

# India 'Becoming': Literary Landscapes and Transmuted Indian Subjectivities in Post-Liberalisation Indian English Travel Writings<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

With the liberalisation of the Indian economy in the 1990s, India began shifting from the Nehruvian socialist model toward a neo-liberal capitalist framework, giving rise to the phenomenon of 'New India.' This reconfigured national identity sought to distance itself from older paradigms, positioning itself instead as a hub of global modernity. This article undertakes a close textual analysis of two hybrid travel narratives – Akash Kapur's *India Becoming: A Portrait of Life in Modern India* (2012) and Siddhartha Deb's *The Beautiful and the Damned: Life in the New India* (2011) – to examine how the trope of landscape<sup>2</sup> functions as a semiotic tool for mapping socio-cultural shifts in post-liberalisation India. Both texts interrogate the dissonance between the imagined and actualised nation, using landscape as a narrative space to foreground emerging subjectivities shaped by call centres, IT industries, and rapid urbanisation. These narratives portray a palimpsestic India which is layered with contradictions, aspirations, and dislocations. It is a space where the 'travelling self' confronts the complexities of identity, alienation, and mobility. The study finally argues that the representation of the transformed Indian landscape reveals the cultural politics embedded within neoliberal modernity.

**Keywords:** Call centres; Cultural politics; Hybrid non-fiction; IT workers; Landscape; Neoliberalism; New India, Transmuted subjectivities, Travelling self, Post-liberalisation India;

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2.Denis E. Cosgrove, "Landscape and the European Sense of Sight: Eyeing Nature," in *Landscape Theory*, edited by Rachel Ziady DeLue and James Elkins, Routledge, 2008, pp. 249-75.

## **Introduction**

India was at the centre of the world. It was India, with its resurgent economy, high savings rates, and young, educated workforce, that beckoned with the sense of a brighter future; it was India that offered the promise of a country and an economy on the upswing...I felt a sense of newness, perpetual reinvention and forward momentum. (Kapur 5)

Post-liberalisation India has often been framed through the glossy narrative of “India Shining,” celebrating economic growth, technological advancement, and global integration. Yet, this image obscures the uneven realities of labour, identity, and belonging in the wake of globalisation. Akash Kapur’s *India Becoming* and Siddhartha Deb’s *The Beautiful and the Damned* critically explore these contradictions by foregrounding the lives of IT professionals and call centre workers. Kapur and Deb foreground Call Centre workers and IT workers as emerging transmuted subjectivities that symbolize the aspirations and anxieties of a nation in transition.

This paper argues that these figures, often viewed as markers of progress, also reflect deeper socio-cultural tensions around caste, language, mobility, and alienation. Through a literary and ethnographic lens, Kapur and Deb challenge the binaries of tradition and modernity, centre and periphery, revealing the complexities of identity in a digitised, networked India. In doing so, they offer a humanised critique of development and modernisation, urging a rethinking of how India’s transformation is narrated and who gets to speak within it.

## **Travelogues, Landscapes and Cultural Politics**

As Denis Cosgrove aptly notes, “Our human landscape is our unwitting autobiography, reflecting our tastes, our values, our aspirations, and even our fears in tangible, visible form... all our cultural warts and blemishes are there, and our glories too; but above all, our ordinary day-to-day qualities are exhibited for anybody who wants to find them and knows how to look for them” (176). Landscapes, long central to travel writing, are not merely scenic backdrops but charged cultural texts that reflect ideological constructs, historical transformations, and the spatial manifestation of power.

The act of seeing and representing landscapes entails a politics of visibility, agency, and narrative authority. Public spaces, such as museums,

parks, and war memorials, are particularly fraught, as they are often shaped by those who possess symbolic and institutional power. Landscape, therefore, is not a neutral or universal experience but an ideologically constructed and usually contested category.

Since the Renaissance, the modern conceptualisation of landscape has evolved to reflect shifting relationships between humans and their environments. As W. J. T. Mitchell suggests, landscape is not a passive object of vision but a “social hieroglyph<sup>3</sup>,” a commodified visual field that conceals the very social relations it embodies (169). Extending this argument, Gillian Rose interprets landscape as a visual ideology shaped not only by the forces of capitalist labour but also by gendered power relations (Oakes and Price 173). Thus, landscape operates as a lens through which one can examine the intersection of ideology, power, and identity.

Cosgrove’s critical intervention insists on reading landscapes as symbolic representations as texts shaped by human appropriation and transformation (Cosgrove 175). For Cosgrove, the landscape serves both to reinforce and challenge dominant ideological formations, revealing the intimate entanglement between space, meaning, and authority. This theoretical framing is particularly resonant in contemporary Indian travel writings, where landscapes are depicted as dynamic stages upon which the dramas of class, caste, and globalization are played out.

This section contends that a critical reading of landscapes in the travelogues of Akash Kapur (*India Becoming*) and Siddhartha Deb (*The Beautiful and the Damned*) reveals the underlying cultural logic of neoliberalism, the resilience of caste and class hierarchies, and the performative construction of Indian modernity. These narratives not only document spatial transformations but interrogate the ideological underpinnings of such changes. Landscapes in these texts function as ideological battlegrounds, where tradition meets aspiration, and exclusion confronts spectacle, mirroring broader anxieties around identity, belonging, and cultural memory in “India Shining.”

Finally, the shifting landscapes in these works do more than reflect physical or economic transitions; they signal deeper cultural and epistemological shifts. They compel readers to rethink the visible and invisible contours of space in post-liberalisation India, positioning landscape as a critical site for understanding the contested narratives of the nation.

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3. J. T. Mitchell, “Imperial Landscape,” *The Cultural Geography Reader*, edited by Timothy Oakes and Patricia L. Price, Routledge, 2008, pp. 126–32.

Building upon this theoretical framing of landscape as a symbolic and contested space, it becomes crucial to examine how literary texts represent these geographies in post-liberalisation India. The works of Akash Kapur and Siddhartha Deb exemplify how contemporary Indian travel and return narratives engage with the transformed and transforming landscapes of the nation. These writers do not merely document spatial change; they decode the ideological assumptions embedded in infrastructural development, displacement, and aspirational modernity. By situating their narratives within shifting cultural and material terrains, Kapur and Deb reinforce the idea that landscapes are not passive settings but active participants in constructing national identity. Their works serve as literary cartographies which map the contradictions, anxieties, and aspirations that define India's neoliberal present.

It was a cliché to write about the poverty of India, a cliché to point out the contrasts and inequalities within the nation... the narrative has changed—how people write about stories of Indian upliftment, about a nation on the move, emerging from the shadows of poverty into the glitter of twenty-first-century prosperity (Kapur 153).

Akash Kapur's observation encapsulates the narrative disjuncture in post-liberalisation India, where writers increasingly resist the reductive binaries of "India Shining" versus "Dark India." Authors like Kapur and Siddhartha Deb move beyond both the celebratory neoliberal tropes and the romanticised depictions of slums and marginalisation. Instead, they offer hybrid, grounded narratives that reflect the contradictions of a rapidly transforming nation.

In alignment with works such as *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga, *Animal's People* by Indra Sinha, and *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* by Katherine Boo, Kapur's *India Becoming* and Deb's *The Beautiful and the Damned* expose the commodification of poverty and progress alike. Their genre-defying texts, part memoir, part ethnography, part reportage, resist fixed forms and mirror the fluidity of contemporary Indian subjectivity. These texts offer nuanced portrayals of India as a "nation-in-process," grappling with uneven development, cultural negotiation, and global aspiration.

Kapur's title, *India Becoming*, reflects a landscape in flux, a nation whose identity remains perpetually under construction. Deb writes, "India was being remade forcefully, and some aspects of that remaking were more visible than others" (Deb 173), pointing to the selective visibility of mod-

ernisation narratives. These authors challenge the dominant national imaginary, opting instead for fragmented, empirical accounts that foreground lived experience over spectacle. As Mendes and Lau argue, such hybrid non-fiction “play[s] with the boundary that readers expect will delineate fiction from non-fiction to emphasize the difficulty of representing experience” (63). This genre of hybridity, much like the landscapes it depicts, becomes a powerful mode of critique.

Kapur’s narrative begins with a reverse migration: a return from the diaspora to India’s East Coast Road. Yet the return is fraught with dissonance. What was once familiar has been overwritten by neoliberal development—beach resorts, restaurants, and multiplexes crowd out older markers of place. “The East Coast Road has changed... much of the countryside has given way to the promised development” (Kapur 1). What appears as spatial progress is, in fact, a symbolic remapping, where nostalgia and tradition are supplanted by market aesthetics and the iconography of “New India.” The past is not erased but recontextualised within a spectacle of consumer modernity.

Deb’s narrative, by contrast, begins with a reflection on Partition and familial displacement, invoking themes of loss and historical rupture. He references F. Scott Fitzgerald not to signal aspiration but to foreground alienation, illustrating how Indian subjectivity is shaped by both inherited trauma and present-day economic dislocation. Both writers are peripatetic, tethered to India yet shaped by transnational mobility. They describe a liminal subject: the returnee who remains physically present in India but psychically distanced by diasporic memory or cosmopolitan experience. As Kapur notes, “For all India’s modernity, the weight of tradition was still formidable... there was still so much in my home I couldn’t relate to” (131). The homeland is not rediscovered; it is re-encountered, fragmented, and reinterpreted.

Their texts blur the line between ethnographic witnessing and literary construction. They are personal without being solipsistic, rooted in empirical observation yet acutely attuned to the symbolic terrain of post-liberalisation India. The result is a deeply textured spatial narrative that engages with emotional geographies, historical resonances, and ideological tensions. Landscape becomes not just a backdrop, but a stage on which aspiration, alienation, and resistance are played out.

A critical intervention within these texts is their reorientation of focus from the privileged diaspora to the grounded everyday Indian. Both writ-

ers dismantle the dominance of diasporic narratives that, as Meenakshi Mukherjee argues, operate at a “metaphoric” level. Mukherjee calls instead for a literature that engages with India’s realities “at a non-metaphoric level,” privileging “the space of the home, the temporality of the daily, and the proximity of reality” (Srinivasan 15). Kapur and Deb heed this call by foregrounding the voices of IT workers, BPO employees, and urban migrants, the figures often reduced to developmental metrics but here restored to subjecthood.

These individuals emerge not merely as avatars of India’s economic rise but as complex, affective beings negotiating exhaustion, ambition, and systemic disillusionment. As Deb observes, “It is an account of people who, either as celebrated representatives of the new India or as statistical details of the other, old India, might be able to tell us who they really are” (Deb 26). Their stories disrupt hegemonic narratives of national progress and offer alternative cartographies of identity and belonging.

Crucially, these representations allow subaltern voices to emerge not just as monolithic symbols of deprivation but as heterogeneous agents within the national landscape. By attending to the granular details of everyday life, Kapur and Deb present the Indian subject as multiply situated, constantly negotiating structures of global capitalism, caste hierarchies, and aspirational modernity. In doing so, they recover what Denis Cosgrove calls the “symbolic landscape”, one that encodes the interplay of power, space, and culture (Cosgrove 175). Eventually, the works of Kapur and Deb exemplify a critical turn in post-liberalisation Indian literature: a turn away from celebratory or condemnatory grand narratives toward intimate, spatialised accounts of transformation. Their narratives reposition landscape as a contested site of meaning, where nationhood, modernity, and selfhood are constantly rewritten.

### Emerging New Subjectivities in Post-Liberalisation India

If postcoloniality was the condition of a comprador intelligentsia: of a relatively small, western-style, western-trained group of writers and thinkers who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery, then the rise of a global new India was meant to mark the abetment of such mediations (Appiah 149).

The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries witnessed the emergence of a reconfigured Indian subjectivity, shaped by globalisation, neo-

liberalism, and the technocratic turn in the economy. In this context, the call centre worker becomes emblematic of India's evolving socio-economic fabric, operating at the intersection of global mobility, virtual connectivity, and local constraints. While the economic implications of outsourcing and ICT growth have received substantial scholarly attention, the cultural and ideological reconfigurations demand deeper exploration. This section examines how literary texts by Akash Kapur and Siddhartha Deb, among others, map the terrain of these emerging identities, especially focusing on call centre agents and IT workers, to expose the contradictions and aspirations of post-liberalisation India.

This period of transformation, marked by the convergence of Mandir (religious politics), Mandal (identity politics), and Market (economic reforms), created a new spatial and ideological order. India ceased to be a passive recipient of global narratives and instead became an aspirational site for investors, diasporas, and writers. Within this reoriented global economy, the call centre agent and the expatriate writer are liminal figures who straddle borders, both geographical and metaphorical. Each, in their way, articulates a dislocated sense of belonging, foregrounding the alienation and rootlessness central to India's global modernity.

The call centre, as both a workplace and cultural symbol, encapsulates the paradoxes of neoliberal India. Workers remain physically located within national borders but participate in global circuits of labour, embodying what Srinivasan calls "virtual migrations." As she observes, the agent is "an enterprising individual whose virtual migrations both de-centre and shore up the West... whose participation in the outsourcing industry confirms New India's centrality to the new international division of labour" (82). Such figures are deeply entangled in the complex web of aspiration, alienation, and ambiguity that defines India's post-liberalisation subject.

Siddhartha Deb's *The Beautiful and the Damned* captures this tension with ethnographic nuance. Tasked with writing a journalistic account of India's call centre boom, Deb initially believes his global exposure and American education would aid his immersion. However, he finds that integration into this globalised workforce demands a peculiar act of cultural regression: "To become globalised through the call centre, I had to stop being globalised and become a provincial Indian" (Deb 8). His enrollment in an expensive call centre English course at the British Council exemplifies the contradictions of this transformation: "I took an expensive class in call centre English... paying more for that brief course than I had for my entire state-subsidised higher education in India" (9). Participation in global

capitalism thus mandates a commodified mimicry of Western norms, often at the cost of one's own educational and cultural capital.

Akash Kapur's *India Becoming* provides a complementary lens, documenting the lives of IT professionals such as Hari and Selvi. These figures encapsulate the tensions between tradition and modernity, stasis, and flow. Selvi's migration to a city and employment in a call centre signify mobility, yet her marginalisation outside the workplace reveals the continued exclusions of caste, gender, and class. Hari, meanwhile, is a software engineer navigating the emergent technocratic India, where land, labour, and identity are all reimagined. Kapur notes, "When I met people like Harsh or hung out with Hari and Selvi, it was hard not to wonder what it meant to be Indian at the turn of the twenty-first century" (Kapur 53).

Literary and journalistic representations further underscore the symbolic centrality of the call centre in reconstituting Indian identity. Bharati Mukherjee's *Miss New India* and Chetan Bhagat's *One Night at the Call Center* displace pastoral and nationalist tropes in favour of an entrepreneurial, urban India. Deb describes how cities morph under global capitalism: "It didn't seem to matter where I was... everywhere the metropolis was expanding, throwing up offices, highways, apartment complexes and SEZs" (Deb 121). The call centre becomes both a space of aspiration and a site of erasure, symbolising India's inclusion in global capitalism while simultaneously reproducing hierarchies and exclusions.

Figures such as Chak and S.S. Prasad in Deb's work reflect deeper ideological constructions. Chak, an engineer educated in the U.S., returns to India as an oracle of the future, renaming himself to suit global norms. His story reflects the technocratic ambition of India's middle class, where education becomes a vehicle for mobility, albeit within deeply stratified structures. S.S. Prasad, the engineer-poet, writes in binary code. His poems are legible only to those with a "cyborgian eye." These figures allegorise a new kind of subjectivity: globally aligned yet culturally insular, technically proficient yet socially alienated.

Ragini Srinivasan deepens this reading by noting the symmetrical relationship between call centre agents and expatriate writers. Both perform linguistic labour; both negotiate identity through voice and accent; and both reflect India's complicated engagement with global Anglophonomism. "The economic and social (im)mobility presented by the call centre agent, as well as her linguistic and vocal performances of India and Indianness, are formally symmetrical to those of the expatriate writer in diaspora" (Sri-

nivasan 77). This structural affinity resists simplistic binaries of exploitation or ventriloquism, instead calling attention to the shared ideological terrain occupied by different avatars of the post-liberalisation subject.

The symbolic weight of the call centre extends beyond individual identity to encompass broader socio-economic trends. The post-Y2K outsourcing boom catalysed a reconfiguration of land, labour, and language. Deb notes the proliferation of dubious training institutes offering computer literacy to those excluded from elite education: "There were already dozens of private institutions offering computer courses for people who had failed to get into engineering college" (Deb 73). This commodification of knowledge parallels the commodification of land, as urban sprawls replace wetlands with SEZs and corporate hubs. Kapur aptly describes engineers as the "foot soldiers of India's surging economy" (Kapur 77).

Despite their centrality in narratives of national progress, these techno-subjects often remain caught in systems of contingent inclusion. Simon Gikandi remarks that such individuals "are not yet quite cosmopolitan even when they inhabit the spaces that have come to be inscribed as the global" (Srinivasan 23). Their virtual mobility does not guarantee socio-political agency; rather, it often masks precarious working conditions and deep-rooted inequalities. As Deb writes, the call centre worker is a "cybercoolie", a rebranded version of historical exploitation: "Old exploitation dressed in a new costume" (Deb 7).

However, the call centre also opens up the possibility of reimagining global belonging from the margins. Priya Menon argues for conceptualising it as a site of "cosmopolitanism from below," wherein subaltern agency negotiates the global through voice, accent, and labour (13). The call centre becomes a symbolic space where India's aspirations, contradictions, and exclusions converge. It is a prism through which the post-liberalisation Indian subject is refracted.

Thus, the emergence of call centre workers and IT professionals as dominant figures in Indian literature and journalism signals a paradigm shift in how national identity, labour, and modernity are imagined. These techno-subjects embody the paradoxes of global capitalism who are at once celebrated and exploited, mobile yet stagnant, global yet deeply local. By reading their stories alongside those of expatriate writers and returnees, we gain insight into the ideological terrain of New India, marked by aspiration, alienation, and a relentless negotiation with the global. Hence it will not be incorrect to read the call centre not merely as an economic

entity, but as a cultural and ideological site crucial to understanding the evolving contours of Indian subjectivity in the twenty-first century.

### **Linguistic Terrains and Technocratic Subjectivities**

The emergence of new subjectivities in post-liberalisation India is shaped not only by economic realignments but also by linguistic and spatial transformations. While landscapes in earlier travel writing symbolised rootedness and tradition, in contemporary narratives they become fragmented terrains of aspiration, exclusion, and transformation. Language, especially English, functions not only as a communicative tool but as a symbolic terrain that reflects and shapes identity within these reconfigured landscapes. In the neoliberal Indian context, the workplace, be it the call centre cubicle or the IT campus, functions as a microcosm where linguistic performance, spatial aesthetics, and socio-economic hierarchies meet. These overlapping terrains of speech and space reveal how identity today is navigated across shifting coordinates of visibility, power, and belonging.

The centrality of English as the dominant medium in India's IT and BPO sectors has triggered substantial debate regarding its neo-hegemonic implications. As the language of economic mobility and technological modernity, English is often seen as a desirable asset, yet its proliferation is entangled with structures of inequality. Scholars like Robert Phillipson have termed this dominance a form of linguistic imperialism, maintained by structural asymmetries: "The dominance of English... is maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages" (Sontag 51). The pressure on Indian workers to modify their accents to cater to Western clients underscores this linguistic hierarchy. Philip Taylor and Peter Bain highlight this duality where workers are expected to lead bifurcated lives, "Indian by day and American by night" (Sontag 30).

However, such readings risk erasing the agency of postcolonial subjects. Siddhartha Deb, for instance, resists simplistic notions of linguistic submission. In his narrative, being asked to "provincialise" his English for call centre work signals not mere capitulation to Anglo norms but a complex rearticulation of language. Ragini Tharoor Srinivasan offers a nuanced framework: "The call centre is not the business of transforming Indian voices into American approximates... rather, it is in the business of producing Indian English as itself distinctly and audibly global" (78). Here, English becomes a site of cultural negotiation rather than domination. It is a space where postcolonial subjects reconfigure power.

Selma Sontag furthers this analysis by exploring identity formation in IT and BPO industries. While these workers operate within global systems that seemingly erase national distinctions, they often assert Indian identity through linguistic inflection and cultural references. Yet, their symbolic visibility as harbingers of “India Shining” contrasts sharply with their material invisibility. As Sontag notes, these workers derive symbolic power from their labour, yet the same labour renders them structurally powerless.

Deb’s critique sharpens this contradiction. He draws attention to caste-coded exclusions embedded within India’s technocratic elite. Engineering, he argues, functions as a “Brahmin” occupation, not just in its association with knowledge but in its guarded exclusivity: “Brahmanical in the way engineers perceive their work around computers, if by Brahmanical one means the idea of exclusive access to knowledge that cannot be shared with commoners” (Deb 99). The cubicle, then, becomes not only a symbol of modernity but also a caste-inscribed landscape which is clean, enclosed, and elite. This is juxtaposed with the polluted, physical, Sudra-coded space of the factory. S.S. Prasad’s “nanopoems,” written in binary code accessible only to a techno-caste, literalise this exclusion (100).

Moreover, Deb identifies parallels between caste hierarchies in India and class stratification in the West. He calls America “hugely regimented,” governed by its own “economic caste system” (117). This global convergence of caste and class under informational capitalism produces new inequalities masked by cosmopolitan aesthetics. The IT sector, though framed as meritocratic, conceals inherited social advantages. In contrast, call centre agents who are often younger, from non-engineering backgrounds, inhabit a more precarious zone within the same economy. Both groups embody late capitalist contradictions: aspirational yet overworked, visible yet voiceless.

Manuel Castells’ concept of informational capitalism provides a structural lens for these contradictions. He imagines a model of development grounded in “productivity, flexibility, solidarity, participation and accountability” (8). Yet, Deb exposes the widening gulf between these ideals and lived realities. Workers excluded from this technocratic vision become “ghosts” in the network society. One telling moment in *The Beautiful and the Damned* features an ad for Vinayak Steel Factory devoid of any human figure, a chilling erasure of labour itself.

Kapur’s *India Becoming* resonates with this tension. The character Hari, an

IT worker, articulates the uncertain identity of India's youth: "Nobody knows where this is all going. These guys are just trying on roles, but they don't know who they are becoming" (Kapur 10). Though modern and cosmopolitan in appearance, these individuals are fragmented internally. Their visibility in the media is often idealised as icons of progress. This is undercut by the alienation of their daily lives. Deb remarks that call centre workers "might have been the most visible face of India Shining, but their lives... showed a more complex reality" (11).

This ironic disjunction is vividly captured in Deb's account of "Happiness Classes" held in cramped BPO offices. These are the programs designed to infuse joy into a structurally exploitative space. The absurdity of such interventions exposes the emotional cost of constant performance, the exhaustion of being "always on," and the hollowness of corporate well-being.

Finally, both Deb and Kapur confront the cultural and psychological landscapes of neoliberal India. Their hybrid narratives dismantle the monolithic optimism of liberalisation, instead offering plural, layered portraits of new subjectivities. These figures – engineers, agents, expatriates embody the fraught convergence of geography, labour, and identity. Their stories reimagine the Indian landscape not as static territory but as a symbolic terrain where global flows meet local fault lines. In this contested space, language becomes a cipher for power; labour a sign of both inclusion and dispossession; and, identity a performance shaped by both visibility and erasure.

## Conclusion

This paper has explored how hybrid non-fiction narratives such as Akash Kapur's *India Becoming* and Siddhartha Deb's *The Beautiful and the Damned* serve as critical interventions into dominant representations of post-liberalisation India. Resisting the binary of "India Shining" versus "Dark India," these texts unravel the complexities of a nation negotiating uneven development, fractured aspirations, and ideological contradictions. Through landscape, both material and symbolic, as well as through their linguistic strategies and focus on emergent subjectivities, Kapur and Deb chart a nuanced cartography of a nation in transition.

The protagonists of these narratives – call centre agents, IT professionals, migrants, and returnees embody the paradoxes of neoliberal India caught between the utopic promises of development and the lived dystopic reali-

ties of inequality, alienation, and socio-cultural fragmentation. Their fragmented journeys reflect a landscape in flux, where global capital overlays traditional topographies, and where the home is no longer a stable, rooted entity but a terrain of affective negotiation.

Language becomes central to this reconfiguration. The privileging of English, the demand for accent neutrality, and the commodification of speech within service-sector economies reveal how voice is both a tool of empowerment and a marker of erasure. The suppression of regional accents and vernaculars mirrors a broader epistemic violence – a silencing of plurality in favour of a globalised, “neutral” India. The cubicle replaces the factory, but the labour remains stratified, surveilled, and linguistically policed. These linguistic practices not only mediate access to economic mobility but also reinforce existing exclusions under the guise of meritocracy.

Through their genre-blurring forms, Kapur and Deb collapse the divide between reportage and self-reflection, constructing a literary geography that maps not just physical space but psychic dislocations. Landscape here is not merely backdrop but narrative device – foregrounding the dissonance between aspiration and alienation, between remembered pasts and hyper-mediated presents. Their works articulate a nation not yet arrived, a becoming rather than a being.

Ultimately, this paper argues that these hybrid texts recover the voices of those caught within India’s neoliberal experiment – figures often hyper-visible in global discourses but invisible within national imaginaries. By foregrounding how landscape, language, and labour intersect in post-liberalisation India, these narratives open space for more plural, situated understandings of identity. In doing so, they contribute to a counter-archive of contemporary India – one that resists totalising narratives and instead foregrounds the fragmented, affective, and contested terrains on which the idea of the nation is being rewritten.

In an era increasingly defined by network societies and supranational governance, the idea of nationhood is no longer static or territorially confined. These hybrid narratives disrupt the essentialist association of identity with geography and open up new interpretive possibilities for understanding Indian subjectivity beyond the nation-state. This research, therefore, contributes to the growing discourse on how cultural texts can illuminate the ideological, spatial, and affective reconfigurations of identity in the global South.

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