



# Indian English Literature

NEW CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES



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**Indian English Literature**  
**New Critical Perspectives**

*Editors*

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Indian English Literature: New Critical Perspectives  
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Edited by Dr. Kiran Khetta and Mr. Kishor Chaudhari

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## Chapter 4

### **Revisiting American Television's Marginalized Subaltern Indian Identity: A Study of Jonathan of NBC's *30 Rock***

Dr Anjan K Behera

#### **Introduction:**

Television has been one of the major mediums of mass communication in the United States of America. As a whole, the television networks of the United States are the largest and the most syndicated in the world. What makes the American television so powerful is that the programmes broadcast on its networks have received international fame. *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, *Friends*, *The Vampire Diaries* have become part of everyday conversation in countries around the world which broadcast American television shows. It has especially been popular among the young generation, as pointed out by Bret Mills in his book, *The Sitcom*. New research by Nielsen confirms that Americans of the age 35 and under now watch an increasing amount of television programming on phones, laptops, or devices other than a traditional, ad-friendly television (Mills 90). The characters shown in these shows are a reflection of the American society, and the Western ideology. They are designed to suit the audience taste, and are a representation of the nation's popular culture.

American television of late has included many South Asian Indian characters in their shows. The migration of

Indians to the United States has increased phenomenally. Currently, 2,831,330 foreign-born American nationals are from India, apart from the multiracial Indians. Constituting an important part of the American culture, Indians paved their way into television. Although it was only in 2007 that American television got its first Indian character in a lead role, Indians have always been present in the shows. As early as the 1960s, *The Adventures of Johnny Quest* had an Indian character called Hadji. Early Indian characters included Apu Nahasapeemahpetilon, the lovable but polarizing Kwik-E-Mart owner on *The Simpsons*. The late 80s saw Jawaharlal Choudhury, the exchange student from New Delhi becoming the Head of the Class, a sitcom about a rainbow-coalition honours class in Manhattan. Indian characters were seen more often in American television in the 1900s, starting with the character of Mr Zameer in *Will and Grace*. Most of these characters were cast in supporting roles and were credited as recurring characters. The 2000s saw more Indian characters, Rajesh Koothrappali in *The Big Bang Theory*, Timmy in *Rules of Engagement*, Tom Haverford in *Parks and Recreation*. It marked an era where Indian characters were cast in lead roles.

However, the way these characters have been portrayed has been similar. Starting from Hadji, the Indian characters are portrayed as stereotypes. The character of Apu Nahasapeemahpetilon was given a surname so difficult to pronounce, based on the stereotype about Indian names being challenging to pronounce. These characters were shown to be in love with Bollywood, have overbearing and protective parents, and often are pressured with arranged marriages. They were always employed by Americans, and had no political freedom. These characters depended on American characters to rescue them from troubles and help them secure their stay in the United States. In short, they are portrayed as being inferior to the American characters in the shows.

### **Why Study Indian Characters in American Television Shows?**

It becomes extremely important to study these characters as these shows are extremely popular and influential in the global television arena. First of all, there have been several Indian characters on American television, all of whom have been portrayed in almost the same manner, and swamped by stereotypes the American audience have about the Indian

race. Secondly, since these shows are telecast around the world and have an international fan base, the way these Indian characters are projected becomes a standard for Indians globally. And third, these shows run for years, either in direct broadcast or syndication, thus strengthening the ideas projected in them. It becomes necessary to understand these depictions and evaluate the causes behind such stereotyping.

### **Research Objectives:**

A few concerns that this research will attempt to address are:

- The application of the term 'subaltern' to the Indian characters in American television shows.
- The conflict of these characters with their identity as Indians, and as Americans.
- Their notion of a national identity, if expressed.
- Analyse the stereotypes with which the characters are presented.
- The notions of the West, in particular, the American society, and Indians.
- The importance given to these characters, with relation to the American characters in the shows.

### **Methodology:**

This chapter analyses the representation of the Indian character Jonathan from NBC's *30 Rock*. A qualitative analysis of the inferences made by the analysis of the television shows that takes into account the mise-en-scene, characterization, plot, and narrative structure, and the secondary texts leads to the conclusion about the observations made.

### **Theoretical Framework:**

Representation of the self always invokes the *other*. The 'other' and its 'otherness' refers to that which is alien and divergent from that which is given, such as a norm, identity or the self. The 'other' is also defined as anything that is external to the *self*. The 'other' is peripheral, and is judged by the dominant ideology. The 'other' is outside of the self and depends on external factors for identity.

When applied to the study of television content, this concept underlines the influence of dominant ideology. The present research focuses on constructing the 'other' that is controlled by the dominant Western ideology. The other, as a concept, has political, cultural, racial and other implications.

In psychoanalytic theory the other is developed from the structures of ego and id and also from psycho-sexual relations. In Lacan's theory of the 'mirror stage' as well as the development of a child from interaction within the family, the sameness and difference of the self emerges (Lacan 1287).

The 'other' thus has no power, and as such, is controlled by others. This makes the other a subaltern. To understand how the 'other' is created, understanding Gramsci's concept of the subaltern becomes crucial. During the Fascist rule in Italy, the Marxist Antonio Gramsci developed the Marxist model, adding many new concepts and ideas to the existing theory. While widely known for his concept of cultural hegemony, Gramsci also postulated on the most effective way to formulate a Marxist vanguard; which he envisioned working alongside the proletariat. It was through this exploration of theory that Gramsci coined the term 'subaltern'. For Gramsci, the term included anyone or any group of inferior social, economic or political rank. The dominant classes dictated social norms, and the subalterns were supposed to follow these set rules and regulations without questioning its significance. Gramsci writes:

“...spontaneous consent is given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group, and that this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position... (Gramsci 19).“

Hence, the way in which the subaltern groups' histories are constructed, and the way they are represented is decided by the dominant class. He advocated that these marginalized people be examined within their 'own cultural and social prisons'. Subaltern studies thus examines histories from the point of the colonized rather than from the point of the colonizer (Prakash 12). This helps in understanding the subaltern groups better, rather than depending on the dominant classes understanding of the same.

Edward Said in his work *Orientalism* further discusses the term subaltern and its implications: “As a discipline representing institutionalized Western knowledge of the Orient, Orientalism comes to exert a three-way force, on the Orient, on the Orientalist, and on the Western “consumer” of Orientalism” (Said 23). Orientalism, as a practice, penalizes the Orient for not being Europe. In the process of penalizing

the Orient, the Occident is orientalizing the Orient by implementing a set of constraints, limitations upon the Orient. In the process, the West constructs an identity for the Orient, which is then naturalized and passed on to the Orient. Not being heard and rendered silent, they become the subaltern. The subaltern is always the 'other', and hence is dependent on the centre for its identity. It cannot independently exist. The power struggle between the centre and the marginalized, or the 'Other' is in constant negotiation. It is in response to these social tensions that the power structure offers compromises through reform movements and change in political agenda. The Orient, according to him, was constructed as a negative version of the West. The West propagated the idea of a racially biased superior Western culture, immediately pushing the Eastern cultures into the margins. Thus, the 'other' was considered inferior, of impoverished cultural background and their art highly mediocre. This led to stereotypical ways in which the Orient was portrayed in colonial narratives.

A stereotype is a popular belief about specific types of individuals. Stereotypes are standardized and simplified conceptions of groups based on some prior assumptions. Sociologist Charles E. Hurst states, "One reason for stereotypes is the lack of personal, concrete familiarity that individuals have with persons in other racial or ethnic groups. Lack of familiarity encourages the lumping together of unknown individuals" (27).

Stereotypes in the media are simple, one-dimensional portrayals of a certain group of people, usually based on race, gender, religion, profession, or age. To some degree we all are stereotyped people who are different from others. In Hollywood, filmmakers often use stereotypes to quickly establish certain characters like the Latino drug dealer, immigrant or gangbanger. Asians are smart and lacking sex appeal; blonds are dumb and African Americans are hip-hop thugs (Castillo Web <http://www.latinomagazine.com/summer12/features/hollywood.htm>).

Subalterns can thus be seen as a way of simplifying concepts for the West which does not really aim at understanding the silent 'other'. It wants to assign a simplified understanding to the subaltern culture and generalize it, making it the 'other'. The creation of stereotypes misrepresents the 'other'.

**NBC's *30 Rock* (2006-2013):**

*30 Rock* is an American television comedy series created by Tina Fey that is aired on NBC. The series, which is loosely based on Fey's experiences as head writer for *Saturday Night Live*<sup>1</sup>, takes place behind the scenes of a fictional live sketch comedy series (*The Girly Show with Tracy Jordan*). The show is set in New York, USA. The show has received international critical acclaim and viewership, having won the Emmy for Best Comedy Series three years in a row (2007-2009). It has also been nominated and has won in several categories in the People's Choice Awards and the Golden Globes. The show was telecast on NBC from 2007 to 2013, and is being broadcast as syndicated in other networks around the globe. Comedy Central and Star World in India telecast *30 Rock*.

Jonathan works as the Personal Assistant to Jack Donaghy. Jack began the series as the Vice President of East Coast Television and Microwave Oven Programming for a fictional version of General Electric<sup>2</sup> and later served as the head of a fictional version of NBC after that he works for the fictional *Kabletown*. Jonathan has remained loyal to his employer throughout the series, often going too far to prove his loyalty. He is of Indian origin. The character is played by Maulik Pancholy and is a recurring character on the series. Jonathan's ethnicity has been confirmed on the show on more than one occasion. The first time it happens in the episode entitled *The Aftermath* (Season 1 Episode 2). It is in a scene where Jack contemplates whether he deserves the post he is in, Jonathan encourages him by supporting him. When Jack asks him if he is being genuine, Jonathan replies, "I may come from the Land of *Fakirs*, but I am no faker." A lot of jokes about him revolve around his identity as an Indian. For example, in the episode titled *Winter Madness* (Season 4 Episode 11) Jack Donaghy is frustrated that his computer is not getting connected to the internet. He calls Jonathan and says, "Jonathan, why do I have an Indian assistant if my computer keeps getting hanged!" Also in the episode titled, *Somebody to*

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<sup>1</sup> *Saturday Night Live* (abbreviated as *SNL*) is an American late-night live television sketch comedy and variety show created by Lorne Michaels and developed by Dick Ebersol. The show premiered on NBC on October 11, 1975, and is currently on air.

<sup>2</sup> General Electric Company or GE, is an American multinational conglomerate corporation incorporated in Schenectady, New York and headquartered in Fairfield, Connecticut, United States. The company operates through four segments: Energy, Technology Infrastructure, Capital Finance and Consumer & Industrial. A fictional version of the company is shown in *30 Rock*.

*Love* (Season 2 Episode 6), Liz<sup>1</sup> is worried when she smells maple syrup in her apartment and Jack tells her that it could be the chemical agent *Northrax*. She immediately assumes her Mid-eastern and Indian neighbours are terrorists and goes on to consult Jack. When she gets to the office, she is worried about Jonathan's presence in the room, since he also belongs to the same race. Jonathan quickly understands the awkwardness and snarls at Liz as he leaves the room, making Liz wonder if she is racist.

The American characters on *30 Rock* often make fun of Jonathan, sometimes identifying him as Mid-Eastern, Arabic, Chinese, etc. In the episode *Live Show East Coast* (Season 5 Episode 4), which was telecast live on the East Coast<sup>2</sup> of the United States, Jack asks Jonathan to bring him a pen. To this, Liz adds, "Ya *chai* boy, get in here. You'll never be a millionaire. *Slumdog Millionaire*<sup>3</sup>. Blemo!" In this telecast, the joke refers to him being an Indian. However, in the West Coast telecast of the same episode few minutes later, now renamed as *Live Show West Coast*, the joke is changed to, "Ya and hurry up Alladin! Before Jasmine is forced to marry Jafar! Similarities. Lemon out!" Here, he is equated with a fictional character from the Middle East. The subaltern character of Jonathan is muddled up with the entire Oriental stereotype. Although he is an Indian, he has to bear jokes even about the Middle East. The Occidental prejudices have muddled up the ethnic diversities of the Orient, and these prejudices result in treating Jonathan's ethnicity without dignity. He lacks a specific history.

The West gazes upon the subalterns and assigns a common identity to them all, inferior and underdeveloped. As a result, all diversity of the subaltern cultures is dubbed under one constructed subaltern culture by the dominant group. The quote by Rudyard Kipling best describes the stereotypes set about the Oriental subaltern.

"Orientals, so the stereotype goes, are impossible to trust. They are capable of sophisticated abstractions, but not of concrete, practical organization or rigorous, detail-oriented

<sup>1</sup> Liz, short for Elizabeth Lemon, is the head writer of the fictional show *TGS with Tracy Jordan*. She is also the protagonist of the show.

<sup>2</sup> The United States is divided into two time zones for television broadcast. The first, *East Coast*, is about 40 minutes ahead of the *West Coast*. Hence, television shows air in this region forty minutes before it does in the *West Coast*. *Live Show* being a live performance by *30 Rock*, had to be shot two times, once for the *East Coast* broadcast, and once for the *West Coast* broadcast.

<sup>3</sup> A reference to the plot of Danny Boyle's 2008 Oscar winning film *Slumdog Millionaire*.

analysis. Their men are sexually incontinent, while their women are locked up behind bars. Orientals are, by definition, strange (Wong 51)."

In the episode where Liz suspects her neighbours to be terrorists and is scared to speak in front of Jonathan, it clearly shows how the American characters have assigned a common and collective identity to the whole diverse Orient. All the subaltern groups have been dubbed into one identity. Since her neighbours have Muslim names, and they are foreign, they are immediately seen as terrorists. And since Jonathan is of Indian origin, he is too to be feared. He is then clearly distinguished as the 'Other'.

Jonathan is the personal assistant to Jack Donaghy and his scenes are mostly limited to conversations with Jack, Liz and a few guests that come to visit Jack. In the show, all the characters are seen in conversations with each other. Jack shares a close bond with Kenneth, the NBC page who does odd jobs for the cast and crew of *TGS with Tracy Jordan*. Liz is a friend of Jack and even Jenna, the narcissistic star of *TGS with Tracy Jordan*, and talks to the writers and other staff of the show. In comparison, Jonathan's interactions are limited to a few people. He is a unique member of the cast, and also the only member of the cast who mostly keeps to his own work. He never takes part in the staff parties, nor does he share any emotional bond with his colleagues. He is presented as a nerd. As such, he is constructed as a stereotypical Orient. Said says, "Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, West, "us") and the strange (the Orient, the East, "them")" (43). The West has thus defined the East as strange, as them, as something alien. Jonathan too is constructed as an alien. In the episode Flu Shot when Liz is down with flu and Jack offers to help by sending Kenneth to nurse her, she replies by saying, "...and be left with that assistant of yours who only knows how to scare people? No thanks!" This again brings out the construction of his character where he is seen as a social misfit and no one actually likes to be in his company.

Jonathan is gay. Although his sexual orientation has not been mentioned on the show explicitly, his feelings for his boss, Jack, is pretty obvious by the things he does. He is the only frequently recurring character that is gay. All other

characters in the show are straight<sup>1</sup>. This while emasculates Jonathan, also at the same time puts him in the place of the 'Other'. He is often demeaned for it. Jonathan is shown to be overtly in love with Jack, often affecting his work. In *Lets Stay Together* (Season 5 Episode 3) when Jack goes to Washington, Jonathan has dreams of seducing his boss. He says, "What if we have to stay overnight and there aren't enough rooms and we have to share a room? And I forgot to bring a shirt to sleep in, and the stores are all closed." He has been known for his flirtatious behaviour around Jack throughout the show. In the cold open<sup>2</sup> of the episode titled *Retreat to Move Forward* (Season 3 Episode 17), Jonathan is on the balcony with Jack, planning aloud their future together. When Liz walks in, Jonathan is furious for having spoilt their moment, while Jack is more than grateful to Liz for having saved him from the awkwardness of having him "thrown off the balcony". When Liz observed that Jack was "a bit of a stress eater" in the episode *The Baby Show* (Season 1 Episode 9) Jonathan defended him, saying emotionally that "he puts up with so much" (referring to Jack's overbearing mother). His obsessive admiration of Jack is coupled with disdain towards Liz, whom he considers unworthy of Jack's attention.

Even though his character represents the many Indians who have found successful positions in American companies over the years, he has many flaws. His eligibility for his position is doubted through the series. In the episode titled *Believe in the Stars* (Season 3 Episode 2), it is revealed that Jack hired Jonathan after (under the influence of a sedative) mistaking him for M. Night Shyamalan<sup>3</sup> on a flight to Boston. This scene proves that Jack is of the view that Jonathan is worthy of his current position in the company. He dubs his appointment as a mistake. The feelings that Jonathan has for Jack, coupled with the funny things he does on the show to defend him, makes him an incompetent Indian who has found a job in America, which by no means he deserves.

<sup>1</sup> The sexual orientation of Lutz, another writer of TGS with Tracy Jordan, is yet to be confirmed on the show.

<sup>2</sup> A cold open (also called a teaser) in a television program or movie is the technique of jumping directly into a story at the beginning or opening of the show, before the title sequence or opening credits are shown.

<sup>3</sup> M. Night Shyamalan is an Indian-born American screenwriter, film director, and producer known for making movies with contemporary supernatural plots that climax with a twist ending. He gained international recognition when he wrote and directed 1999's *The Sixth Sense*, which was a commercial success and later nominated for six Academy Awards, including Best Picture, Best Director and Best Original Screenplay.

He is treated as a subaltern, lacking all power and influence. His existence is broken down to a joke. His identity is designed by the gaze of the Western audience, and their view of the Indian community.

In the episode *Winter Madness* Jack makes a joke about Indians being good in computers and technology. In the episode titled *Lets Stay Together* (Season 5 Episode 3) Jack asks Jonathan to provide a distraction by speaking in a loud Indian accent. In *Klaus and Gretta* (Season 4 Episode 9), it is revealed that Jonathan has adopted parents who are Americans. Despite the fact that he has been brought up by Americans, Jonathan still resorts to many of the stereotypes about Indians on the show. In *Respawn* (Season 5 Episode 23) however this fact is ignored. When Jack wants to prevent Jonathan from following him, he sends off all the pages from the NBC offices, and employs Jonathan and his family to clean the office. Although it was clearly stated that his adopted parents are Americans, the family seen in this episode is typically Indian, dressed in flamboyant *salwars, sarees and kurtas* (Appendix II). Jack claims to have brought his family straight from home without them having any idea of where they were going. It is obvious that Indians do not dress up this festive when at home. In *Operation Righteous Cowboy Lightning* (Season 5 Episode 12), Jonathan's boss Jack needs a natural disaster to occur so he can air his pre-shot fund raising programme on air. Jonathan reacts with glee to news of a natural disaster in Pakistan, hopeful it took place in Kashmir.

“JACK DONAUGHY: Jonathan! Come in here.

Jonathan rushes in.

JACK DONAUGHY: Fantastic news! There has been a natural disaster.

JONATHAN: Was it in Indian Kashmir? May Durga's trident pierce them from the skies.“

(Carlock Transcript).

This is again a stereotype that believes that all Indians hate Pakistan. These stereotypes are modeled after the gaze that defines the Indian subaltern in the Western context. The East gets its identity from the gaze of the West, making it external. Jonathan is then made to act and behave the way the West has always viewed the East, a land of ignorance and mysticism. There is no attempt to actually understand the subaltern. This can also be exemplified by the following quote from Said, “One

ought never to assume that the structure of Orientalism is nothing more than a structure of lies or of myths which, were the truth about them to be told, would simply blow away” (120). Through these lines, Said brings out myths that have been created about the Orient and have been carried on over centuries.

Jack Donaghy dated a nurse named Elisa in the third season of the show. Played by Salma Hayek, the character was a Puerto Rican. Not only did she speak a lot of Puerto Rican on the show, Jack was also shown attending her niece’s birthday party in *Señor Macho Solo* (Season 3 Episode 7) where the entire crowd speaks in Puerto Rican, Elisa serving as the translator. A Puerto Rican fictional television show is shown on *30 Rock* as well (Season 3 Episode 10 *Generalissimo*). While the Puerto Ricans also form a subaltern and an immigrant group in America, the depiction of Elisa was filled with Puerto Rican culture and heritage. She also spoke in Puerto Rican. In the case of Jonathan, although he is of Indian origin, he is never shown in tune with his Indian roots. He spoke in Hindi in just one episode, and even that was to defend his love interest in Jack. He says, “*Maulvi aur raajkumar bhi apna Donaghy waqt secendo mein ginte hain*”. Subtitled by the show itself, it reads, “Even Popes and Princes count their Donaghy time in seconds”. Over the 7 seasons of the show, this is just the one sentence in Hindi that Jonathan has uttered. Jonathan as a subaltern is dubbed under one generalizing identity. He is not allowed to explore his uniqueness, neither is he allowed to connect to nor express his Indianess in terms of language. The West which has taken charge to liberate the subalterns has further imprisoned them in their subaltern status. As Spivak has pointed out, by assigning the role of speaking for the subalterns, the dominant classes take decisions about how the subalterns should be represented. In the process, the subalterns lose their true identity, and are forced to adapt to the ones prescribed by the dominant class.

Jonathan holds no administrative or executive powers, neither he is taken seriously by anyone on the show. He is often used to do menial jobs by Jack, and spends most of his time trying to defend himself from the bullying cast members of *TGS with Tracy Jordan*. In *Winter Madness*, Jonathan is beaten up by the rowdy page boys. In the episode *Live Show*, Liz throws a bottle of water at him for having forgotten to put her name in the staff birthday list. Kenneth, the NBC page, although is in a much lower job level than Jonathan, is often seen undermining Jonathan. Jonathan, as a subaltern is shown

without any power and no say on any matter. Gramsci points out that the subalterns are denied any power, and have no influence over the working of the dominant groups. The only time that Jonathan is shown to be in control is during the episode *MILF Island* (Season 2 Episode 11). He detains the staff of *TGS* for questioning by Jack Donaghy, torturing them by lowering the heat on a winter night, and not allowing them to watch the finale of the fictional critically acclaimed reality show “MILF Island”. The other cast members are seen begging to Jonathan to be let out. But again, this is a borrowed authority. All that Jonathan is doing is extending Jack’s control through him over the cast members. He actually is not in control of the situation. Although the writers of the show want to show him having some authority, in truth, he has none. He is Jack’s ‘puppet ruler’, and his authority is controlled by Jack. This is a typical representation of Indian characters on American television.

These characters are not real, but constructed by American writers, and hence a projection of their ‘gaze’ of the Indian community. Simply put, the Indian characters get their identity from the ‘gaze’ of the West. As theorized by the Audience Response Theory, the audience must see what they are familiar with. Hence, the character of Jonathan is presented as a powerless Indian subaltern.

Like the character of Principal Figgins of ABC’s *Glee*, Jonathan is also deprived of an Indian name. Most of Jonathan’s scenes are short and he is absent altogether in many of the episodes. Analysing his costume, Jonathan always appears in business formals, which seems appropriate considering his job profile. But it is also to be noted that Jonathan is the only character without a personal life. Since he is always seen in the office or running errands for his boss Jack Donaghy, the entire series has him clad in western business formals.

The character of Jonathan was absent from the 6<sup>th</sup> Season of the series. The producers and Maulik Pancholy declined rumours of him having left the show. However, no one in the show actually missed him. Life for Jack, Liz and other members of *30 Rock* progressed smoothly on the show. No one even mentioned his disappearance. Jonathan returned to *30 Rock* in Season 7, and his absence was never acknowledged on the show. Jonathan is an offshoot of the notions that the West had made about the East during the colonial era. All those Oriental characteristics are visible in

the creation of Jonathan's character, and hence, he emerges as an Indian subaltern character.

### **Conclusion:**

The portrayal of Indian characters in American television has evolved significantly over the years, reflecting broader shifts in cultural representation and inclusivity. From stereotypical depictions to multifaceted characters, Indian Americans are now more visible and varied on screen. Historically, Indian characters on American television were often relegated to minor, stereotypical roles. These characters were typically depicted as convenience store owners, taxi drivers, or tech-savvy sidekicks, emphasizing exotic accents and cultural quirks. Such portrayals reinforced narrow and often negative stereotypes, failing to capture the diversity and richness of Indian culture.

In recent years, there has been a notable shift towards more authentic and diverse representations. Shows like *Master of None* and *The Mindy Project* have been at the forefront of this change. Aziz Ansari's *Master of None* not only stars an Indian American lead but also explores nuanced themes related to identity, race, and family through its characters. Similarly, Mindy Kaling's *The Mindy Project* features a complex and relatable Indian American protagonist, breaking away from traditional stereotypes. Reality television has also embraced Indian American stories. *Family Karma* on Bravo, for instance, showcases the lives of several Indian American families, providing a platform for authentic cultural narratives and personal stories. This type of representation helps demystify Indian culture and presents it as an integral part of the American mosaic.

Despite progress, challenges remain. Stereotypes still persist, and there is a need for even more diverse storytelling that reflects the wide array of Indian American experiences. Writers and creators must continue to push for characters that go beyond tokenism and explore the complexities of identity and culture. The portrayal of Indian characters on American television has come a long way, from being largely invisible or stereotyped to becoming central figures in popular shows. This evolution is a positive step towards a more inclusive media landscape. However, ongoing efforts are needed to ensure that Indian American stories continue to be told with authenticity and depth, reflecting the true diversity of the community.

When it comes to Jonathan of NBC's *30 Rock*, there is no doubt that he occupies the place of the subaltern who is dependent on his American employers for his existence. He does not yield any power, and whatever power he has is borrowed from his American boss, Jack Donaghy. Jonathan's origin story is never covered in the show, and we do not know if he is an American citizen of Indian origin, or an Indian immigrant working at NBC. He does express his affinity towards his national identity - that of an Indian, when he wishes doom on Pakistanis, as seen in *Operation Righteous Cowboy Lightning* (Season 5 Episode 12). His family members are also seen wearing Indian outfits, clearly indicating that they adhere to their Indian origin and heritage.

In *Winter Madness* (Season 4 Episode 11), Jack Donaghy calls out to Jonathan for not having his computer running smoothly despite him being an Indian. Indians are stereotypically thought to be good with technology, and this becomes one of the many stereotypes assigned to minority characters like Jonathan on American Television. Liz Lemon, an American character of the show is suspicious of Jonathan in *Somebody to Love* (Season 2 Episode 6), wondering if he might be connected to terrorism, and this assumption is based solely on his race, and not because of anything Jonathan has done. As mentioned earlier, Jonathan remains absent from the show for quite a lot of episodes, however, this goes unacknowledged by the other American characters, helping us realise the importance given to the representation of minorities in American television. Ultimately, it is safe to say that Jonathan of *30 Rock* is definitely a subaltern South Asian Indian character created with stereotypes and beliefs that the Americans (West) have about Indians (East).

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# INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE NEW CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

Indian English Literature: New Critical Perspectives is a thought-provoking and academically rich anthology that brings together fourteen well-researched and engaging chapters, each offering a distinct critical lens through which to explore the vast and evolving terrain of Indian English writing. This collection is a testament to the intellectual vigor and diversity of Indian literary scholarship in the 21st century, as it navigates a wide array of themes and concerns that shape and define contemporary Indian narratives.

From cinematic adaptations and feminist reimaginings to explorations of postcolonial identity, marginalization, translation, diaspora, ecocriticism, and legal realism, the volume offers nuanced interpretations and cross-disciplinary approaches. The essays delve into the complex interplay between literature and socio-political realities, thereby illuminating how Indian English texts continue to respond to, reflect, and reshape cultural consciousness in a globalized world.

By offering new perspectives on well-known texts and shedding light on lesser-discussed narratives, this book bridges the gap between traditional literary critique and contemporary cultural studies. It invites readers to think critically about how Indian English literature continues to act as a mirror to society—capturing its conflicts, transformations, and hopes.

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In an age where literature constantly intersects with film, media, and lived experience, this anthology opens up vital conversations and offers insightful scholarship that resonates deeply with contemporary Indian realities.



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