

Gothic Resurgence: Tracing the Evolution of Elements from the 18th Century

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Abstract

Gothic is now a significant genre that rules the artistic world in India and is loved, appreciated, and demanded by the audience. Gothic evolved further in India as the cruelty imposed by the British Raj increased, and slavery, discrimination, loss, pain, and war inspired the authors to write more about them. People could relate more to the Gothic genre because it was either a reflection of their current situations or the fiction in these stories was a distraction from their everyday problems. This paper aims at the emergence of the numerous elements related to Gothicism. It will also uncover the rising popularity of these Gothic elements in the country since the 18th Century. Many gothic elements, like horror, fear, mystery, supernatural, sadism, etc., are an integral part of the Gothic genre, drawing not just readers towards the genre but also inspiring the next generation of writers. The aspects highlighted in this paper include the

various elements used in Gothic literature since the 18th Century and why people are attracted to this genre.

Keywords: Gothic Literature, Gothicism, Gothic Elements, Indian Gothic

Introduction

"Gothic" is an adjective that is associated with horror, gloom, and mystery. Readers term Gothic Literature as Literature of horror, darkness, and mystery, where our fantasies are mixed with science and supernatural sources to create plots that keep the audience hooked. Gothic Literature found its origin in 1764. Later, this served as the basis for many gothic novels written by renowned gothic writers in India in the early 18th century. Gothic Literature traces various literature genres and their ability to knit societal evils in the novels portraying typical elements that recognize Gothic Literature. Indian Literature has elements of Gothic that were created around the societal evils of the time of the British Raj. As it emerged after the 18th century, more and more people started understanding Gothic Literature and were drawn towards it. The works of that time featured an array of fantasies, intense characters, and supernatural plots. Gothic described the devils of society and how they made humans helpless, yet a small ray of hope kept them alive. Since then, many Indian Gothic novels like *Cry, the Peacock*, *Chandrakanta*, *Gora*, etc., use these gothic elements in the plot. It evolved further after its introduction to the world in the 18th century. It appeared in the publications during the British Raj, as well when the shackles of slavery imposed by the Englishmen became an agony for many. In the contemporary era, "*The Indian Gothic*" in 2016 has seen a similar influence.

Literature Review

Ahmed Saadawi reconstructed *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* into *Frankenstein in Baghdad* in 2005 in Iraq. Gothic literature has celebrated two prominent sides: romance and horror. Myriad Novels and their research have been deduced from these two sides and their influence over world literature.

Lia Criselda Lim Pun-Chuen's "*Social Disruption in Gothic Novels of Horace Walpole*" in 2005 described similar observations. The genre rose from the ashes of societal devils during the time of unrest in the 18th century when politics, economies, and humans were facing unrest and revolutions. "*The Gothic novel exaggeration prescribed sex roles and uses various narrative techniques to produce commentary on politics and demonstrate the consequences of destroyed social structure.*".

Nalini Raj, in her Research Paper "*The Indian Gothic*" in 2016, has seen an identical community muddle. Gothic Literature traces various literature genres and their ability to knit societal devils in the novels portraying typical elements that recognize Gothic literature. Indian literature has Gothic elements that were created around the societal devils of the time of the British Raj. "*This literature was born of the anxiety of political, social, and cultural upheavals the country went through, resulting in the triumph of democracy over oppression in 1994.*"

Many Indian literature authors like Anita Desai's *Cry the Peacock* (1963), Anuradha Roy's *An Atlas of Impossible Longing*(2008), Rabindranath Tagore's *Gora* (1910), and many more are seen expressing elements blended with societal evils of the time. Many research scholars have made philosophical revelations on Gothic literature, its influence, the use of elements, and the portrayal of societal incidents.

Research Gap

Gothic literature is a subject that many individuals have tried to understand and have studied the various works of Gothic literature and how they emerged and improved. But some aspects of it remain under the veil. Such as:

Previous studies have not emphasized the significance of specific gothic elements in Indian literature of the 18th century. And how they contributed to the growth and evolution of Gothic to result in what it is today.

18th Century Early Gothic Influence and the Elements Involved in Gothic Literature

Gothic in the early 18th Century started with prominent works by Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) that displayed horror stories with a blend of science fiction. Similarly, Novels like *Dracula* by *Bram Stoker* in 1897 are one of the early works extremely popular among literature readers and writers across the globe. These novels served as the basis for the growth and evolution of Gothicism and its influence worldwide. However, as mentioned in the research paper “*Dominance of Early Gothic Literature on Contemporary & American Gothic with special reference to Frankenstein and Dracula*”, the crude essence of Gothic was almost similar. According to this paper, “*Gothic literature witnessed a huge transformation from 19th century to 20th-century novels, but the idea behind the dark, and mysterious genre remained the same. Today's modern authors try to depict current societal issues and social cultures through the lens of gothic literature.*”

18th-century Gothic novels comprise many elements that have continued to prevail across novels through the ages. These elements serve as the basis, inspiration, and recognition of Gothic literature. The elements include a supernatural atmosphere, protagonist, antagonist, darkness, mystery, fantasy, and horror. However, these elements in gothic literature, starting from early 18th-century novels, resulted from politics, revolutions, and other societal aspects in the world that writers knitted into words. For instance, societal problems in the 18th century, like the use of privilege and power in the wrong way, sexual differences, and social class issues, are described in *Dracula*, where the writer boasts heritage and high social class. The following quote used in *Dracula* by *Bram Stoker* is an excellent depiction of the same. “*How blessed are some people, whose lives have no fears, no dreads; to whom sleep is a blessing that comes nightly, and brings nothing but sweet dreams.*”

Early Indian Gothic Novels specifically covered these gothic elements, and they became a way to depict societal issues in those times. Indian Gothic novels, similar to Gothic literature, exhibit the imposition of cruelty and injustice on a specific part of society. Writers

took literature as a medium to lay an outlook on how society has a dark side like Gothic elements- Mystery, murder, villain, and more. Novels like *Gora* by Rabindranath Tagore in the 18th Century were revolutionary, demonstrating the oppression by the Britishers. *"To thee, to thee, my fire! Thou hast been burning in my heart all these futile years. If my life were a piece of gold, it would come out of its trail brighter, but it is trodden turf of grass, and nothing remains of it but this handful of ashes."* - *The Hungry Stones and Other Stories*; this states the helplessness, dread that humans face during low phases. The same can be seen in the British Raj, where poor people met the most helpless and dreadful situations when the British started their oppression.

Gothic literature is strongly influenced by incidents worldwide like politics, psychological issues, etc., which later inspired many literature genres. Indian Gothic novels are inspired by many gothic elements seen in 18th-century novels where writers can raise their voices against discrimination, like *Gora (1909)* by **Rabindranath Tagore**, where the author says, *"Our atmosphere breeds fear just as it breeds malaria."*

Indian Literature Embracing the New Genre of Gothicism

Artists of Indian literature have been known to embrace the new genres of Gothicism in numerous instances. These new genres involve the use of horror and dark elements in works of literature and other elements like slavery, social and racial discrimination, unrest, etc. And the use of such features in Indian literature was characteristically observed during the British Raj. Authors found a way to express the plight of the society and people around them who faced the atrocities imposed by the Britishers back in the day. Racism was also very significant in that era, causing a specific part of society to suffer only because they were considered "inferior" by others.

Indian writers adopted English during the British colonization as well. Many of these authors wanted to write the truth of what India was facing at that point and hence increase

awareness about the same. Both fiction and nonfiction literature took inspiration from the slavery and cruelty imposed by the British Raj for over a century in India. It is interesting to note that eventually, this Indian literature contributed significantly to the freedom struggle against the rule. Rabindranath Tagore, Bakim Chandra Chattopadhyay, R. K. Narayan, and many other names in the world of literature have given hints of Gothicism in their works, especially during India's struggle for independence.

In *Anandamath* (1882), Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay wrote about the revolution that took place by common people in India against the British and how they lost not just their homes but also their near and dear ones. The national song Vande Mataram was first published in Chattopadhyay's *Anandamath*, and it served as an inspiration to many individuals. This is how the popularity of Bande Mataram was fostered by the author. *“Because the British keep India in subjection by the sword. And she can be freed only by the sword. Those who talk of winning India’s independence by peaceful means do not know the British, I am sure. Please say Bande Mataram.”*

People started to recite this poem in front of the British to portray their disobedience. Another novel by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, *Devi Chaudhurani* (1884), had a female protagonist who struggled during tough times yet strived hard to remain unwavering as she grabbed the weapons with her fellow sisters and fought against the British.

R.K. Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma* is another example of fiction inspired by the freedom movement in India. Rabindranath Tagore's *Gora*, which was about nationalism, identity, and social reform, is another example. Many other writers shed light on Gothic's pain, darkness, loss, and other similar elements, ensuring that the pain of the masses was portrayed creatively and touchingly. The writing styles also changed during the eras as the popularity of Gothic as a genre increased.

"The moment you clasp an infant to your heart, you realize that nobody is born into a caste." **Gora**: This depicts how people faced oppression based on caste, one of society's darkest evils during the British Raj.

Conclusion

Gothic literature has been constantly evolving, from the first gothic novel to current works of Gothic literature; there is a massive transformation from the 18th century to contemporary gothic novels. Indian literature from the early 19th century has traces of many Gothic elements. These elements strongly emphasize its influence from gothic literature. Many renowned Indian literature authors have produced work that displayed societal evils with gothic elements. While a lot of people are discovering the landscape of Gothic literature, a lot of it still remains undiscovered for future researchers.

Conflict of Interest: The corresponding author, on behalf of all authors, confirms that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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