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AMERIKA ADABIYOTIDAGI IDEAL HINDU OBRAZLARI

Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqola Amerika adabiyotida “ideal hindu” obrazlarining yaratilishi va davom etishini erta mustamlaka davri hamda romantik tasvirlardan tortib zamonaviy tubjoy xalq qarshi-narrativlarigacha o‘rganadi. Tarixiy kontekst, adabiy tahlil va postkolonial nazariyaga tayangan holda maqola qayta-qayta uchraydigan timsollar — “oliyjanob yovvoyi” (noble savage), “yovuz yovvoyi” (ignoble savage), “yo‘qolib borayotgan hind” (vanishing Indian) va “hindu malikasi” (Indian princess) — ni tahlil qiladi hamda ularning millat qurilishi va yo‘q qilish jarayonidagi madaniy rolini baholaydi. Muhokama qilingan asarlar qatoriga Jeyms Fenimor Kuperning The Last of the Mohicans (1826), Genri Vadsuort Longfellowning The Song of Hiawatha (1855), Mark Tvenning Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884), Zitkala-Šaning American Indian Stories (1921), N. Skott Momadeyning House Made of Dawn (1968) va Luis Erdrichning Love Medicine (1984) asarlari kiradi. Maqolada xulosa qilanadiki, garchi ba’zi tasvirlar hamdarddek ko‘rinsa-da, ular ko‘pincha ramziy mahrumlikni davom ettiradi; tubjoy mualliflarning qarshi-narrativlari esa murakkablik va subyektivlikni qayta tiklaydi.

Kalit so‘zlar: Ideal hindu, Amerika adabiyoti, stereotiplar, olijanob yovvoyi, yo‘qolib borayotgan hindu, mahalliy vakillik, Mahalliy Amerika Uyg‘onishi, madaniy o‘zlashtirish, Jeyms Fenimor Kuper, adabiy obrazlar.

IDEAL INDIAN IMAGES IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Annotation

This paper examines the construction and persistence of “ideal Indian” images in American literature, from early colonial and romantic portrayals to modern Indigenous counter-narratives. Drawing on historical context, literary analysis, and postcolonial theory, it traces recurring tropes – noble savage, ignoble savage, vanishing Indian, and Indian princess – and evaluates their cultural work in nation-building and erasure. Works discussed include James Fenimore Cooper’s The Last of the Mohicans (1826), Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s The Song of Hiawatha (1855), Mark Twain’s Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884), Zitkala-Ša’s American Indian Stories (1921), N. Scott Momaday’s House Made of Dawn (1968), and Louise Erdrich’s Love Medicine (1984). The paper concludes that although some portrayals appear sympathetic, they often perpetuate symbolic dispossession; counter-narratives by Native authors reclaim complexity and agency.

Key words: Ideal Indian, American literature, Stereotypes, Noble savage, Vanishing Indian, Indigenous representation, Native American Renaissance, Cultural appropriation, James Fenimore Cooper, Literary tropes.

ИДЕАЛЬНЫЕ ИНДИЙСКИЕ ОБРАЗЫ В АМЕРИКАНСКОЙ ЛИТЕРАТУРЕ

Аннотация

В данной статье рассматривается формирование и сохранение образа «идеального индейца» в американской литературе, от ранних колониальных и романтических описаний до современных контрнарративов коренных американцев. Опираясь на исторический контекст, литературный анализ и постколониальную теорию, статья анализирует повторяющиеся образы - «благородного дикаря», «низменного дикаря», «исчезающего индейца» и «индейской принцессы» - и оценивает их культурную роль в процессах формирования и разрушения наций. Среди обсуждаемых произведений — «Последний из могикан» Джеймса Фенимора Купера (1826), «Песнь о Гайавате» Генри Уодсворта Лонгфелло (1855), «Приключения Гекльберри Финна» Марка Твена (1884), «Рассказы об индейцах» Зиткалы-Шы (1921), «Дом, сотканный из зари» Н. Скотта Момадэя (1968) и «Лекарство любви» Луизы Эрдрич (1984). В статье делается вывод о том, что, хотя некоторые изображения могут показаться симпатичными, они часто увековечивают символическую депривацию, в то время как контрнарративы авторов-аборигенов восстанавливают сложность и субъективность.

Ключевые слова: Идеальный индеец, американская литература, стереотипы, благородный дикарь, исчезающий индеец, представление коренных народов, Возрождение коренных американцев, культурная апроприация, Джеймс Фенимор Купер, литературные образы.

Introduction. From the first European contact with the Americas, written accounts have been instrumental in shaping how Native Americans were perceived by outsiders. These perceptions—often filtered through the political ambitions, religious convictions, and cultural biases of settlers – gave rise to what later became known as the “ideal Indian” image in American literature. Such an image is rarely an accurate reflection of the lived experiences, languages, and traditions of Indigenous peoples; rather, it is a constructed literary figure, molded to fit the needs and fantasies of a settler-colonial society. Whether romanticized as noble guardians of the wilderness or cast as tragic relics of a fading world, these portrayals were, in effect, tools of cultural narrative-making. They did

not merely describe Native Americans; they also served to justify policies of expansion, removal, and assimilation.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, colonial narratives and captivity accounts presented Indigenous peoples through sharply polarized lenses – alternating between the “savage” foe and the “noble” ally. These texts, such as Mary Rowlandson’s The Sovereignty and Goodness of God (1682), were read widely in both the colonies and Europe, shaping transatlantic understandings of the American frontier. By the early nineteenth century, as the United States sought to forge a distinct cultural identity separate from Britain, authors turned to Native figures as symbols of American authenticity. Romantic writers like James Fenimore Cooper invested Native characters with stoic heroism, ecological wisdom, and an air of tragic inevitability. In works like The Last of the Mohicans (1826), Indigenous characters such as Uncas embody virtues admired by white audiences—courage, loyalty, harmony with nature—while being doomed to extinction, a narrative that implicitly cleared the way for settler occupation (Cooper 412–15).

The ideal Indian image is not monolithic. It has manifested in several recurring archetypes: the “noble savage,” who embodies moral purity but is destined to vanish; the “Indian princess,” whose beauty and loyalty facilitate cross-cultural mediation; and the “vanishing Indian,” whose disappearance is mourned as a natural or inevitable process rather than the product of policy and violence. These tropes are not benign. Even seemingly flattering depictions are steeped in paternalism and erasure, replacing real communities with symbolic figures that serve the settler imagination.

The power of these literary images lies in their adaptability. In different eras, they have been mobilized for different ideological ends: to justify colonial warfare, to romanticize frontier nostalgia, or to underscore a myth of national unity. This adaptability has allowed the tropes to persist well into the twentieth century, appearing not only in literature but also in visual art, advertising, and popular culture. Even when the “ideal Indian” was framed as a figure of dignity and virtue, that dignity was often contingent on the character’s removal—either by physical death or cultural absorption into whiteness.

The late twentieth century brought a seismic shift with the rise of the Native American Renaissance, as Indigenous authors began reclaiming their narratives. Writers like N. Scott Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko, Louise Erdrich, and Sherman Alexie introduced characters whose complexity, humor, contradictions, and survival stood in stark opposition to earlier idealized or tragic stereotypes. These works challenged the very notion of an “ideal” Native image by refusing simplification and by situating Indigenous experiences within both historical trauma and ongoing sovereignty struggles.

This paper addresses two central questions: How have “ideal Indian” images been constructed in American literature over the centuries, and how have Native authors disrupted and redefined these portrayals? Drawing on close readings of canonical and Indigenous-authored texts, as well as scholarship from Native studies and postcolonial theory, this study argues that even sympathetic idealizations participate in the broader project of erasure. By replacing actual Indigenous political and cultural presence with symbolic representation, such images serve the settler nation’s identity rather than Native communities themselves. At the same time, the counter-narratives of Indigenous writers dismantle these images, presenting not ideals but realities—messy, vivid, and enduring.

Literature review. The “Noble Savage” and Romantic Idealization

The “noble savage” trope emerged strongly in early nineteenth-century literature. Figures like Uncas and Chingachgook in James Fenimore Cooper’s The Last of the Mohicans (1826) embody moral purity, courage, and harmony with nature, yet they are framed as relics of a dying race (Cooper 412–15). Such portrayals fit into a Romantic vision that idealized pre-industrial life while assuming Indigenous cultures were doomed to extinction. As Philip J. Deloria notes, these depictions offered white readers a way to “play Indian,” appropriating symbols of authenticity without engaging with living Native realities (Playing Indian 3–5).

The “Ignoble Savage” and Threatening Other

In contrast, the “ignoble savage” stereotype depicted Native Americans as violent, deceitful, or uncivilized. This image was common in frontier adventure stories and dime novels, which needed antagonists for white heroes. The trope legitimized military campaigns and policies like Indian Removal by casting Native resistance as barbaric rather than political (Berkhofer 28–29).

The “Vanishing Indian” and Sentimental Erasure

The “vanishing Indian” myth permeated nineteenth-century poetry and fiction. This narrative mourned the supposed inevitable disappearance of Native peoples, aestheticizing their loss while ignoring the role of U.S. policy in their displacement (Truettner 12). Longfellow’s The Song of Hiawatha (1855) romanticizes Ojibwe legends but frames them within a closing world, reinforcing the idea that Indigenous cultures belong to the past (Longfellow 287).

Gendered Tropes: The “Indian Princess”

Female figures like Pocahontas became symbols of exotic loyalty and assimilation. The “Indian princess” trope cast Indigenous women as intermediaries between cultures, often sacrificing themselves for white men. As Rayna Green observes, such portrayals reinforced colonial gender hierarchies while obscuring the diversity of Native women’s roles and voices (Green 709–10).

Critical Responses and the Native American Renaissance

The Native American Renaissance of the late twentieth century saw Indigenous authors reclaiming voice and revising stereotypes. N. Scott Momaday’s House Made of Dawn (1968), Leslie Marmon Silko’s Ceremony (1977), Louise Erdrich’s Love Medicine (1984), and Sherman Alexie’s The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven (1993) center Indigenous epistemologies and everyday life, resisting idealization by presenting complex, flawed, and resilient characters (Momaday 55; Erdrich 22–23).

Debate

The portrayal of the “ideal Indian” in American literature has long been the subject of debate among scholars, Indigenous activists, and literary critics. At the core of this debate is a central tension: are idealized representations inherently harmful, even when they depict Native Americans in a positive light? Or can such portrayals be reframed as bridges toward cross-cultural understanding, provided they are read critically?

One side of the scholarly debate maintains that the “ideal Indian” is simply another form of stereotyping—what Gerald Vizenor calls a “simulation” of Native identity, which exists only to satisfy non-Native

expectations and reinforce settler-colonial narratives (Vizenor 5). These idealizations may appear benevolent on the surface, but they often rely on static, ahistorical characterizations that strip Native peoples of agency. For instance, Cooper’s Uncas in The Last of the Mohicans is courageous and morally upright, but his heroism is tethered to a narrative that requires his death for the story’s resolution. The implication is clear: the noble Indian can be honored, but only in absence—either removed from the land or absorbed into settler history as a symbol rather than a living community (Weaver 26–28).

Another scholarly position, often articulated by cultural historians, suggests that early “ideal Indian” portrayals were sometimes attempts—however flawed—to resist the harsher “savage” stereotypes dominant in colonial propaganda. From this view, works such as Longfellow’s The Song of Hiawatha (1855) introduced many 19th-century readers to a sympathetic, dignified Native figure. Yet, as Robert Berkhofer observes, these literary images were constructed “within the limits of white cultural frameworks,” meaning they reinforced the idea that the only “good Indian” was one who fit a romanticized, non-threatening mold (Berkhofer 72). Thus, even positive stereotypes served colonial goals by portraying Indigenous peoples as relics of a bygone era, rather than as political actors in the present.

The debate intensifies when considering the potential for reclamation. Some contemporary critics argue that certain romanticized images can be reinterpreted through Indigenous-authored adaptations. For example, Louise Erdrich’s The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse engages directly with Catholic missionary narratives, subverting the archetype of the “spiritual Indian” by embedding it in a complex web of gender identity, colonial religion, and reservation life. In such cases, the original trope becomes a tool for critique rather than a perpetuation of myth. However, others caution that reclaiming stereotypes is a delicate act that risks reinforcing them for audiences unfamiliar with the subversion (Deloria 102).

A further layer to the debate concerns the broader consequences of perpetuating any form of “ideal Indian” in cultural discourse. Critics such as Philip Deloria and Jean O’Brien note that these portrayals are not confined to literature—they bleed into policy, education, and public memory. The “vanishing Indian” narrative, for instance, has been mobilized historically to justify land seizures under the premise that Native peoples were disappearing anyway (O’Brien 53). In this light, even well-intentioned idealizations contribute to real-world dispossession by framing Indigenous existence as a past condition.

This tension between intention and impact is central to the debate. While early American authors may have believed they were preserving Native heritage through literature, their works often operated within, and reinforced, settler-colonial ideology.

Conversely, Indigenous writers’ counter-narratives challenge the very premise of “idealization” by presenting characters who defy typecasting. Sherman Alexie’s The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven dismantles both the noble and ignoble stereotypes, replacing them with flawed, funny, and complex individuals navigating poverty, family bonds, and systemic marginalization. In doing so, Alexie forces readers to confront the gap between symbolic Indian figures and actual Native lives.

Ultimately, the scholarly consensus is shifting toward the idea that even positive stereotypes carry damaging effects. While they may invite momentary admiration, they deny Native peoples the right to self-definition in literature and beyond. The contemporary debate is less about whether the “ideal Indian” is harmful, and more about how to replace such images with diverse, authentic, and community-driven narratives that reflect Indigenous realities on their own terms.

Methods. This study applies: Close Reading: Examining diction, metaphor, and narrative voice to reveal underlying assumptions about Indigeneity. For example, Cooper’s repeated emphasis on Uncas’s “lastness” enforces the vanishing myth (Cooper 414).

Historical Contextualization: Situating literary works within their political era – e.g., The Last of the Mohicans amid Indian Removal debates; Hiawatha during post-frontier nostalgia (Longfellow 287).

Postcolonial and Native Studies Frameworks: Using theories of otherness and Indigenous sovereignty to analyze representation (Deloria 4; Green 710).

Comparative Approach: Reading white-authored and Native-authored texts together to highlight differences in voice, agency, and worldview (Momaday 54–55; Zitkala-Ša 132).

Analysis: Case Studies

James Fenimore Cooper, The Last of the Mohicans (1826)

Cooper’s narrative sets the noble Uncas and his father against a backdrop of colonial conflict. They are virtuous but doomed, embodying both the “noble savage” and “vanishing Indian.” Uncas dies heroically, symbolizing the “passing” of Indigenous nobility, which clears symbolic space for white settlement (Cooper 413–15).

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, The Song of Hiawatha (1855)

Longfellow’s epic, modeled on Ojibwe and other Native traditions via Henry Rowe Schoolcraft’s ethnographic work, portrays Hiawatha as a wise, nature-connected leader. However, the poem’s stylization into trochaic tetrameter and sentimental closure turns living traditions into folkloric artifacts for white consumption (Longfellow 286–88).

Mark Twain, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884)

Although focusing on African American slavery, Twain’s novel references Native Americans in passing, usually as cultural metaphors or similes, showing how Indigenous presence had been relegated to rhetorical devices in post-frontier literature (Twain 122).

Zitkala-Ša, American Indian Stories (1921)

In sharp contrast, Zitkala-Ša writes from lived experience, depicting the trauma of assimilationist schooling and the resilience of Sioux traditions. Her narratives reject both noble idealization and ignoble vilification, insisting on modern Native identity (Zitkala-Ša 134–35).

N. Scott Momaday, House Made of Dawn (1968)

Momaday’s Pulitzer-winning novel re-centers Native spiritual and geographical frameworks, depicting Abel’s struggles within both Pueblo traditions and modern America. It refuses closure via disappearance, asserting continuity despite hardship (Momaday 53–55).

Louise Erdrich, Love Medicine (1984)

Erdrich’s interconnected stories portray generations of Ojibwe families, blending humor, tragedy, and

spirituality. Her work dismantles stereotypes by presenting multifaceted, evolving Native lives embedded in real historical conditions (Erdrich 22–24).

Conclusion. The enduring presence of the “ideal Indian” image in American literature reflects not only the creative imagination of authors but also the persistent influence of settler-colonial ideology on cultural production. From early colonial narratives to 19th-century romanticism, these images have offered white audiences a version of Native identity that is emotionally satisfying but politically and historically distorting. Figures such as the noble warrior, the Indian princess, and the vanishing Indian have shaped national myths about innocence, frontier expansion, and cultural harmony—myths that obscure the violence, dispossession, and survival strategies of real Indigenous nations (Berkhofer 72).

The literary canon reveals that even seemingly positive portrayals carry embedded narratives of erasure. Characters like Cooper’s Uncas in The Last of the Mohicans or Longfellow’s Hiawatha are celebrated precisely because they fit a predetermined mold: virtuous, self-sacrificing, and – most importantly – destined to disappear (Cooper 412–15; Longfellow 57). Such representations, while offering moments of sympathy, ultimately reinforce the idea that Indigenous existence belongs to the past. As scholars like Berkhofer, Vizenor, and O’Brien have shown, these cultural patterns feed into wider structures of marginalization, influencing policy, education, and collective memory (Vizenor 5; O’Brien 53).

The shift in the late 20th century, marked by the emergence of Indigenous voices in mainstream literature, challenges the very premise of the “ideal.” Writers like N. Scott Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko, Louise Erdrich, and Sherman Alexie offer narratives grounded in lived experience, linguistic diversity, and community-based storytelling traditions. They replace monolithic images with layered portrayals that encompass humor, pain, resilience, and contradiction (Momaday 112; Silko 89; Erdrich 144; Alexie 67). In doing so, they redefine Native presence in literature – not as a symbolic ornament to American identity, but as an autonomous, ongoing reality.

The debate over the “ideal Indian” is far from academic nitpicking; it speaks to broader questions about cultural ownership, self-representation, and historical truth. The persistence of these images in literature, film, and popular culture suggests that dismantling them requires not only scholarly critique but also structural changes in publishing, education, and media representation. It also demands that readers and scholars approach literary works with a critical awareness of the contexts in which they were produced and the power dynamics they perpetuate (Deloria 102).

Ultimately, the “ideal Indian” image is a mirror – not of Native life, but of the society that imagined it. The task ahead for literature and criticism alike is to move beyond the mirror and toward authentic engagement with Indigenous narratives, told by Indigenous voices, on their own terms. Only then can American literature evolve from using Native characters as symbolic scaffolding for national myths to honoring them as full participants in the nation’s cultural and historical present.

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