

COMMUNITY LIFE IN SOUTH ASIAN COUNTRIES

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<https://doi.org/10.54922/IJEHSS.2025.0988>

ABSTRACT

The aim of the present review is to explore community life in South Asian countries. It investigates the socio-economic, cultural, and political relationships among these nations. Additionally, it examines familial relationships, the dynamics within families, food habits, lifestyles, cultural transmission, and a shared historical background. This study addresses the theme of interconnectivity, emphasizing how shared histories have contributed to similar food practices, cultural rituals, traditions, and ways of life. Furthermore, these South Asian countries not only share a common past but also face similar challenges and obstacles. Thus, the study presents a comprehensive examination of community life and shared concerns across South Asian literature. Moreover, these countries possess a rich cultural heritage, a deep-rooted history, and a strategic geographical location that connects them through sea, air, and land routes. Throughout South Asian literature, authors, writers, and philosophers strive to capture their rich cultural heritage, traditional ways of life, and the impact of urbanization on communal and familial relationships.

Keywords: Community, Society, Family, Culture, Identity, Language and Literature, Religion, Modernization, Hybridity, Stereotype, Western perceptions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Situated in the southern sub-region of Asia, the South Asian countries are a group of eight countries including India, [Bangladesh](#), [Bhutan](#), [Maldives](#), [Nepal](#), [Pakistan](#), and [Sri Lanka](#), with [Afghanistan](#). In the South Asian countries, one third of world populations are lived. These countries are bound the [Indian Ocean](#) in the south, and the [Himalayas](#), [Karakoram](#), and [Pamir Mountains](#) in the north. As a result, these south Asian countries from the ancient time period share their social, culture, religion, political and economic way of life. Due to this, it is found that there are a lot of similarity is found in these countries which are skillfully portrayed by these South Asian countries' writers through their art of writings. Through the community life of these countries the writers try to explore their communal and social, family structure, rituals and traditions, food and fashion, power structure and economic, myth and so on. So, the aim of present subject review is to review the community life in the South Asian countries and literature.

Historical documents and ancient scriptures provide ample evidence that South Asian countries have long been interconnected through commercial activities and trade networks. These interactions facilitated not only economic exchange but also the sharing of culture, cuisine, language, and religious practices. As a result, notable similarities can be observed among South Asian countries, particularly in their culinary traditions, linguistic roots, and spiritual beliefs. India has played a significant role in this interconnectedness due to its strategic geographical location and extensive maritime routes. It has served as the birthplace and nurturing ground for major religions such as Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, and the Indian expression of Islam, making it a spiritual epicenter of the world. Furthermore, ancient Hindu scriptures like the *Mahabharata* and

the *Ramayana* also contain references that trace the historical and cultural connectivity of South Asian regions. These texts indicate that the interrelation among South Asian countries dates back to ancient times.

South Asian literature reflects the complexity of the region's social systems, encompassing essential units such as the community, the family, and individual relationships. In South Asian societies, the family is regarded as the heart of the social structure, where emotional and psychological bonds among members are deeply valued and vividly portrayed. Throughout South Asian literature, authors, writers, and philosophers strive to capture their rich cultural heritage, traditional ways of life, and the impact of urbanization on communal and familial relationships.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Many scholars, philosophers, thinkers, and writers have examined South Asian literature through their diverse perspectives and critical insights, exploring various thematic concerns. Notable among them are M. N. Srinivas, who studied the "village community," Janaki Nair and Veena Das, who discussed "Nuclear family and Individual living," and Naila Kabeer, who explored "Gender and Community." Despite these valuable contributions, many aspects and thematic concerns within South Asian literature remain underexplored. Through my critical insights into community life in South Asian countries, I aim to investigate the major dynamics and evolving patterns of community structures. It is with this objective that I have chosen the topic, "**Community Life in South Asian Countries.**"

Due to their geographical proximity and historical interconnections with other parts of the world, South Asian countries share many cultural similarities, as outlined below:

Family and Social Structure:

Extended Family system:

In the South Asian countries, Family seems to be the bedrock of communities, with extended families which is often situated nearby or supporting each other socio-economically, political and emotionally.

Hierarchical Structures:

Moreover, it is clearly seen that the South Asian countries have a traditional social hierarchies in their caste system in some regions that influence over social interactions and economic opportunities.

Cultural Practices:

Religion:

South Asia is one of the most indigenous regions of the world where all the religion of the world consist such as Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Sikhism, and others. Therefore, the community and day to day life of inhabitants of heavily influenced Religious beliefs and practices.

Marriage and Family:

South Asian countries continue to follow traditional, religious, social, and culturally rich practices. To preserve these customs, arranged marriages remain common in many communities, reflecting the importance of family ties and social networks in the matchmaking process. Although dowry is legally prohibited in many regions, it remains a concern in certain areas.

Language and Literature:

The rich literary tapestry of South Asian countries is rooted in their vast array of languages, including Hindi, Bengali, Urdu, Tamil, and many others. South Asia is known as a linguistic hub,

home to a multitude of languages from around the world. This linguistic diversity contributes to the region's vibrant literary traditions, oral storytelling practices, and diverse artistic expressions.

Festivals and Celebrations:

Most of world religions are originated in South Asian due to this area is rich in festivals and celebrations, often linked to religious holidays, harvest seasons, and other significant events.

Influences of Modernity over the South Asian Countries:

Modernization:

After rapid pace of urbanization, the South Asian region's societies are influenced with the luxurious life style and there are a number of changes in way of life style, advancement in technology and increased access to education shaping new ways of life.

Globalization:

Inventions in communication and transportation system, South Asian countries are connected to the other part of the world as a result, people belong to the other countries come to the south Asian countries and exchanges their culture and transmit their knowledge to the inhabitants of South Asian countries as a result western culture is spread in South Asia.

Hybridity:

Rapid urbanization formed many world class cities in which various culture are blend with the local culture and formed a new culture or hybrid cultural practices and expressions that fulfill the aspirations of both inhabitants and migrants.

Stereotypes and Misconceptions:

Stereotypes:

It is a common misconception that South Asians are stereotyped as blindly adhering to tradition without logic or reason. This stereotype overlooks the nuanced and thoughtful ways in which many individuals engage with their cultural practices, often balancing tradition with critical reflection and modern values.

Western Perceptions:

The West has often held misconceptions about South Asian countries, viewing them through stereotypes and labeling them as uncivilized. This perception stems from the belief that South Asians are overly traditional and orthodox, blindly following customs that are seen as outdated or meaningless. As a result, the West has frequently misunderstood the cultural diversity and complexity of South Asian societies. Conversely, the West tends to regard itself as modern and advanced, often considering its way of life to be superior to others. There is a prevailing belief that contemporary South Asians are now reinterpreting their traditions, gradually adopting more modern lifestyles and improving their standards of living in the process.

Major writers and their works and themes in their works:

India:

Indians, always boast on their rich culture and long history and considered themselves as the best civilization of the world which are linguistically and religious roots that date back thousands of years. The foundations of Indian society—particularly the concepts of family and community life—are deeply embedded in ancient Hindu scriptures such as the Vedas. In fact, evidence suggests that structured family and community systems existed even before the Vedic period.

India's unique geographical location, along with its extensive coastal boundaries, has historically facilitated contact and interaction with other parts of the world. This constant exchange has contributed to the nation's unparalleled diversity, reflected in its social, cultural, political, and

religious landscapes. Moreover, India's close ties with other South Asian countries have fostered shared traditions in areas such as cuisine, religion, language, and community practices.

In order to show the India social, communal and family bond, India writers take an initiative to uncover the Indian family system and community life in their art of writings. Some of them are cited below:

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Narayanaswami, popularly known as R. K. Narayan, is one of the most celebrated and widely read Indian English writers. He is best known for his creation of the fictional South Indian town of Malgudi, which serves as the setting for many of his novels and short stories, most notably *Malgudi Days*. In his depiction of Malgudi, Narayan brings to life the intricate web of relationships that define community, family, and neighborhood life. His characters, often ordinary people such as teachers, vendors, priests, and astrologers, are shown to be deeply rooted in their social surroundings. He illustrates how individuals participate in community life through their everyday routines, interactions, and responsibilities—highlighting the cultural and emotional bonds that hold people together. His works reflect the Indian ethos of **collectivism**, where people cannot easily separate themselves from the responsibilities and emotional ties of their families and communities. His famous writings are *Swami and Friends*, *The Guide* and *Malgudi Days*.

Born in India, Salman Rushdie is a British American life. Throughout his writings, he uncovers the hidden truth of Indian history with the life story of Saleem Sinai, the protagonist of the novel. He connects an individual's life and family history with the freedom of India and the other historical events. Through this story, he tries to present the other problems of India such as man and woman relationship, religious extremism, identity crisis, and existing cultural diversity in the different part of the country. For this, he uses the nation as family allegory and personal history as a country history. Moreover, his other writings are *Midnight Children*, *The Satanic Verses*, *Shalimar the Clown* and so on.

Born in India, Arundhati Roy won Man Booker Prize for *The God of Small Things*. Published in 1997, the novel is set in Kerala and revolves around the lives of fraternal twins Estha and Rahel and their friend Velutha. Through this story, Roy explores the entrenched caste system and social hierarchy prevalent in South Indian society. She reveals how the caste system functions as a deep-rooted social stigma in Indian culture—so pervasive that even children are not spared from its effects. Roy also delves into the complexities of power structures, family relationships, and internal family politics, highlighting how casteism impacts the lives of individuals within the community. Furthermore, she uncovers lingering traces of colonialism that persist in post-independence Indian society, especially at the macro level. In addition to *The God of Small Things*, her later work *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* further explores India's socio-political landscape, skillfully interweaving personal narratives with broader questions of justice, identity, and resistance.

Born in 1967, Nilanjana Sudeshna is used pen named Jhumpa Lahiri. She wrote many short stories, essay and novel in English and Italia. Some of them are *Interpreter of Maladies*, *The Namesake*, and *Unaccustomed Earth* in which she tries to highlight a glimpse of the contemporary social, cultural and economic issues faced off by the immigrated in a foreign landscape. Moreover, she throws the light on human relationship within a family and community and the other dynamics of men and women relationship. In spite of these things, she also tries to introduce the diasporic experience, where characters grapple with identity crises, a sense of belonging.

Amitav Ghosh, known for his background as a historian, possesses an intricate narrative style that closely intertwines his identity with history. His storytelling often blends personal and familial histories with broader national and global events, creating a rich and complex narrative structure. This deep engagement with history is evident throughout his body of work. Among his most acclaimed writings are *The Shadow Lines*, *Sea of Poppies*, and *The Glass Palace*—novels that reflect his profound interest in colonial history, memory, and the fluid nature of identity. Ghosh explores deeply rooted family histories and the interconnectedness of individual lives with the historical forces that shape them. A central theme in his work is the impact of migration on identity, culture, and familial relationships. He reveals how displacement and the movement across borders transform not only personal identities but also the relationships within families and their connection to the societies they inhabit.

Anita Desai is an Indian English writer. She tries to present a picture of India society after the independence. She reveals a true picture of Indian domestic life. She always presents the familial relationship in a city. Her novel *Voices in the City* presents a complex web of family relationship among the city of Calcutta. In the novel, she tries to show that the exotic environment of the city spoils the life of innocent people. Although, the individuals' migrate to the city to fulfill their life aspiration but once they entangle with the city. Then they are realised that the city trapped them and now they have no way to escape them. His other major writings are *Clear Light of Day*, *In Custody* and *Fasting, Feasting*.

Born in Delhi, Chetan Bhagat belongs to a Punjabi family. Throughout his writings, he tries to reveal the cultural diversity of India. In his writings, he basically deals with the life of Youth and their life problems in the contemporary social system. He also tries to reveal that the Indian Youth is going to break the traditional social system of India and try to adopt a new one that is based on equality, love and passion, and also live without the barriers of caste. He represents 2 States as a two states of India which are totally different from each other. His major writings are *Five Point Someone* and *The 3 Mistakes of My Life*.

Daughter of Anita Desai, Kiran Desai is also a famous Indian English writer. Like her mother, Desai has a great art of writings and she is skillfully woven universe themes with the local story or it can be said that her writings are universal application. She basically deals with the issue of migration, culture dilemma, dislocation, hybrid and sense of belongingness when an immigrant adopts or migrates in a new location, city and country. She explores the impact of migration social and family life when he/she migrate in a location. Her major writings are *The Inheritance of Loss* (Booker Prize) and *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*.

In 2008, Aravinda Adiga got Man Booker Prize for his novel *The White Tiger*. The White Tiger is his debut novel. Throughout his writing, Adiga tries to highlight the upcoming changes in the social structure and family relationship with the development of the country. He also tries to unveil that how the caste system in India affect the individual and community life. In *the Last Man in Tower*, Adiga highlights that the older man situation in the city and how capitalism brings changes in the relationship of social. Moreover, Adiga tries to uncover that the relationship in a city depends upon the demand and supply concept. Adiga's other writings are *Selection Day* and *Between the Assassinations*.

Pakistan

Born in Pakistani-administered Kashmir, Mohsin Hamid is a British-Pakistani novelist and former bank consultant. He made his literary debut with *Moth Smoke*, a novel centered around a

marijuana smoker and ex-banker who falls in love with his best friend's wife. The story explores themes such as extramarital affairs, the emotional distance within marriages, and the fragility of social norms in contemporary Pakistani society. It also reflects on the concept of the social contract and examines the complex web of interpersonal relationships.

In his works, including *Moth Smoke*, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and *Exit West*, Hamid highlights the crucial roles women play in society — as mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters. He portrays women as essential to the social fabric, underscoring their importance and the need for their representation and agency in both private and public spheres.

Born in Pakistan, Kamila Shamsie is a British writer. She always uses her writing setting of Pakistan, but her thematic concerns are universal. Throughout her writings, she highlights the issues related to the contemporary Pakistan's society such as men and women relationship, women sufferings, family dynamics and psychological trauma. In addition to this, she tries to provide a keen glimpse of understanding of friendship to understand loyalty, betrayal, and the complexities of human relationships. Her major works include *Home Fire* (winner of the Women's Prize for Fiction), *Burnt Shadows*, and *Kartography*. Shamsie delves into the intricate web of familial connections, exploring themes of inheritance, tradition, and the enduring impact of family history.

Born in Pakistan, Bapsi Sidhwa currently lives in the United States and identifies with her Pakistani heritage. Through her writings, Sidhwa shares her experiences and reflections on the Partition of India and Pakistan. She sheds light on the horrific events that took place during this tragic historical moment. Sidhwa portrays how communal harmony completely collapsed, turning friends into enemies, and how people became capable of violence against those they once loved. Her works explore themes such as Partition, communal discord, violence, and the harassment of women, as seen in her novels *Cracking India* (also published as *Ice-Candy-Man*), *The Pakistani Bride*, and *An American Brat*.

Bangladesh

Taslima Nasrin, known as a prominent human rights activist, hails from Bangladesh. Some of her most notable works include *Amar Meyebela (My Girlhood)*, *Lajja*, and *Shodh*. Her novel *Lajja* is both widely acclaimed and controversial. It centers around the aftermath of the Babri Masjid demolition and tells the story of a Hindu Bengali family living in Bangladesh. The novel exposes the rise of communal violence, gender discrimination, the exploitation of women, and religious intolerance triggered by the incident. Nasrin vividly portrays how the demolition of the Babri Masjid had a profound impact on Bangladesh, leading to a breakdown of social and communal harmony, as well as the disintegration of familial relationships.

Through his writings, Humayun Ahmed portrays the lives of the middle, marginalized, and poor classes in Bangladesh. His works are a unique blend of family and social themes, tradition and modernity, fantasy and reality. He vividly highlights the everyday struggles of the middle class. At the same time, his writings explore human relationships—such as those between father and daughter, son and mother, and husband and wife—as seen in *Nondito Noroke (In Blissful Hell)*, the *Misir Ali* series, and the *Himu* series.

Monica Ali (British-Bangladeshi) explores in her writings domestic issues which is belonged to everyday life of humans. Her novels like *Brick Lane* and *In the Kitchen* are dealt with the issues like domestic complexities, work and upcoming changes in adopting a new countries and environment. In her writings, she unveils that her characters grapple with the issues related to their self, family and personal relationship in the contemporary social context.

Sri Lanka

Born in Sri Lanka, Michael Ondaatje currently resides in Canada. His writings often explore the complexity of human relationships, highlighting the impact of war and violence on love, identity, memory, and culture. Ondaatje suggests that an individual's past significantly shapes their present and future. As a result, his writing *Running in the Family* explores the themes of community and family, often drawing from his own complex and layered family history. He was awarded the Man Booker Prize for his novel *The English Patient*. Some of his other notable works include *Running in the Family* and *Anil's Ghost*.

Born in Colombo, Romesh Gunsekera is a ecologist and writer. He special writes about the marine life. Nominated for Booker Prize, His early novel *Reef* became popular after its publishing. The novel *Reef* is about the marine life. It deals with the theme related to the impact of environment pollution on both human and marine life. Because, human and marine life both of them part of nature and there are coherence among them. His other novel *Sandglass* is also dealt with the story of two feudal family and relationship between them. Throughout the novel, Gunsekera explores the intricate social relationship among the rural setting. His next novel, *Noontide Toll* also deals with the life of immigrants on a foreign country and tackle the problems encountered by them.

Published in 1994, the novel *Funny Boy* is written by Shyam Selvadurai. Shyam's homeland is Sri Lanka and live in Canada. Shyam's *Funny Boy* is a collection of six stories. The novel is dealt with the theme of clash of Tamil and Sinhalese, through the story of Arjie. Throughout the story of Arjie, Selvadurai presents a glimpse of communal bonds in the two major ethnic groups of Sri Lanka. He also arises his voice against violence done in the name of caste. He also tries to talk about his personal experience and the hidden tensions and historical truths behind the ethnic problems. He illustrates how inter-ethnic violence not only destabilizes society but also affects its foundation and basic units. His other writings are *Cinnamon Gardens*, and *The Hungry Ghosts*, often portray families navigating the intertwined challenges of ethnicity, sexuality, and societal expectations.

Nepal

Born in Nepal, Samrat Upadhyay now resides in the United States, where he works as a professor of creative writing at Indiana University. His first book, *Arresting God in Kathmandu*, is a collection of nine short stories. In this book, Upadhyay portrays the lives of Nepal's working-class community, offering insightful glimpses into their everyday struggles and social dynamics. The narrative structure and storytelling style of *Arresting God in Kathmandu* draw comparisons to Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, making it a compelling reflection of contemporary Nepali society and its community life. His subsequent novel, *Buddha's Orphans*, presents a broader political landscape of Nepal. Blending political commentary with elements of adult romance, the novel explores themes such as youth, love, and the issue of human trafficking in the country.

Got universal acclaim, Manjushree Thapa is an essayist, writer and editor. She debuts in the literary world through the *Mustang Bhot in Fragments* (1992) and her first novel was the *Tutor of History*. Published in 2001, the novel presents a glimpse of general election of Nepal and their impact on the life of common masses and their participation. The novel's setting is 1980. Located in Canada, The next book is *All of Us in Our Own Lives* is dealt with the story of two strangers who are disappointed with their life and move to Nepal to get peace in their life. The book deals

that how the individuals are disappointed with the urban life style and move to find peace in their life.

Bhutan

Got the title of first English female writer of Bhutan, Kunzang Choden major works are *The Circle of Karma* and *Tales in Colour and Other Stories*. Throughout her writings, she presents the contemporary social system and the impact of imperialism on Bhutanese culture and society. Her first novel *Circle of Karma* is about the story of a female Bhutanese contractor who throws the light on the imperialism impact on Bhutanese social system to bring economic changes in Bhutanese society. Even though, there are limited resources and educational resources for the women. Moreover, she tries to highlight the issues of gender discrimination, orthodox and male dominance over the society. Along with it, she wrote many books on the various subject matters. books on the various subject matters particularly the limited access to education for girls. Her

Maldives

Known as Daisymaa, Aminath Faiza is the one of the most celebrated Maldivian poetess. She began writing poetry in the age of sixteen. She wrote her poetry about the various political and celebrates of the Maldives in which she talks about the political, social and cultural life of Maldives. Moreover, she highlights the beauty of Maldives and its rich culture, Icelandic and community of these islands. Her poetry is the beauty example of collective spirit where shared experiences, mutual support, and cultural traditions form the backbone of daily life.

Known as Gogo Latheef, Mohamed Latheef is a prominent human rights campaigner, politician, and former Member of Parliament in the Maldives. He is also one of the most notable Maldivian writers in English, known for his insightful portrayals of Maldivian history, culture, and politics. His writings—spanning poetry, short stories, and essays—are deeply rooted in his lived experiences in the Maldives. Through them, he vividly captures the essence of island life, marine biodiversity, and the socio-political and economic dynamics of the country. Latheef's works often highlight the tightly knit nature of island communities in the Maldives, where mutual dependence, strong familial bonds, and shared responsibilities form the backbone of daily life. His characters frequently navigate their worlds through communal relationships, with neighbors, extended families, and village elders playing key roles in shaping everyday decisions.

Afghanistan

Born in Afghanistan, Khaled Hosseini is an Afghan-American writer. Published in 2003, *The Kite Runner* is his debut novel. The story of *Kite Runner* is dealt with a son and his father, and two friend's story. It gains universal acclaim and becomes popular after his publication. Throughout the novel, Hosseini tries to introduce with the history of Afghanistan and its culture, social and political situation. Moreover, he also tackles the theme of violence, marization of women, exploitation, and domestic violence and so on. His other notable works such as *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *the Mountains Echoed*, also deals with the issue of migration and displacement, cultural dilemma, identity crisis and so on.

Born in Kabul, Atiq Rahimi is a French-Afghan writer and filmmaker whose works vividly portray the human cost of war in Afghanistan. His novella *Earth and Ashes* gained widespread popularity in Europe and quickly became a bestseller. In his writing, Rahimi presents a raw and realistic picture of Afghan society, focusing on how war devastates the family unit and dismantles

the broader social fabric. He explores how the relentless pursuit of political power leads to the collapse of familial and communal structures. Through novels such as *The Patience Stone* and *Earth and Ashes*, Rahimi depicts landscapes filled with fractured families struggling to survive amid political violence and social decay. The recurring absence, silence, or loss of male figures often leaves women and children in vulnerable positions, emphasizing the fragility and instability of familial and communal support systems. His works serve as a poignant reflection on the psychological and emotional toll of conflict on Afghan lives.

Throughout this study, it becomes evident that South Asian countries not only share their culture, history, geographical and ocean boundary from the ancient time but also shared languages, and literary traditions. The South Asian writers beautifully try to portray through their art of writings. They reveal the social, culture, communal and family life and their complexities in their writings. Furthermore, the literary works of these writers serve as a reflection of the subcontinent's rich and turbulent history, as well as its evolving political landscape, cultural diversity, and persistent struggles with identity, gender dynamics, and diasporic experiences. These shared narratives and concerns underscore the region's collective consciousness and emphasize the profound interconnectedness of South Asian societies.

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