



History of Indian Science Fiction: A Study

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Introduction:

Science fiction is a form of fiction that deals principally with the impact of actual or imagined science upon society or individuals. Science fiction, often called “sci-fi,” which is a genre of fiction literature whose content is imaginative, but based in science. It relies heavily on scientific facts, theories, and principles as support for its settings, characters, themes, and plot-lines.

The genre has existed since the early years of silent cinema. After Georges Melies' *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) the next major example was the film *Metropolis* (1927). From the 1930s to the 1950s, the genre consisted mainly of low-budget B movies. After Stanley Kubrick's landmark *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), the science fiction film genre was taken more seriously. In the late 1970s, big-budget science fiction films filled with special effects became popular with audiences after the success of *Star Wars* (1977) and paved the way for the blockbuster hits of subsequent decades.

Indian Science Fiction:

The nature of fiction is often defined by society's notion of science and fantasy. A plethora of science, supernatural and familiar mythological tropes abound in this intriguing collection that finds new ways of seeing the rumoured and the believed. Mohanty says about why he consistently returns to mythology. In one story from his anthology a goat and a cow speak and bear witness to the supernatural phenomenon of Hanuman carrying the Doragiri mountains in his palm. This switch of the perspective alone speculates on the many overseen realities of our ancient texts, repositioning some as new queries into the old.

Science fiction is also usually regarded as an urban phenomenon, where a larger proportion of the population is science literate. “While SF may have begun in the metropolitan cities it slowly started seeping into towns and other areas – with an increase in scientific education the stage was set for the rise of SF a few decades ago. And Indian writers have played with/on this: Ray's Professor Shonku, for example, lives in Giridih.



That said, the overlap of folklore and superstition still makes it difficult to delineate boundaries. “SF is hard to define because it is the literature of change and it changes while you are trying to define it.

Modern Indian science fiction echoes modern sensibilities and anxieties, most recently collected under the Gollancz Book of South Asian Fiction. But these anxieties, one could argue, remain rooted in an Indian morality or aesthetic. Comic book industry that focuses on fantasy and science fiction primarily. Our TV channels have mythological or fantasy stories running almost all the time. Podcast statistics will tell you that one of the most popular genres in India is mythology. The Indian imagination, like everything else in India, is not a monolith. Community, Mohanty believes, plays an important part, and it will eventually define if India’s sci-fi movement and its proponents survive the struggles of everyday life to leave small, but intriguing legacies of wonder and disbelief.

More than anything, sparse anthologies like these underscore the feeble health of the sci-fi genre in India. While internationally, Douglas Adams and Isaac Asimov's *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and *Foundation* have always enjoyed mass appeal, many fans of the genre back home complain that sci-fi sections in libraries hardly ever stock Indian titles. Singh is the author of the 2018 collection *Ambiguity Machines and Other Stories* (Zubaan Books) and *The Woman Who Thought She Was a Planet* (2009, Penguin/Zubaan Books). *The Wall*, Gautam Bhatia’s 2020 debut, has quickly become one of my favorite dystopian works.

The genre of science fiction has been prevalent in the Indian film industry since the second half of the 20th century. Beginning in 1952, the Tamil film *Kaadu* was made, which was an Indian-American co-production. The 1963 Tamil film *Kalai Arasi* and 1967 Hindi film *Chand Par Chadayee* also have science fiction in its storyline. The *Alien* was a science fiction film under production in the late 1960s which was eventually cancelled.

The 1991 Telugu time-travel heist film *Aditya 369* was one of the highest grossing South Indian films at the time. In 2003, the blockbuster film *Koi... Mil Gaya* marked the beginning of the successful *Krish* film series, which is the first sci-fi/superhero film series in Indian cinema.



Science fiction in India, on the other hand, is yet to witness its golden age. While Indian sci-fi in English has seen limited success on account of being at a nascent stage and having a small readership, works produced in the regional languages have lacked a global appeal. Some notable regional works are, however, worth mentioning. In more recent decades, the genre has seen the rise of regional heavyweights such as the Marathi writer, Jayant Narlikar, and the legendary filmmaker, Satyajit Ray. Magazines like *Adbhut Vigyan* and *Vigyan Katha*, which regularly publish vernacular science fiction, have created a niche fan following, but lack the translations needed to reach a wider audience.

Mainstream Indian science fiction has drawn upon mythological legends and settings to create popular works like the Shiva trilogy or the Baahubali franchise. Things are slowly changing, though, because of the increasing penetration of technology in the lives of Indians, and the expanding base for popular Indian writing in English. Publishers are taking cognizance of this and investing in Indian sci-fi works. The stories dwell upon issues relevant to India, including communalism, history, corruption, pollution and technology. In the dystopian set-up of Tarun Saint's "A Visit to Partition World", the world's first Partition-themed experience park exists. In Shovon Chakraborty's story, a man who turned into Gandhi faces dilemmas in the modern world.

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