and struggle epistemically. Their broken, frequently imprecise narratives reflect the doubt of actual information systems, validating the notion that the pursuit of truth is an endless, never-resolved activity.

Post-truth literature thus requires an interactive investigator or a close reader, one who does not just consume stories but questions their beginnings, inconsistencies, and meanings. As *The Wall* and *Chosen Spirits* show, even reading itself becomes an epistemological battlefield, in which believing and disbelieving are charged with ideological stakes. In a universe in which facts are under siege, histories get rewritten, and fiction is presented as truth, incredulity is not merely a literary tactic—its survival. Literature thus becomes a resistant space where the reader can build resistance against doctored realities, reasserting their power in a world increasingly determined by fictiocratic forces.

## Conclusion

Indian literature today is a critical eye with which the complexities of the post-truth situation are examined, questioned, and frequently undermined. As evident in the works under examination, writers like Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh, Perumal Murugan, Meena Kandasamy, and Samit Basu address linguistic manipulation, pseudofactuality, fictiocracy, and incredulity, revealing how truth is not only warped but

actually manufactured and disputed. These stories unveil the processes whereby history is fabricated (The Nutmeg's Curse, Things to Leave Behind), identity is superimposed (Poonachi), and systems of belief are dogmatically enforced (The Wall). They also illustrate the vulnerability of factuality in an environment where truth is determined by political and ideological powers, which prompts readers to challenge hegemonic epistemologies. By placing such issues in the foreground, modern Indian literature does not merely record the post-truth age—it becomes an active agent in reframing how truth is constructed, questioned, and reclaimed.

Literature during the post-truth era manifests as a site of contestation and complicity, pushing back or, in the case of other works, unwittingly reinforcing manipulated facts. The allegorical critique in Poonachi and the metafictional pushback in Exquisite Cadavers demonstrate how fiction can lay bare and deconstruct fictiocratic edifices, while dystopian fiction such as Chosen Spirits unveil the ubiquity of epistemic control in virtual and political domains. These texts foreground the reader's agency in acknowledging the constructed nature of truth, illustrating how belief is constituted by narrative framing over objective fact. Post-truth literature, therefore, is not simply entertainment or information but requires an active, questioning, and reflective readership, one that actively questions literary texts as well as the wider socio-political context in which they appear.

Indian literature, in the coming of age, will be responding to the increasingly complex post-truth world with its deepening crises of factuality, specifically with the rising prevalence of misinformation, digital fabrication, and revisionism. Speculative and dystopian fiction, as in The Wall and Chosen Spirits, will continue to gain prominence in offering critical counter-narratives to new fictiocratic governments. Concurrently, autofiction and disjointed narratives will probably keep challenging mainstream storytelling, testifying to our current fragmented and insecure epistemic climate. While fact and fiction get closer and closer together, literature will be the significant arena of epistemic counter-practices that offer supplementary methods of signifying in a universe where truth remains relentlessly attacked. In doing so, it will continue to challenge its readers—not just to read stories but to actively pursue a more critical and nuanced comprehension of reality.

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