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## Speaking for an Odia Identity: Examining Resonance: English Poetry from Poets of Odisha

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### Abstract

Identity as a narrative, subsumes a host of factors - location, gender, ethnicity, caste, class, language, religion, sexuality, (dis)ability, and more. In a multilingual country like India, language remains pivotal to most identity debates. Within such a context, English has had a tough time establishing its viability as an Indian language by proving its allegiance to the country's cultural and emotional fabric. The present paper seeks to examine the possibility of a successful construction and communication of a regional Indian identity through Indian English poetry by taking up the case of Odia identity vis-à-vis a recent anthology of poems titled *Resonance: English Poetry from Poets of Odisha*.

Keywords: identity, culture, language, poetry, nation

'We write a running biography with life-language rather than only word language in order to "be". Call this identity!' writes Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak in *Outside in the Teaching Machine*. (4) Identity is a matrix wherein a diversity of factors such as ethnicity, history, location, gender, caste, class, language, religion, sexuality, (dis)ability, etc. come into play and at any given moment, identity theoretically remains a definitive choice to be made from amongst these in terms of action or representation and amounts to a political statement articulated by an individual or a group. Among the many factors that come together to contour one's perception and experience of identity, language remains vital. In the multilingual postcolonial nation-scape of India, language has been at the forefront of movements agitating for the formation of separate states since the 1950s. Education, economics, politics and development policies have all been crucially shaped over and through debates on language. The hierarchy of languages that was established in the colonial period with English being granted the highest supremacy on the linguistic ladder has prevailed in India even seven decades after Independence with the minor difference that both Hindi and English have been granted recognition as official languages. In *Language as Identity in Colonial India: Policies and Politics*, Papia Sengupta writes:

The identification of intellectual and political elites as speakers of major official languages still prevails in Indian politics. In contemporary India, the parliamentary