

INDIANISING ENGLISH: NATIVIZING INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH

Sudarsan Sahoo

Assistant Professor of English

Parala Maharaja Engineering College

Sitalapalli, Berhamapur, Odisha, INDIA.

Abstract

The Indian writing in English is examined today as a legitimate language of literary expression. It is as relevant and significant despite its foreign origin. We can hardly deny its kinship with Sanskrit and other languages of Indo-Aryan group as they all come from Indo-Germanic tongues. If it had been the language of colonial domination, it had been the language of anti-colonial resistance. Our national leaders Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru had employed it in the service of freedom struggle arousing the nation to fight the Empire. The present research throws lights on English acquiring a specific cultural identity in India and a language of intellectual, emotional, and imaginative articulations of Indian writers.

Keywords: Nativization, Indigenized, Indigenous, Experimentation, Assimilation

English language in the Indian intellectual scenario is getting absorbed enriched by assimilating in turn. Several English words have merged indistinguishably with Indian languages that have not been bothered to find indigenous equivalents for them or where they are, they seldom care to use them. Words like school, desk, bench, book, party, machine, factory, computer, wine, soap, box, car and scores of others have gone into common speech across classes in the country. It is true to realize that 'post-colonized' can never retrieve the pristine purity of English language as observed by Simon During.

Nativizing English has acquired new structures and tonalities in India. There are many instances of the function of English deeply connected to the heart and soul of Indians. At a time when we have ceased to speak of Queen's English and speak instead many Englishes, we need no longer be apologetic about Marathi/Gujrati/Bengali/Tamilian English that carry tonalities and inflexions of mother tongues. When Vikram Seth's novel, *A Suitable Boy* was translated by Gopal Gandhi into Hindi as *Ek Achha sa Ladka*, the author saw it as an act of retrieval since the cultural subtext of the original really belonged to the Hindi milieu. Mulk Raj Anand once told in a conversation that he would first think in Punjabi whatever he would later write it, rather translate into English and that is what gave a Punjabi flavor to his English. Jayanta Mahapatra's claim that he is a Oriya poet writing in English can be seen in the linguistic context.

At a deeper level, Indian language writing and English writing share concepts, experiences, world views and belief systems. This is beautifully experimented in the prominent texts of prolific Indian writers writing in English. They are Ananathaamurthy's *Samskara*, Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, Premchand's *Godan*, Mulk Raj Anand's *Coolie*, O.V. Vijayan's *Khasakkinte Itihasam* or R.K. Narayan's *Malgudi Days*. There is also a sharing of discursive devices and indigenous experiences. R.K. Narayan's *Malgudi Days* and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* are *sthapuranas* or local

histories .Allan Sealy's *Trotternama* is a name like Moghul chronicle, Kiran Nagarkar's *Cuckold* is a kind of hagiography and Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate* is an epic narrative in verse. Agha Shahid Ali and more recently, Jeet Thayil have tried ghazals and qasidas in English like Lorca did in Spanish. V.S. Naipaul claims he was inspired by the Indian epics in the writing of *A House for Mr. Biswas* .Shahshi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* also takes off from Mahabhrata in an ironic vein. Raja Rao commented on the way Indian creative writers should handle English :

One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is own's own.....We cannot write like English, we should not. We can write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us. The tempo of Indian life must be infused into our English expression even as the tempo of American or Irish life has gone into the making of theirs.....and our paths are paths interminable.....we tell interminable tales. This was and still is the ordinary style of our story telling. ('Forward' *Kanthapura*, p.1)

We may examine and introspect the ways English is indigenized by Indian writers. The distinct Indian English Idioms are taking shape in poetry from 1960 onwards. The new poets are unique in their themes in appropriate expressions. They have rejected the high rhetorical devices and colourful overstatements of their predecessors. The poets like Sarojini Naidu, Toru Dutt, Nissim Ezekiel, Kamala Das, Adil Jussawallah, A.K. Ramanujan, Jayanta Mahapatra and Arun Kolatkar helped this nativization in various ways. In his *Rough Passage* R. Parthasarathy wondered: :

How long can foreign poets
Provide the staple of your lines ?
Turn inward, scrape the bottom of your
Past(.11)

A.K. Ramanujan searched the roots and veins of Tamil and Kannada and translated it into divine poetry .He confessed emphatically:

I must seek and will find
My particular hell only in Hindu mind.

(Conventions of Despair,.34)

Ezekiel's poetry is an attempt to recreate Indian characters in their natural situations. He employed colloquial speech rhythms and conventional tones in poems like 'The Professor' , 'Goodbye Party for Miss Puspa T.S.'

'Hangover' etc. Here lies the simplicity of the poem, 'Hangover'

No Indian whisky sir all imported this is Taj.
Yes sir soda is Indian sir.
Midnight.
Taxi strike. George Fernandez.....

Half the day hazy with previous night.(32)

Three other poems are written in the same technique of colloquial poetry:

Remember me? I am Professor Sheth
 Once I taught you Geography. Now
 I am tired, though my health is good.....
 If you are coming again this side by chance,
 Visit please my humble residence also
 I am living just on opposite houses backside.

(The Professor,.22)

Come again
 All are welcome whatever caste
 If not satisfied tell us
 Otherwise tell others
 God is great.

(Irani Restaurant Instruction ,11)

You are going?
 But you will visit again
 Any time, any day
 I am not believing in ceremony
 Always I am enjoying your company.

(The Patrio,.32)

In the texture of poetry, Ramanujan has used Indian words and expressions like goonda, guru, mantra, ashram, bhikshuks, chapatti, pan, burkha, Ramrajya etc. The national sense and sensibilities are the pivotal focus in his poetry. He has made an honest statement about the sources of Indian poet writing in English:

English and my disciplines give me my outer forms-linguistic, metrical, logical and other such ways of the shaping of experience, and my thirty years in India, my frequent visits and field trips, personal and professional preoccupations with Kannada, Tamil, the classics and folklore gave me my substance, my 'inner' forms, images and symbols. They are continuous with each other, and I no longer can tell what comes from where (Parthasarathy, OUP, p. 95-96)

Jayanta Mahapatra, a significant voice in poetry, is true to Indian closely the realities, the plights of the people of Odisha. He has vehemently presented the sorrows and sufferings of people in his poem entitled 'Death in Orissa':

Nothing but the paddy's twisted throat
 Exposed on the crippled earth, nothing but
 Impotence in lowered eyes.....
 Nothing but cries of shriveled women
 Cracking against the bloodied altar of Man,
 Nothing but the moment of fear
 When they need a God whom can we them some good.(45)

Kamala Das, a noted poetess has deep observations on the philosophical conceptions of Indian values, approaches and insights:

Bereft of soul
 My body shall be bare
 Bereft of my body
 My soul shall be bare

(The Suicide 12)

One can go on multiplying examples. Arun Kolatkar's poems like *Jejuri, Sarpa Satra* are Indian in many ways, at the levels of myth, ritual and the modern urban reality. Rukmini Bhaya Nair's poetry is not only deeply Indian in the ways it confronts social and individual experience, but in the use of certain forms borrowed Sanskrit like stuti or hymn. Several poets writing today from Arvind Krishna Mehrotra and Dillip Chitre to Ranjit Hoskote, Arundhati Subramaniam, Jeet Tayil, Vijay Nambisan are deeply Indian in their themes, sensibility and their way of looking at things.

The Indian writers of fictions are talented and creative artists to present the situations at their own will. They are quite confident to blend the language and infuse English with their essence. Mulk Raj Anand was first the conscious experimenter followed by Raja Rao and Bhabani Bhattacharya. They with G.V. Desani, took liberties with diction and syntax. Meenakshi Mukherjee in her *twice-born fiction* points to certain linguistic problems the Indian writers of English face:

1. They have to write in English about people who do not normally speak or think in English
2. They have to write in an acquired language which is a situation very different from those of American, Australian, Canadian or West Indian writer.

Looking the writings of V.S. Naipaul's use of Indian dialects in his *House for Mr Biswas, or Derek Walcott* bringing in special effects from creole dialects in St. Lucia, we understand the effects and impacts of Indian dialogues and conversations in English flavor.

Many prominent Indian writers experiment with diction and transform the structure of sentence. The literal translations can be seen mostly in Mulk Raj Anand. Look at some examples: "Is this any talk", "Are you talking the true talk", "May I be your sacrifice". There are Punjabi-Hindi expressions 'counterfeit luck', swear words and abuses used by the peasants as also proverb like

“Your own calf’s teeth seem golden’ (The Road,p.24) “A goat in hand is better than a buffalo in the distance’ (The Road,p.22) “The camels are being swept away , the ants say , they float’’ (*The Big Heart* p.206).Khuswant Singh has also similar flavor to his English : “Sardar Saheb, you are a big man , and we are but small radishes from an unknown garden’’ (*I Shall not hear the Nightiangale*)

The Indian English drama begins to strengthen its position and started carving its own identity and place in Indian Writing in English.It registers remarkable growth and also earns glory at national and international level in contemporary era.With thematic and theatrical innovations, Indian English Drama marks the beginning of distinctive tradition in the realm of world drama.The playwrights find myths, legends, history, folklore etc. very useful and attractive for the thematic investment in their plays.In fact , contemporary playwrights reinvestigate this treasure of knowledge with present socio-cultural and political scenario.However, it should be pinpointed that contemporary drama mainly depends on translation.The plays, written in vernacular languages, are translated into English.So, the translation work boosted up the Indian dramatic scene.In this context, the contributions of some great playwrights like Girish Karnad, Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar are highly wonderful and need special elucidation.

Girish Karnad is one of the outstanding playwrights of modern India.He has considerably enriched and enlightened the tradition of Indian English drama. During his childhood days in country side of Karnataka, he encountered with some Natak Mandalies which made indelible impressions on his sensitive mind and subsequently find expressions in his dramatic works.Karnad has composed eight plays. All these plays are originally appeared in Karnad and later on, have been translated into English. He began his dramatic career with the publication of his maiden play *Yayati* in 1961.He is retelling the myth of *Mahabharata* very skillfully in this play.He works out the motivation that facilitates Yayati’s final choice .It is a unique and original play.His plays,*Tughlaq*, *Hayavadana*,*Nag-Mandal* ,*Tale-Danda* are reincarnated into English.

The next great dramatic voice in contemporary era that needs to be discussed is that of Vijay Tendulkar who provides new force and direction to Marathi theatre as well as Indian English theatre.As a prolific dramatist of Marathi, he begins his career as a freelance writer and emerges as a prominent playwright on the literary scene of India.His dramatic corpus is vast,varied and wonderful. He has originally written all his plays in Marathi.Most of his plays are translated into English.*Some of his well-known plays are The Silence!The Court is in Session(1968)Gharisam Kotwal(1972)Kanyadan(1982)Sukhram Binder (1972) Kamala(1982).Considering his great service to Indian theatre , he has been honoured by Natak Academy in 1972.*

Another brilliant star in the literary firmament of India is that of Badal Sircar who externalizes the existential attitude of modern life through his dramatic works.He has to his credit ,*Solution X, Evan Indrajit(1462), That Other History(1964), There is not End(1971)*Badal Sircar is called ‘Barefoot Playwright’.Since theatre is the effective and powerful medium of sharing our views and opinions with people, Sircar employs theatre as a mode of social change and expresses his views and ideas pertaining to social –economic issues. What makes him endearing dramatist is his successful attempt to relate theatre to people and develops it to suitable people’s theatre.He aims at delineating ground reality of Indian villages:He has not only broken the dictionary between the actors and audience but reduced the drama to its barest by dispensing with conventional story, plot, character and dialogue.(14)

Sircar involves new technique of live communication with playgoers who also actually participate in the performance of play especially concerning contemporary social issues. He evolves 'third theatre' deriving the good qualities of the first and second theatre of Calcutta. Sircar's 'third theatre' facilitates the process of 'being within and experiencing 'with the persona and event being performed on the stage. His theatre differs from other theatre by bringing actors and spectators on the same wave length mentally and physically as well.

Apart from literary scenario enriched with English language, the present classrooms of India are increasingly borderless. Many international students from diverse language streams come to study India as they find the costs more affordable in this country than in their home country. Learning English is functionally as good as anywhere in the Anglo-American world. Several universities from Australia, Britain and USA have franchised centres in our metropolies. Increasing pressure on the classroom has led to a situation where teaching –learning policies and programmes do require a high priority on the national agenda in the country. The literary critics and academicians at this juncture is to sensationalize the experiences and emotions of English in India. The structural clarity, the nuances of meanings and uniqueness of themes are the treasures of English in India. As a literary, administrative, and cultural language of India, It is not privileged or de-privileged. It is one of the several languages in which the multilingual Indian creativity chooses to express itself.

Let me conclude my observations with some relevant lessons from the African and American encounters with English. They have fought the hegemony of English by creating their own English, infusing it with tones, timbres, rhythms, and expressions of native speech as has been done by Derek Walcott or Sam Selvon. There are writers like Ngugi who have chosen to shift their creative writing into their own languages and persuade others to write in pidgins, creoles, other dialects of English rather than 'standard English'. Zimunya of Zimbabwe admits that English can be shifting and inflexible while translating from Shona, his mother tongue. Gabriel Okara, the Nigerian poet, also speaks of 'untranslatability' of Ijo experience. Poets like Christopher Okigbo, Okot p'Bitek, Kofi Awoonor and Denis Brutus bring into their writing the qualities of oral poetry thus collapsing orature with ecriture. Chinua Achebe considers English richer than his language, Igbo, though his expression is impacted by his native speech. Writers also engage in code-switching and code-mixing, just as G.V. Desani in India had allowed the intrusion of Sanskrit compounding in *All About H. Hatterr*.

Nativizing the English language in different forms of literature has become a practice of writers today. There is a great demand and necessity of English as a language for better understanding, appreciation and retention of finer elements of life. The local, the regional and the native images and pictures are the potent forces of writings of contemporary writers. The strength of the language is solely depending on the vitality and potentialities of Indian writers on literary circles and scenes. The practice is shaping a new turn in connection with the realities of Indian life and survival techniques of Indians. The writings are the vital modes of expression, expressing the necessities and demands of life. The fragmentation of selves, the reconnection of the fragmented selves are the complex theatrical devices of playwrights of contemporary days. The writers are prolific in selection of excellent thematic contexts and situations.

References

- Parthasarathy, R.(1976) Ten Twentieth century Indian poets. Delhi: OUP.
- Naik,M.K.(1995) A History of Indian Writing in English,New Delhi:Sahitya Akademi.
- Naik,M.K.(1995)*A History of Indian English Literature* ,New Delhi:Sahitya Akademi
- Rao,Raja(1989)'Foreward".*Kanthapura*.Delhi: OUP
- Rickett, Arthur Compton (1990) A History of English Literature,NewDelhi Universal Book Stall
- Reddy, K.Venkata(2005), "India's Barefoot Playwright:Badal Sircar"*The Plays of Tagore, Sirca and Mahasweta Devi* , New Delhi:Prestigious Books

