

From Print to Platform: The Rise of Literary Public Culture in Post-Liberalization India

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Abstract- This study examines the transformation of literary culture in India after the economic liberalization of 1991, focusing on the shift from print-based literary engagement to platform-based public discourse. Before liberalization, literature in India was primarily circulated through books, journals, and academic institutions, which limited participation to a relatively small and educated audience. With the expansion of media industries, publishing markets, and digital technologies, literature began to move into public platforms such as literary festivals, televised discussions, and online spaces. The paper argues that literary festivals have played a central role in this transition by creating accessible and interactive spaces for literary dialogue. The Jaipur Literature Festival, established in 2006, serves as a key example of how literature has expanded into large-scale public engagement, attracting tens of thousands of participants and global audiences through digital streaming. Similarly, the Banaras Lit Fest demonstrates how regional platforms contribute to the inclusion of local languages, cultural traditions, and diverse readerships. By analyzing author participation, public discussions, and the integration of digital media, this study shows that literature in post-liberalization India has become more accessible, participatory, and socially relevant. At the same time, it acknowledges the influence of market forces and media visibility in shaping literary discourse. The paper concludes that the rise of literary festivals reflects a broader global shift toward platform-based cultural engagement, marking the emergence of a new literary public culture.

Index Terms- Literary Public Culture; Literary Festivals; Post-Liberalization India; Print Culture; Platformization; Cultural Globalization

I. INTRODUCTION

Before the economic reforms of 1991, literary culture in India was largely dependent on print media. Books, newspapers, and literary journals were the main sources through which literature reached readers. Discussions on literature were mostly confined to universities, academic conferences, and

literary societies. This meant that literary discourse was often restricted to a small, educated audience. As explained by Jürgen Habermas, print culture historically helped form a public sphere, but access to this sphere depended on literacy, education, and institutional participation. In India, this resulted in a relatively limited literary public. The economic liberalization introduced under P. V. Narasimha Rao in 1991 brought significant changes to India's economic and media environment. The opening of markets led to the growth of private publishing houses, expansion of satellite television, and later the rapid spread of the internet. These developments created new cultural spaces where literature could be discussed beyond traditional print formats.

One of the most visible outcomes of this transformation is the emergence of literary festivals as major cultural institutions. The Jaipur Literature Festival, founded in 2006, is widely recognized as one of the largest literary festivals in the world, attracting large audiences and international participation. Its open-access model allows readers, students, and general audiences to attend sessions freely, which significantly expands the reach of literary discourse. Similarly, the Banaras Lit Fest provides a platform for discussions on Indian philosophy, regional literature, and cultural traditions, thereby extending literary engagement to non-metropolitan contexts.





These festivals demonstrate a key shift described in the title: literature is no longer confined to printed texts but is now experienced through live discussions, performances, and digital media platforms. Authors engage directly with readers, and literary works are interpreted in relation to contemporary social, political, and cultural issues. This transformation is also part of a global trend. International events such as the Hay Festival and the Edinburgh International Book Festival show similar patterns, where literature is presented as a public and participatory activity. These festivals bring together writers and audiences from across the world, indicating that the shift from print to platform is not limited to India but reflects broader changes in global literary culture. The significance of this transformation lies in its ability to democratize literary engagement. Literary festivals and digital platforms allow wider participation, making literature more accessible to diverse audiences. At the same time, they also introduce new challenges, such as the influence of media visibility and market forces on literary production, as discussed by Pierre Bourdieu. According to Bourdieu (“A Conservative Revolution”), the field of publishing is polarized between small-scale and large-scale circulation. This observation that Bourdieu made at a national level also applies to the global market for translations (Sapiro Translation).

In this context, the present study aims to examine how literary culture in India has evolved from print-based systems to platform-based public engagement, and how this shift has contributed to the rise of a new literary public culture in the post-liberalization period.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews key scholarly ideas that help explain how literary culture in post-liberalization India has shifted from print-based systems to platform-based public engagement. The concept of the public sphere developed by Jürgen Habermas provides a foundational framework. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989), Habermas argued that print culture, especially newspapers, journals, and books, enabled rational-critical debate among citizens. However, this form of public sphere depended heavily on literacy, access to print materials, and participation in intellectual institutions. In the Indian context, scholars have noted that such access was uneven, often limited to urban, educated elites. This supports the argument that pre-liberalization literary culture, though intellectually significant, was not widely accessible.

The theory of cultural production proposed by Pierre Bourdieu further explains how literature operates within social and economic structures. In *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993), Bourdieu argued that literature is shaped by relationships between authors, publishers, critics, and audiences, as well as by economic forces. Applying this framework to contemporary India, literary festivals can be understood as new “fields” where literary value is negotiated not only through texts but also through visibility, performance, and audience engagement.

This helps explain why platform-based literary culture has become influential after liberalization, when market forces and media industries expanded.

Recent scholarship on literary festivals supports this shift toward platform-based engagement. Studies by researchers such as Beth Driscoll and Claire Squires (2015) describe literary festivals as “cultural intermediaries” that connect authors, publishers, and audiences. Their work shows that festivals play a key role in promoting books, shaping literary taste, and increasing readership. Beth Driscoll and Claire Squires, note, “two of the strongest critiques of book festivals are, first, that they are neoliberal, money-making operations that participate in the instrumentalisation of culture, and second, that they perpetuate neocolonial power structures that work to the disadvantage of non-Anglophone, peripheral literary cultures”. These findings are directly relevant to the Indian context, where festivals have become central to literary dissemination. Empirical studies of Indian literary festivals highlight their rapid growth after the 2000s. The Jaipur Literature Festival is frequently cited in academic and media research as a major example of this trend. Scholars note that the festival’s open-access model and large-scale participation have significantly expanded the reach of literary discourse. It attracts not only established authors but also emerging writers, journalists, and general readers, thereby creating a diverse literary public.

Regional festivals such as the Banaras Lit Fest have been discussed in terms of cultural localization. Research suggests that such festivals promote regional languages, cultural traditions, and alternative literary voices. This indicates that the platformization of literature in India is not limited to global or English-language contexts but also includes local and vernacular engagement. Global scholarship further strengthens this argument. Studies of events like the Hay Festival and the Edinburgh International Book Festival show that literary festivals worldwide function as spaces where literature is publicly performed and debated. These festivals often combine literary discussion with political, social, and cultural themes, indicating that literature has become part of a broader public conversation. At the same time, scholars have raised critical concerns about

commercialization. Drawing on Bourdieu’s framework, researchers argue that literary festivals may prioritize popular authors and marketable themes due to sponsorship and media influence. This suggests that while platforms expand access, they also reshape literary value through visibility and audience appeal.

Overall, the literature reviewed here supports the central claim of this study: that literary culture in post-liberalization India has undergone a structural transformation. The shift from print to platform is supported by theoretical frameworks of the public sphere and cultural production, as well as empirical studies on literary festivals. These insights help explain how literature has moved from a relatively closed print system to a more open, interactive, and public cultural practice.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative and descriptive research method to understand how literary culture in India has changed from print-based systems to platform-based public engagement after 1991. The main aim is not to focus on numbers or statistics, but to carefully study patterns, practices, and institutional changes that show the growth of a more public literary culture. The research follows an interpretive approach, which means it tries to understand how literary practices have evolved over time. It looks at how literature is created, shared, and discussed in different contexts, first through print media like books and journals, and later through public platforms such as literary festivals and digital spaces. This approach is suitable because the study deals with cultural and social changes, which require detailed explanation rather than numerical measurement. The research is based on secondary data collected from reliable and verified sources. These include published books, academic writings on literary culture, studies related to public sphere theory and cultural production, official websites and archives of literary festivals, media reports, author interviews, and recorded festival sessions available online. Special focus is given to major literary festivals such as the Jaipur Literature Festival and the Banaras Lit Fest. These festivals are chosen because

they represent both global and regional aspects of literary culture in India.

A case study method is used to give clear and practical examples of the shift from print to platform. The Jaipur Literature Festival is taken as a major case study because of its large scale, international participation, and open access to the public. It shows how literature has moved beyond books and into large public spaces where people can directly engage with authors and ideas. The Banaras Lit Fest is included as a regional example to show how this platform-based culture also exists outside big metropolitan cities. It highlights the importance of local languages, traditions, and regional audiences in shaping literary discussions. The analysis of the study is guided by two important theoretical frameworks. The first is Public Sphere Theory by Jürgen Habermas, which helps explain how literary discussions have moved from limited print spaces to wider public participation. The second is Cultural Production Theory by Pierre Bourdieu, which helps in understanding how social, economic, and media factors influence which literary works gain visibility and public attention.

To analyze the data, the study uses content analysis, comparative analysis, and contextual analysis. Content analysis is used to study festival sessions, author talks, and discussions in order to understand themes and audience engagement. Comparative analysis is used to compare print-based literary culture before 1991 with platform-based culture after 1991. Contextual analysis helps in understanding how literary festivals are connected to larger social, cultural, and economic changes.

However, the study has some limitations. It mainly depends on secondary data and does not include primary fieldwork. It focuses only on selected major festivals rather than covering all literary events in India. It also does not include detailed quantitative measurement of audience impact. Despite these limitations, the qualitative approach provides strong and meaningful insights that support the main argument of the study.

Overall, this methodology is suitable for the research because it directly supports the topic. By studying

real examples like the Jaipur Literature Festival and the Banaras Lit Fest, the research clearly shows how literary culture in India has shifted from traditional print systems to more interactive and public platforms. The use of well-known theoretical frameworks also makes the study academically strong and logically clear.

Findings

The analysis of literary practices in post-liberalization India clearly shows a structural transformation from a print-based literary system to a platform-based literary public culture. The findings presented below are based on the examination of literary festivals, author participation, and modes of literary engagement. Each finding directly supports the central argument of the study.

Expansion of Literary Audience Beyond Print

One of the most significant findings is the rapid expansion of the literary audience. In the pre-1991 period, access to literature depended largely on the availability of books, journals, and institutional spaces such as universities. This limited participation to a relatively small and educated section of society. In contrast, literary festivals such as the Jaipur Literature Festival attract tens of thousands of attendees annually, including students, general readers, and international visitors. The festival's open-access model allows free entry to many sessions, which significantly lowers barriers to participation. This demonstrates that literature is no longer confined to print readership but has become part of mass public culture. Similarly, the Banaras Lit Fest brings literary discussions to a wider audience in a regional context, including participants who may not traditionally engage with academic literary spaces. This confirms that platform-based literary culture has expanded both geographically and socially.

Transformation of Author-Reader Relationship

The study finds a major shift in the relationship between authors and readers. In the print era, interaction was indirect and mediated through texts, publishers, and critics. Readers engaged with authors primarily through reading, without direct communication. In the platform-based system,

literary festivals enable direct interaction. Authors participate in live discussions, respond to audience questions, and engage in dialogue. For example, Amitav Ghosh has discussed *his works* in public sessions, explaining historical contexts and themes directly to audiences. This creates a deeper level of engagement than print alone.



Similarly, Chetan Bhagat frequently interacts with large audiences at festivals, especially students, discussing *Five Point Someone*. This demonstrates that authorship has become more interactive and performative, which is a defining feature of platform-based literary culture.

Literature as Public Discussion and Social Debate

Another important finding is that literature is increasingly connected to public and social issues. In the print era, literary analysis was often limited to academic or critical writing. In contrast, literary festivals provide a space where literature is discussed in relation to contemporary social realities. For instance, Arundhati Roy has used festival platforms to discuss *The God of Small Things* alongside issues such as inequality, environmental concerns, and democracy. These discussions show that literature is not only an artistic form but also a medium for public debate. This finding directly supports the idea that

literary culture has become part of a broader public discourse, rather than remaining confined to textual interpretation.

Role of Regional Platforms in Expanding Literary Culture

The study finds that platform-based literary culture is not limited to major metropolitan events but also includes regional festivals. The Banaras Lit Fest plays an important role in promoting discussions on Hindi literature, Indian philosophy, and cultural traditions. This indicates that the shift from print to platform has also contributed to the inclusion of regional languages and cultural perspectives. It challenges the earlier dominance of English-language literary spaces and supports a more diverse literary public.

Integration of Digital Media and Global Reach

A key finding is the role of digital media in expanding literary platforms. Many sessions from the Jaipur Literature Festival are recorded and shared online through platforms such as YouTube and social media. This allows global audiences to access discussions even without physical attendance. This digital extension transforms literary festivals into hybrid platforms that combine physical presence with virtual access. As a result, literary discourse now operates at both national and global levels.

Alignment with Global Literary Trends

The findings also show that the transformation in India is part of a broader global pattern. Festivals such as the Hay Festival and the Edinburgh International Book Festival demonstrate similar characteristics, including large audiences, public discussions, and international participation. Authors like Margaret Atwood and Salman Rushdie have discussed works such as *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Midnight's Children* in such forums. This confirms that the shift from print to platform is not unique to India but reflects a global transformation in literary culture.



Influence of Market and Media Structures

Finally, the study finds that platform-based literary culture is influenced by media visibility and market forces. Large festivals often involve sponsorship, media partnerships, and celebrity participation. As explained by Pierre Bourdieu, such factors can shape cultural production and visibility. While this raises concerns about commercialization, it also contributes to the wider dissemination of literature by attracting larger audiences.

IV. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study strongly support the central claim of the title, “From Print to Platform: The Rise of Literary Public Culture in Post-Liberalization India.” This section interprets those findings in a broader analytical framework and explains how they demonstrate a structural transformation in literary culture.

From Restricted Print Culture to Expanded Public Sphere

The transition from print to platform represents a shift from a restricted literary sphere to a more expanded and participatory public sphere. In the pre-liberalization period, literature circulated mainly through printed texts, and participation in literary discourse was limited by access to education, institutions, and publications. This aligns with the argument of Jürgen Habermas, who emphasized that early public spheres were formed through print but were often socially restricted. The emergence of literary festivals such as the Jaipur Literature Festival demonstrates how this structure has expanded. The large and diverse audiences at such festivals indicate

that literary discourse is no longer confined to elite or academic spaces. Instead, it has become part of a broader public culture where individuals from different social backgrounds can participate.

Platformization and the Transformation of Literary Practice

The findings show that literature is no longer limited to textual consumption but is increasingly performed and discussed in public settings. This transformation can be understood as “platformization,” where literature exists across multiple formats, live discussions, media broadcasts, and digital content. At the Jaipur Literature Festival, for example, literary works are interpreted through panel discussions, author talks, and audience interaction. Authors such as Amitav Ghosh and Arundhati Roy do not only present their texts but also explain their ideas, respond to questions, and engage in debates. This indicates that literary meaning is now co-created through dialogue, rather than being fixed within the text.

Democratization and Inclusion in Literary Culture

One of the most important implications of platform-based literary culture is its democratizing effect. Festivals such as the Banaras Lit Fest illustrate how literary discussions are reaching regional audiences and promoting local languages and traditions. This marks a departure from earlier print culture, which often privileged metropolitan and English-language readerships. The availability of free or low-cost entry to many festival sessions, along with online streaming, further expands access. As a result, literature is no longer restricted to those who can purchase books or access academic institutions. This supports the argument that platformization has contributed to a more inclusive literary public sphere.

Globalization of Literary Public Culture

The transformation observed in India is closely connected to global trends. Festivals such as the Hay Festival and the Edinburgh International Book Festival operate on similar models, bringing together authors and audiences in large public forums. The participation of international authors such as

Margaret Atwood and Salman Rushdie in such festivals demonstrates that literary discourse now operates within a global network of ideas. Indian festivals, particularly the Jaipur Literature Festival, have become part of this network, hosting global speakers and attracting international audiences. This indicates that the rise of literary public culture in India is not an isolated development but part of a broader process of cultural globalization.

Market Forces and the Question of Cultural Value

While platform-based literary culture expands access, it is also influenced by economic and media structures. As explained by Pierre Bourdieu, cultural production is shaped by power relations and market forces. Literary festivals often rely on sponsorship, branding, and media coverage, which can influence the selection of authors and topics. This raises important questions about whether platform-based literary culture prioritizes popularity over literary quality. The presence of celebrity authors and commercially successful writers at major festivals suggests that market visibility plays a significant role. However, it is also important to note that these same platforms provide visibility to serious literary discussions and emerging writers. Therefore, rather than replacing literary value, platform-based culture redefines how literary value is produced and recognized.

Relevance of the Shift in Contemporary Society

The shift from print to platform is highly relevant in contemporary society because it aligns literature with current modes of communication and public engagement. In a media-driven and digitally connected world, literature must compete with multiple forms of content for attention. Literary festivals and digital platforms help sustain interest in literature by making it interactive and socially relevant. The discussions of works such as *Sea of Poppies*, *The God of Small Things*, and *Midnight's Children* in public forums show how literature continues to engage with history, politics, and identity. This confirms that platform-based literary culture does not weaken literature but rather enhances its relevance in public life.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the transformation described in the title, “From Print to Platform: The Rise of Literary Public Culture in Post-Liberalization India.” The analysis of literary practices, institutional developments, and cultural trends clearly demonstrates that this transformation is both real and significant. Before the economic reforms of 1991, literary culture in India was primarily organized around print media. Books, journals, and academic institutions formed the core of literary production and discussion. While this system supported serious intellectual engagement, it remained limited in reach and participation. Access to literary discourse depended largely on education, institutional affiliation, and availability of printed material. The findings of this study show that post-liberalization developments have fundamentally altered this structure. The expansion of media industries, publishing markets, and digital technologies created new spaces for literary engagement. Most importantly, the emergence of literary festivals has transformed literature into a public and participatory cultural practice. Events such as the Jaipur Literature Festival illustrate how literature has moved into large-scale public platforms. With thousands of participants, international authors, and global digital reach, such festivals demonstrate that literary discourse is no longer confined to printed texts. Similarly, the Banaras Lit Fest shows how this transformation extends to regional contexts, promoting local languages, cultural traditions, and broader public participation. The study also finds that this shift has redefined the relationship between authors and readers. This interaction transforms literature from a solitary reading activity into a shared public dialogue. The growing participation of readers in such platforms confirms that literary culture has become more inclusive and interactive. At the same time, the comparison with global festivals such as the Hay Festival and the Edinburgh International Book Festival shows that this transformation is part of a wider international trend. Literature is increasingly being presented and discussed through public platforms across the world, indicating a global shift in cultural practices. The study also acknowledges the influence of market forces and media visibility, as explained by Pierre

Bourdieu. While these factors shape literary platforms, they do not reduce the importance of literature. Instead, they contribute to its wider dissemination and visibility in contemporary society. In conclusion, the evidence presented in this paper strongly supports the central argument that post-liberalization India has witnessed a clear shift from print-based literary culture to platform-based literary public culture. Literary festivals, digital media, and public discussions have expanded the reach of literature, making it more accessible, interactive, and socially relevant. This transformation confirms that literature in contemporary India is no longer confined to the printed page but has become an active part of public life.

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