

Reflection of Entrepreneurship in Literature: The Indian Literature Context

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article History: Received: 31st Dec 2025 Accepted: 15th Jan 2026 Published: 22nd Jan 2026	This paper presents how Indian literature represents entrepreneurship, focusing on themes like social mobility, gender, tradition, modernity, and globalization. By closely reading Indian novels and short stories in both English and regional languages, the study highlights how literature both reflects and critiques the changing social and economic landscape of India. Global literary examples are also referenced to provide context and to underline what makes the Indian narrative distinctive. The paper discusses works such as R.K. Narayan's "The Financial Expert" and "The Vendor of Sweets," Chetan Bhagat's "One Night @ the Call Center" and "Revolution 2020," Sudha Murty's "The Old Man and His God," Aravind Adiga's "The White Tiger," Anuja Chauhan's "The Zoya Factor," and Bharati Mukherjee's "Miss New India." These texts capture the aspirations, struggles, and ethical dilemmas faced by entrepreneurs and examine the impact of ambition on individuals and society.
Keywords: <i>Global literary , entrepreneurial journey , Indian literature etc.</i>	

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Introduction

Entrepreneurship is widely recognized as a key factor in economic and social development, but its value and meaning depend on historical, cultural, and individual circumstances. Literature serves as a powerful lens through which we can explore not only the outward journey of entrepreneurs, but also their internal struggles, moral dilemmas, and motivations. In India, especially since the economic reforms of the early 1990s, the theme of entrepreneurship has become increasingly central in both society and literature. Indian writers, responding to rapid social and economic change, have crafted stories that capture the hopes, challenges, and ethical complexities of entrepreneurial life in contemporary India. The findings show that Indian literature provides a nuanced, critical perspective on entrepreneurship, shaped by the country's unique historical and cultural context. Literature emerges as both a reflection and a critique of the entrepreneurial journey, offering insights into the hopes, challenges, and contradictions of modern India.

Objectives

This paper aims to:

1. Understand how entrepreneurship is portrayed in literature, with an emphasis on Indian narratives, especially through selected novels.
2. Explore how Indian literature depicts entrepreneurship, particularly in the context of challenges, social mobility, gender issues, tradition, modernity, and globalization.
3. Examine how literary texts both reflect and critique entrepreneurial themes in India.
4. Show how literature not only mirrors but also questions the ethical, social, and cultural challenges of entrepreneurship.
5. Investigate how Indian literature reflects and critiques entrepreneurial them

Methodology

This research paper depends on secondary source data and employs textual analysis of selected Indian novels and short stories written in English and regional languages. The texts are analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns related to entrepreneurial ambition, ethical dilemmas, social mobility, and globalization. Relevant global literary works are referenced for comparative purposes to contextualize Indian narratives.

Entrepreneurship in Global Literature

Across the globe, literature has long explored themes of ambition, risk-taking, and the drive for success. In F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, the protagonist Jay Gatsby epitomizes the relentless pursuit of economic advancement and social status, prompting reflections on the costs of ambition and the hollowness of material wealth. Similarly, Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* portrays the rise of a person from modest beginnings, emphasizing the opportunities and moral challenges that come with social mobility. Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013) satirizes the rapidly evolving landscape of entrepreneurial ambition, blending dark humour with social critique while highlighting inequities and the moral costs of chasing wealth. These works encourage readers to reflect on the values driving entrepreneurship and its effects on personal and communal well-being.

Post-1991 Economic Reform Context and Literary Response

The economic liberalization initiated in India in 1991 marked a decisive shift from a state-controlled economy to a market-oriented framework characterized by privatization, deregulation, and globalization. These reforms expanded the role of private enterprise, encouraged foreign investment, and reshaped employment patterns, particularly in urban India. As a result, entrepreneurship emerged as a dominant socio-economic ideal, associated with individual ambition, self-reliance, and upward mobility. Indian literature written in the post-1991 period reflects and critically engages with this transformation. Writers began to depict new entrepreneurial spaces such as call centers, private educational institutions, technology hubs, advertising, and small-scale urban enterprises. At the same time, these narratives expose the uneven benefits of liberalization, highlighting persistent class inequalities, ethical compromises, and the marginalization of rural and informal workers. Literary texts such as *One Night @ the Call Center*, *The White Tiger*, *Miss New India*, and *Revolution 2020* illustrate how economic reforms created new opportunities while also intensifying competition, insecurity, and moral ambiguity. Thus, post-liberalization Indian literature positions entrepreneurship not merely as economic progress but as a contested cultural and ethical phenomenon shaped by globalization and systemic inequality.

Entrepreneurship in Indian Literature

Indian literature has explored themes of entrepreneurship from ancient to modern times, recounting the tales of merchants, traders, and innovators. Ancient texts like the Mahabharata, Ramayana, Jataka Tales, and Artha Shastra underscore risk-taking, wisdom, and sophisticated business strategies.

Medieval works, including Bhakti and Sufi poetry and the Panchatantra, depict merchants as clever, problem solvers. During the colonial and modern periods, authors like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee,

Rabindranath Tagore, Munshi Premchand, R.K. Narayan, and Chetan Bhagat illustrate how entrepreneurs adapt to evolving social and economic environments—from colonial trade to modern startups.

1. The Financial Expert by R.K. Narayan (1952)

R K. Narayan was an Indian novelist known for his work set in the fictional town of Malgudi. This novel follows Margayya, a financial advisor who dreams of becoming wealthy and influential.

Narayan offers a satirical look at the entrepreneurial spirit in pre-liberalization India. Margayya's rise and fall illustrate both the potential and the perils of financial ambition. The narrative is attentive to the social and ethical implications of entrepreneurship, especially as Margayya's pursuit of wealth leads to personal and familial discord

2. The Vendor of Sweets by R.K. Narayan (1967) :

This novel revolves around Jagan, the central character of the novel, an elderly sweet vendor who has a small business that represents both a connection to tradition and a site of generational tension. The novel explores how entrepreneurship can become a space for negotiating identity, familial expectations, and changing economic realities.

3. One Night @ the Call Center by Chetan Bhagat (2005)

The novel is set in a Gurgaon call center, focusing on a group of young employees confronting personal and professional crises. This novel not only focuses on a traditional entrepreneur but also reflects the spirit of enterprise among India's urban youth. The call center itself is emblematic of India's integration into the global economy. The characters in this novel display adaptability, risk-taking, and a desire for self-improvement. Chetan Bhagat highlights the changing aspirations of India's middle class and the opportunities and challenges presented by globalization

4. The Old Man and His God: Discovering the spirit of India by Sudha Murti.(2006)

Sudha Murty's stories, such as those compiled in 'Wise and Otherwise' and 'The Old Man and His God', are collections of real-life stories that often celebrate the everyday entrepreneur, self-reliance, and professional ambition.

In the title story, the character is a visually impaired old man who believes in the concept of "own maker" and refuses any help. This character shows the demonstrating strong sense of independence and contentment with his self-sufficient life. This attitude shows a typical business growth. He is the Model of entrepreneurship. Her characters are ordinary people who transform their circumstances with creativity and integrity, emphasizing the social and ethical dimensions of enterprise. These stories highlight the importance of empathy, community, and responsibility, challenging the notion that entrepreneurship is solely about profit.

5. The White Tiger by Aravind Adiga (2008)

This Booker Prize-winning novel centers on Balram Halwai, a village boy who becomes a successful entrepreneur in Bangalore. The story is narrated as a letter from Balram to a visiting Chinese premier, in which he recounts his transformation from servant to business owner.

Entrepreneurship in The White Tiger is portrayed as a means of escaping poverty and social oppression. However, Adiga provides a nuanced critique: in this novel, the protagonist Balram Halwai's journey from rural poverty to urban entrepreneur is marked by cunning, resilience, and moral ambiguity, crime, and betrayal. The novel interrogates whether entrepreneurship is possible in a corrupt and unequal system. In this novel, the central character Balram achieves his entrepreneurial success not only through a traditional, honest way but through criminal acts, which include murder. It truly empowers the individual or perpetuates new forms of exploitation. Adiga uses Balram's rise to expose the dark side of India's economic boom and to question the ethical compromises often associated with entrepreneurial success.

6. The Zoya Factor by Anuja Chauhan (2008)

The theme of entrepreneurship is reflected through character. It shows professional drive and a commercial ecosystem surrounded by cricket and advertising. The protagonist, Zoya Singh Solanki, becomes the "lucky charm" for the Indian cricket team and leverages this status for commercial and personal gain.

The novel blends romance and satire, but its depiction of Zoya's accidental rise to fame and the subsequent commercialization of her "luck" reflects the entrepreneurial opportunities arising in modern Indian society. Chauhan also explores themes of gender, agency, and the negotiation of traditional roles in a rapidly changing environment.

7. Miss New India by Bharati Mukherjee (2011)

The novel follows Anjali Bose, a small-town girl who moves to Bangalore to pursue opportunities in India's burgeoning tech industry.

Through Anjali's transformation, Mukherjee highlights the intersection of globalization, technology, and personal reinvention. The narrative explores the challenges faced by women and migrants entering India's entrepreneurial workforce and how modern enterprise allows for the negotiation of identity and agency.

8. Revolution 2020 by Chetan Bhagat (2011)

In this novel, the plot follows three childhood friends—Gopal, Raghav, and Aarti—in Varanasi, focusing on their dreams and dilemmas as India's education and business sectors undergo rapid change. Bhagat explores the commercialization of education as a form of entrepreneurship. Gopal, who opens an engineering college, embodies the drive for upward mobility and financial success, but his journey is fraught with corruption and ethical conflicts. The novel highlights both the allure and pitfalls of entrepreneurial ventures in contemporary India, especially the tension between personal ambition and social responsibility.

9. How I Became a Farmer's Wife by Yashodhara Lal (2018)

This light-hearted, semi-autobiographical novel follows a family's entrepreneurial journey into organic farming, capturing the risk, learning curve, and rewards of starting a new venture. The novel delves into the motivations behind starting a new venture—seeking a more meaningful, sustainable lifestyle and the desire to build something of their own, contrasting sharply with the routine of urban corporate life.

Conclusion

Indian literature provides a rich, nuanced look at entrepreneurship, tracing its evolution from ancient stories to modern realities. The books discussed here show that entrepreneurship in India is about much more than business; it's a social phenomenon shaped by culture, ethics, and history. Literature helps us see both the promise and the pitfalls of ambition, and challenges us to think about the broader consequences of economic change. Indian literature offers a layered and critical understanding of entrepreneurship, portraying it as a socially embedded and ethically complex process rather than a purely economic pursuit. Through these stories, Indian writers invite us to reflect on what it means to succeed—and at what cost—in a transforming society. By reflecting on themes, Indian authors challenge readers to reconsider the meaning and consequences of entrepreneurial ambition in a rapidly transforming society. The literary exploration of entrepreneurship thus serves as both a mirror and a critique, offering valuable insights into the hopes, challenges, and contradictions that define India's journey toward modernity and economic growth.

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