

Unveiling the Voices: Zadie Smith and the New Generation of BAME Writers in Britain

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Abstract—The literary landscape in Britain has been enriched by the works of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) writers who have brought diverse voices and perspectives to the forefront. These writers have brought attention to important social issues such as race, justice, and creativity through their unique perspectives and cultural experiences. Their artistic expression has served as a powerful tool for resisting injustice and challenging traditional narratives. Three prominent Afro-British writers, Bernardine Evaristo, Andrea Levy, and Caryl Phillips have made significant contributions to this tradition. Zadie Smith is widely regarded as one of the foremost BAME literary voices, acclaimed for her incisive narratives and contemplative insights. This paper examines the selected works of four BAME authors: Zadie Smith, Andrea Levy, Bernardine Evaristo, and Caryl Phillips. The objective is to unveil the richness and diversity inherent in BAME literature and to comprehend the issues and experiences encapsulated within their writings. The analysis also explores how language, character development, and narrative structure combine to shape Zadie Smith's distinctive voice, firmly establishing her as one of the most astonishing contemporary literary talents. This paper discusses Smith's unique approach to carving out a niche for herself among other BAME writers in Britain, offering new and exciting perspectives on problems of race, identity, and culture in the modern era.

Index Terms—BAME, Black British, ethnicity, identity and race

I. INTRODUCTION

Zadie Smith plays a pivotal role in shaping the discourse surrounding race, identity, and belonging within contemporary Britain. Her poignant narratives and insightful observations have opened up vital conversations that resonate deeply in today's society. In contrast, a vibrant new generation of BAME (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic) writers, including the acclaimed Bernardine Evaristo, the insightful Andrea Levy, and the evocative Caryl Phillips, is making significant strides in creating a more inclusive and diverse literary landscape. In contrast, a vibrant new generation of BAME (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic) writers, including the acclaimed Bernardine Evaristo, the insightful Andrea Levy, and the evocative Caryl Phillips, is making significant strides in creating a more inclusive and diverse literary landscape. This paper compares Smith's foundational contributions to the innovative approaches of these newer writers, highlighting a generational shift that enhances BAME literature and reflects broader cultural changes. This comparison enriches our understanding of the complexities of identity in modern Britain and the ongoing conversations about race and culture.

Historical Background of BAME Literature

The term "Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic literature" will hereafter be referred to as BAME literature works penned by writers emanating from different ethnic backgrounds, namely those from groups facing discrimination in Western societies. As a general rule, the so-called BAME literature encompasses a very broad range of topics and life experiences. It normally dwells on the cultural origin and particular challenges that minority groups undergo and gives their own perspective on it. BAME authors have been a part of English literature for a very long time; for various reasons, their voices have not always been heard, but they are now well-known. The writings produced by BAME authors provide light on the challenges of living in a mixed society. Their works are bound to relate to ideas of identity and belonging to subjective areas deeply influenced by colonialism and its legacy. Many BAME writers came from countries colonized by Britain, which testifies to the continuance of this history in their lives. Writers such as Bernardine Evaristo, Andrea Levy, and Caryl Phillips have come into prominence over the last couple of decades and have made an enormous contribution to bringing basic human issues into public view. The themes and approaches in their writing have, however, changed with the coming of a new wave of Afro-British writers of which Zadie Smith is a part these four authors Bernardine Evaristo, Andrea Levy, Caryl Phillips, and Zadie Smith hold up examples of representations through their work of the Afro-British experience that raise the stakes and challenge perceptions. Through such efforts, these people show how much can be done with the power of storytelling in a literary world that is becoming increasingly inclusive and representative.

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BAME is a commonly used acronym in the United Kingdom that stands for Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic. Individuals of color, as well as minority ethnic groups, possess the necessary creative mindsets that allow them to represent experiences and deconstruct aspects of the culture that influence their various groups within the UK. BAME (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic) literature gained prominence across Britain because of four major developments including postcolonialism and migration as well as racial discrimination and the quest for personal identity. British literary history took a major turn after World War II through the arrival of the Windrush generation who settled in Britain as Caribbean immigrants. Writer Samuel Selvon alongside George Lamming joined other members of their generation to produce literary works describing immigrant life in Britain (BBC, 2024). Their literary works examined cultural assimilation and Caribbean heritage preservation as well as the racial discrimination which Caribbean communities encountered in Britain. Building upon the foundations laid by the Windrush generation, Black British literature flourished in subsequent decades. Black British literature emerged as a significant topic in the 1970s, encompassing the work of authors in Britain who originate from British former colonies, including regions in Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean. It was the time of a political rather than a purely racial depiction; it points out the experience of postcolonial migration, alienation, and discrimination that connected with an oblique yet potentially subversive assertion of attachment to Britain (Ledent, 2009). The term "Black British Literature" is frequently used to describe a literary tradition that emerged only after World War II, following the arrival of the Empire Windrush, a ship that carried Jamaican immigrants to London in 1948 and is thus thought to have marked the beginning of the black presence in Britain (2022). Black British literature is viewed as a time-limited phenomenon attached to post-war migration to England, some of whom are of mixed parentage, like Anglo-Jamaican Zadie Smith or Anglo-Nigerian Diana Evans, the most publicized contemporary genre, or in poetry, especially when it is performative. Most of Britain's best performance poets are from the Black community. Writers like Linton Kwesi Johnson and Benjamin Zephaniah utilized poetry to address social and political issues, giving voice to Black Britons. By examining how Zadie Smith's writing diverges from and aligns with that of other prominent BAME authors in Britain, including Bernardine Evaristo, Caryl Phillips, and Andrea Levy, this paper aims to elucidate the unique qualities that distinguish Zadie Smith's literary voice and contributions.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents an overview of some significant critical pieces, drawn from a variety of national and international journals, which highlight the importance of including BAME writings in academic discourse and shed light on the social and political issues examining the themes of identity, assimilation, and cultural diversity in BAME literature in Britain. Racism and racial discrimination remain a part of everyday life for Britain's ethnic minorities. Black and Asian Britons, who constitute nearly a tenth of the population (Office for National Statistics, 2003), are less likely to be employed and are more likely to work in worse jobs, live in worse houses, and suffer worse health than white Britons (Donnell, 2002). A rich history of migrants is a literary mark for the United Kingdom, and the writings of immigrants and ethnic minorities have been evident for a long time. The literature of these writers especially focused on the authors whose backgrounds can be traced to Africa, South Asia, or the Caribbean, and the significant discussions in their writings about race and multiculturalism in Britain. Wambu (2011) recognizes that 'the new generation of writers is moving away from the limitations of the biographical narrative into many different varieties of genre fiction.' The term 'Black British' became popular in the mid-1970s and served as a political label. In Britain, people used the word 'black' to describe African, Caribbean, and South Asian settlers. This differs from how North Americans use the term 'Black,' which refers to African and Caribbean settlers. In Britain, the broad term 'Black British' helped create a political bond among second-generation immigrants from very different cultures who joined forces to fight against their shared experiences of institutional and personal racism. Black British literature can play a central role in disrupting this inculcation because it provides us with authentic and diverse portrayals of Black communities and creates openings for students to ask critical questions about the relationship between our past and present society (Blackaby, 2002).

In contrast to the first generation of Caribbean immigrant writers, who masterfully captured the Windrush generation's yearning for return, modern black fiction in Britain rejects the concept of return and, perhaps more importantly, draws parallels between the "here" of black Britons and the "there" of their ancestors (Anderson, 2016). Caribbean-born urbanites such as Andrea Levy, Zadie Smith, and Caryl Phillips, among many others, have tried to break away from previous fiction, inspired in part by the shifting demographics of the white population in Britain (Dhouib, 2014). Literary experimentation with *dup*, rap, hip-hop, and other predominantly Black musical styles continued during the 1990s when new poetic forms flourished in Black British writing. Writers such as Lauri Ramey and Sarah Broom recognized the emergence of new poetry tribes. These writers emphasized live readings and performances alongside their strong performance aesthetic. The literary world was enhanced by this innovation, which also elevated new; compelling voices (Larrissy, 2016). Black British writers are renowned for their uniqueness and diversity, which have greatly influenced English literature. The thematic and formal reconstruction of several literary traditions has been greatly influenced by it. It would be Fiction in the "black British" genre is incredibly versatile, making it difficult to define a typical work. For example, having a strong interest in history and a particular concern for "otherness", might include sexual orientation, race, and religion (Bishop, 2009).

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper employs qualitative analysis to explore the works and scholarly articles about British Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) writer Zadie Smith. The study examines the themes, characters, and writing techniques used by Smith in comparison to other BAME authors in British literary circles. The aim is to identify what makes Smith's work unique and how she crafts her distinctive writing style as a British author. The analysis investigates the cultural and interpersonal elements that influence her work as it navigates the diverse narratives within this literary landscape. Applying qualitative approaches, the research analyzes Zadie Smith's literature alongside scholarly articles about her writing to establish her unique qualities and recognized style among British BAME authors. This paper seeks to observe the factors from Smith's cultural and interpersonal background that have shaped her approach to crafting diverse narratives in the British literary domain.

IV. DISCUSSION

Zadie Smith tackles an expanse of social issues in her novels. Smith boldly explores the intricacies of identity, frequently confusing it with race, culture, and nationality. In the forms of her characters, Zadie Smith challenges readers' assumptions about belonging, demonstrating how identity can be purposefully fluid. Perhaps more than any other contemporary author, Smith's work prompts introspection and fosters appreciation for diverse hybrid identities. Smith's unique narrative form distinguishes her from other twenty-first-century writers; moreover, it is a form that has greatly influenced the emerging cohort of BAME novelists in Britain today. Indeed, Smith's vibrant prose is characterized by its fusion of wit, satire, humor, and acute commentary. Zadie Smith's writing style differs significantly from that of other Black and Asian writers, as she addresses a range of unique issues in her work. Her writing has been termed a vivid tapestry, interweaving wit, intelligence, and deep inquiry into the contemporary world. Her writing is characterized by playful wit and humor, the writer uses a lot of playful language to get their points across such as witticism and humor which can be used for either being inoffensive or endearing. The tone of this light touch contrasts with the severe subjects she often discusses.

Although it is difficult to generalize, her characters are not just people of the society; they are complex and ambiguous. These individuals face issues of identity, race, class, and subculture. Smith excels at creating characters that are both relatable and complex. One notable feature of Smith's novels is their interwoven narratives, often comprising multiple storylines that connect in meaningful ways, resulting in a rich and intricate tapestry of human experiences. The other writing style of Zadie Smith is an exploration of modern issues; her ability to take on the big questions of today's world, including race, beauty, gender, and globalization, with subtlety and grace. Cultural hybridity is growing in a multi-cultured atmosphere; Smith's writing reveals her true perspective as she seamlessly blends diverse cultures and viewpoints. In her novel "White Teeth," Smith explores the interesting and complex relationships between two families, a Bangladeshi and an English family. It is funny and makes you think, plus it offers an interesting perspective on what it means to be a migrant/diasporic community in the UK. The character in the novel "White Teeth", Archie Jones, tries to kill himself in his car on New Year's Day, 1975. It's a dark moment that we don't stay in for long, thanks to Mo Hussein-Ishmael the butcher, who rescues Archie because his premises are not licensed for suicides. But it sets the tone for a novel that mixes laughs with big questions. "We're not licensed for suicides around here. This place is halal" (WT, p. 7). The novel deals with the multi-cultural society of London wherein multiple characters from different cultural backgrounds have been shown. The novel explores the cultural clashes and connections between the characters Archie, Clara Bowden, Samad Iqbal, and his family. The sub-themes discussed in this novel are Immigration, Race issues, Identity Crisis, and the Multiculturality of London.

Zadie Smith's novel "White Teeth" stands out as a great example of non-linear storytelling, blending different characters, eras, and viewpoints. The novel offers several notable instances of the friendship between Archie and Samad; the story often moves between now and then when it looks at how Archie Jones and Samad Iqbal became friends during World War II. The moment about their shared memories helps to understand their current lives and challenges (Bradford, 2020). The novel also explores the lives of several generations in the Jones and Iqbal families. It goes back to tell us about Samad's ancestor, Mangal Pande, who took part in the Indian Rebellion of 1857. Then it shows us how different things are for Samad's twin boys, Magid and Millat, in today's London. Clara Bowden's tale offers another instance of the book's non-linear plot. Her Jamaican past, her strict Jehovah's Witness childhood, and her later move to London blend with her current life alongside Archie and their daughter Irie. In her novel "NW", Smith traces the lives of four Londoners all struggling with questions of identity and belonging. The novel is a poignant meditation on how race, class, and gender mediate our encounters with the world. The novel takes place in the northwest part of London. It follows the grown-up lives of Leah Hanwell, Keisha (who later goes by Natalie), Blake, and Felix Cooper after they move out of Caldwell, a made-up council estate in Kilburn where they spent their younger years (Kokate, 2019). The story centers on Leah and Keisha's friendship. It traces their childhood and teen years together and then their separate adult lives, where they both try to make sense of life in the city today. They face challenges related to social class, being men or women, who they're attracted to, their racial background, schooling, and what they want to do for work.

Felix's story, found in the "Guest" part, crosses paths with Leah and Natalie's lives in small ways. For example, Leah and Natalie learn about Felix's sad ending, which has an impact on how they see their own lives and how fragile their situations are. The linked stories also bring to light wider social and cultural topics, like race, class, and who we are. Take Natalie's path from a working-class background to becoming a top lawyer. This stands out when compared to Leah's life,

which hasn't changed much. Their stories show different ways of dealing with similar money and social challenges. In the novel "On Beauty", published in 2005, Smith frequently shifts focus between different characters, offering varied perspectives on the same events. This technique enriches the narrative by providing a more nuanced and layered portrayal of the characters and their interactions, some of the most important issues in this regard being the Belsey family, a bi-national family, the members of which are of mixed races living in the United States. The novel examines the themes of race, identity, and cultural diversity both in the US and the UK (Batra, 2010). The Belsey family is comprised of Howard, a white Briton who is a scholar of Rembrandt; his wife, an African-American named Kiki; and their three kids, Jerome, Zora, and Levi. The story vividly presents how racial challenges confront the families alongside societal prejudices they must face. The verbal exchanges in "On Beauty" present themselves through intelligent wording and direct statements that expose the multilayered mental and emotional features of each character. The academic interactions of Howard Belsey create meaningful dialogue which Kiki Belsey brings to life with her honest remarks to add substance and humor to the plot. The narrative style uses interesting commentary to examine cultural and social matters that include race class and identity perspectives. The thoughtful integration of thematic elements by Smith throughout character narratives and dialogues makes the book highly engaging both intellectually and emotionally.

Andrea Levy, a British-Jamaican writer, through "Small Island" Andrea Levy established her literary fame by winning the Orange Prize for Fiction in 2004 while maintaining her British-Jamaican heritage. The writing of Levy stems from her family background because she comes from the Windrush generation whose parents settled in Britain during World War II. In her writing, Levy presents the challenges and proud moments of Windrush generation descendants and other British carriers who owe their family history to this important immigration wave. As a leading figure within BAME writing her storytelling power together with her place and time evocation establish her position as a main contributor to this new literary movement. Levy's writing explores the history of Windrush, along with the challenges and accomplishments faced by its members and their British descendants, to improve their understanding of the British historical narrative. Through her exceptional storytelling and effective depiction of time and place, she has gained recognition as a significant figure among post-Windrush era BAME authors. Andrea Levy's writing style stands out and has a significant effect on readers, with several key features. Levy often uses historical events as a backdrop for those connected to the Windrush generation and slavery's lasting effects. Her books, like *Small Island* and *The Long Song*, take a close look at these historical settings. Levy's own life as a child of Jamaican immigrants in Britain plays a big role in shaping her writing (BBC, 2024). She draws on her background to add real-life feel and emotional depth to her stories. Levy's writing stays true to life, showing her characters' ups and downs in vivid detail. Her stories bring historical and personal events to life, making them feel close and easy to relate to and standing out for their deep feelings. She captures all the ins and outs of her characters' emotions, giving readers a full picture of their lives and experiences. Levy tends to explain the stories from the past and how colonialism has left its mark, while Smith's books deal more with today's world, looking at societies where many cultures mix. When Levy's writings are so emotional and feel true to life, Smith's work stands out for its wit and sharp takes on society.

The British-Nigerian writer Bernardine Evaristo achieved literary history by earning the 2019 Booker Prize with her novel "Girl, Woman, Other" which represented the initial win by a Black female novelist. Through experimental storytelling, Evaristo expresses unconventional writing that breaks societal norms by bringing neglected societal groups into literary narrative roles. The novel follows twelve Black women whose lives depict the Black British experience through multiple perspectives. Evaristo's writing is bold, unapologetic, and unafraid to delve into uncomfortable truths, making her a trailblazer in the new era of BAME writing (Justine, 2017). By creating a wide range of characters Evaristo explores the multiple dimensions of identity while dismantling traditional stereotypes. Through twelve interconnected characters in "Girl, Woman, Other" Evaristo creates a character portrait of Black British reality. The text illustrates how black women fight against multiple barriers because they exist in multiple dimensions of self while enduring social prescriptive norms. Evaristo weaves these topics together to help audiences acknowledge multidimensional aspects of British race and gender relations in present-day society. The literary works of Smith exemplify realistic literature infused with satirical elements, Evaristo weaves a captivating poetic narrative that delves deep into themes of identity and femininity, skillfully employing rhythmic structures that draw readers in and invite them to explore the layers of meaning within her work. Her novel, "Girl, Woman, Other," blows apart traditional forms of narrative structure and interweaves the lives of twelve different characters, all sharing one commonality: their identity as black women in Britain (2022). Much of her prose is lyrical and poetic, and the way she structures her stories goes far beyond regular storytelling. She plays with structure, using a mix of prose and verse that together gives a unique reading experience. It's like listening to a symphony where every instrument lends its color to the piece in a soundscape that will linger long after the last note. It boldly interrogates race, gender, and class, often reclaiming those narratives that have been overwhelmingly sidelined in the past. The characters in Evaristo's stories reveal their truths unapologetically, demanding the reader to understand their struggles and triumphs. This approach feels a bit like a call to arms: to start listening and to learn from voices that are at once so wide-ranging and deeply buried in silence.

Caryl Phillips is a British author of Caribbean origin who has been central to British literature since the 1980s. Much of his work deals with issues about displacement, identity, and belonging because he draws on experiences about being a Black man growing up in Britain. Phillips' writing is known for its lyrical prose and its ability to capture the complexities of the human experience. In his novel "Crossing the River," he weaves together the stories of four characters, each

representing a different stage of the African diaspora, to explore the legacy of slavery and colonialism. Phillips' writing is both thought-provoking and emotionally resonant, making him a significant voice in the new era of BAME writing (Kato, 2002). Phillips' unique way of telling stories gets to the core of these social problems and makes readers confront their own biases and opinions. One of Phillips' best works is his book "Crossing the River." The novel explores the spread of African people worldwide and the struggles Black folks have dealt with over time through several connected tales. Despite the existence of accounts of the brutal reality of racism and slavery, things could work out better because Phillips refuses to accept assumptions about human nature. Instead, he has portrayed how resilient and capable people are, encouraging readers that indeed, change is possible.

According to Phillips, he advocates for realizing and welcoming the presence of diversity. Using his personal experiences as a Black man of Caribbean descent who traveled the world in his book "Color Me English: Migration and Belonging Before and After 9/11" he explains how comprehending cultural differences remains highly significant instead of pretending to be color blind. In doing so, he reveals all of the issues and personal biases that crop up when people try sweeping racial identity under the carpet. Phillips often intertwines historical and contemporary narratives, providing a broad perspective on the experiences of the African diaspora. The combination of modernism and realism is evident in both his novels, "Crossing the River" and "The Final Passage." Every one of his novels contains numerous narrative voices which create multidimensional storytelling. Through this method, he investigates numerous dimensions of his characters' existence and all their events. His written prose achieves a deep emotional depth through which he leads readers into his characters' emotional inner worlds. The profound emotional depth he incorporates into his stories generates greater closeness in his storytelling approach. The writing of Phillips concentrates on historical stories about slavery which he presents with strong emotional depth alongside reflections but Smith creates modern multicultural themes using satirical methods and social observations. Unlike the bold and experimental styles of Evaristo, Levy, and Phillips, Zadie Smith's writing has wit, humor, and social commentary. Her intersecting stories explore issues of race, class, and social mobility. She sheds light on the challenges people face in a diverse urban environment. She gives voice to the voiceless, from backgrounds that have been marginalized. It is empathetic in its portrayal of their experiences. This provides a nuanced view of the many dimensions of modern-day London and the different struggles of the multitudes that go through it. She is exemplary at mixing humor and wit with deep social and human insight. Further, the intricate, multi-dimensional characters in Smith's treatment add richness and authenticity to the stories.

V. CONCLUSION

Zadie Smith's writing, while addressing issues related to race, identity, and multiculturalism, is known for its distinctiveness in not solely focusing on the suffering of Black people. The author presents a nuanced and multifaceted examination of these themes, distinguishing herself from other writers who primarily focus on the suffering experienced by Black communities. Her method involves creating intricate characters, incorporating humor and wit, and innovating narrative structure. She is particularly interested in how these themes intersect and interact with each other. Her writing is deeply personal and introspective. Her writing is highly self-aware and self-reflexive. Smith is aware of how her background and position influence her writing perspective. Her work engages with today's culture and politics. Smith's writing often considers current happenings and social problems. Compared to other BAME writers, for example, Andrea Leavy, Bernardine Evaristo, and Caryl Phillips, Zadie Smith stands out. She sees herself as a major literary figure who will continue to break all boundaries while provoking others about the question of race, identity, and belonging. Thus, her work testifies to the role of diverse voices in literature and their effects on changing how one sees the world. While all these writers have thematic preoccupations with race and identity, the often nuanced and playful in Smith's approach makes her different from the rest. By introducing new ways of thinking to the reader, she disrupts hegemonic discourse. In this sense, she is both thought-provoking and entertaining. This paper examines what differentiates her style and ideas from others to truly understand the changing voices within Britain's BAME literary circle. The boldness and attempt at different narrative structures helped to stretch the potential of the literature. Because of her strength and wit in handling such complex issues, Smith became a special voice in the land of British literature.

Smith's novels are characterized by second-generation immigrants and their complex identities, which include cultural clashes. This is unlike other writers such as Evaristo and Levy, who focus mainly on first-generation immigrants. Smith is known for her sense of humor and irony; Smith often incorporates elements of comedy into serious themes. Her writing approach stands apart from writers who distribute their work through obvious political stances and serious vocalization. The working class and urban spaces of present-day London form the main setting for Smith's novels as she explores relevant issues from this context. Smith received renown through her essays and her engagement with public speaking in addition to her authorship of novels. Her collections, such as "Changing My Mind" and "Feel Free," showcase her intellectual depth and versatility as a writer. The extensive scope of her cultural and intellectual interests made her writing stand apart from what other authors produced (2020). Through his literary work Smith succeeds in making important contributions to the writing world. The initial novel by Smith gathered multiple recognition awards that led to TV adaptations which demonstrated the extent of her literary influence. The position she holds as professor of fiction at New York University demonstrates her dedication to developing writers who will follow her. Zadie Smith stands out in BAME literature through a blend of her special writing approach and comical touch and scholarly dedication along with her cultural observations.

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