
INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH

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Abstract:

A dozen or more distinct languages and literatures flourish today on the Indian literary scene, and most of these are distributed on broadly regional basis. However, there are, three exceptions Sanskrit, Urdu and English. The Aryan conquest brought Sanskrit to India, perhaps three or four thousand years ago; the six centuries of Muslim rule led to the rise of Urdu, as an expression of a composite culture, and the two centuries of British rule made Indo-Anglian literature possible.

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INTRODUCTION

The effective presence of the British in India that made Indian writing in English possible as well as necessary about half a century old. When enterprising Indians started writing in English. First, then, occurred the Indo-English literature comprising both (Anglo-Indian and Indo-Anglian) literature- was an inevitable result under the circumstances. Sundry Englishmen wrote on Indian themes since the time of Sir William Jones, and the historians Robert Orme and Alexander Dow, in the latter half of the eighteenth century; and not many decades later were witnessed the first sure beginnings of Indo-Anglian literature.

In comparison with other Indian languages and except Hindi the English is almost uniformly distributed all over the country. Although it is the first language of only the Anglo-Indians, a microscopic minority, the people who know and can speak and read English as a second language in India. Hence, for all practical purposes, English is the all-India language, in indispensable use at national conferences or gatherings, whether official or non-official.

The popular vogue of Hindi is of course much greater, at least in North-India; but for administrative purposes, and in higher education and the higher judiciary, English still holds a paramount place. It would not be wide of the mark to say that Indo-Anglian literature has a substantial base today, and this base- notwithstanding periodical scares- seems likely to be strengthened rather than weakened as the years pass.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH

The point to remember is that, although Indo-Anglian literature is a matter of recent history, Australian and Canadian literature too can hardly claim a longer history. Besides, these commonwealth literatures in English are also more or less contemporaneous with the modern phase of the various regional literatures in India, having grown out of the same time-nexus and similar conditions of political and intellectual ferment.

One can perceive a rhythm or a pattern in the history of all those territories that have affected the difficult passage from colonial subjection to political independence, covering a period ranging from 100 to 200 or more years. First came the shock, the trauma of conquest, a stage of demoralization and mute acceptance of alien rule. Then came the period of slow awakening, the sense of hurt and shame and resentment, and also the desire to imitate the rulers and adopt their language, their manners, and even their religion.

As a result the base for Indian writing in English is much wider and stronger today than at the time of independence. It is true literature is the creation of sundry gifted individuals. During the past 10 years, the outlook for Indo-Anglian literature has become brighter than before. There are journals in English the workshop Miscellany, Mother India, Poet, Dialogue, Transition, Levant, Contra that publish poetry and creative prose, and there are the literary pages in the papers and weekly magazines, besides desirous critical journals like the Miscellany, the Literary Criterion, Indian Literature, the Literary Half-Yearly, the Indian Journal of English studies, Triveni, Quest and several University Journals that publish reviews and critical articles.

Moreover, Indian writing in English has now begun to receive scholarly and critical attention in the Indian and foreign Universities. It figures as a paper at the M.A. level in several Universities in India, and courses in Indo-Anglian literature are given in many American and Commonwealth Universities. Indian teachers of English literature have been publishing learned papers and critical monographs, not only on British and American authors, but even on Indo-Anglian writers. Professors like S.C. Sen Gupta and C. Narayan Menon have published authoritative studies of Shakespeare, Rajan has given us excellent monographs on Milton and Yeats, K.B.Vaid has written on Henry James's Tales, V.K. Chari on Whitman, M.K. Naik on Somerset Maugham and Raja Rao, and Saros Cowasji on Sean O'Casey and Mulk Raj Anand.

Moreover, symposia on literary problems have been organized at the Mysore University, the Indian Institute of Advanced Study (Simla) and other places, and these too have helped to give a tone to the critical climate in the country. English has remained in the saddle all along, Indian writing in English has achieved a new range and power, literacy in English has been steadily growing, there are more schools, colleges, and universities, there are more English newspapers and readers of such papers, then even before. Rajaji has boldly asserted that English is the gift of Saraswati to us Sarawati is the Hindu Goddess of Learning and the Arts and we shall reject this light from the West only at peril to our sanity and security. The position therefore is that people now continue to talk and write in English, the language of the higher administration and the law courts remains English, the proceedings of the numerous all-India Conferences and Congresses are conducted in English, and the many examinations and

interviews for the Indian Administrative and other all-Indian services and even most of the provincial services are also conducted in English.

PRE-INDEPENDENCE ERA

When discussing the work of Indo-Anglian writers, it is sometimes argued that several of them (especially the novelists and, the autobiographers) are more interested in a foreign audience than in an audience in India. It is said that these writers, instead of presenting a true image of India, give the kind of image that the west (particularly affluent British or America) is supposed to want or expect. On salutary development is the growing interest of Indo-Anglian writers in the Indian literary and critical tradition. They were always aware of the European literary tradition, and the intelligent use of the English language itself involves a certain intimacy with English and American literature. What makes Indo-Anglian literature an Indian literature , and not just an overflow of English literature, is the equality of Indianness in the choice of subject, in the texture of thought and play of sentiment, in the organization of the material in terms of form and in the creative use of language. It is hardly worth pointing out that Indianness is not meant to be a substitute for discipline or a deliberate lowering of standards. For example, an Indian writer may avoid Tragedy, whether Hellenic or Shakespearian, and prefer romantic comedies of the Kalidasian or late Shakespearian brand.

It is the unique role of Indo-Anglian literature both to derive from and to promote an all India consciousness. To put it in another way, we should expect Indian writing in English- rather than any of the regional literatures to project a total vision of Mother India, interpreting her aspirations and hopes and recording her arduous and frustrations and partial achievements, not only before the outside world, but also before the diverse linguistic groups within the country, and thereby promote a sense of national identity, an ineffable feeling of oneness with the Mother of her six hundred million children. Sir Aurobindo pointed out in an article in the *Bandemataram* sixty years ago; the sap that keeps it that is, our patriotism or involvement in our national identity alive is the realization of the motherhood of God in our country. And Gandhiji too said at about the same time the *Hind Swaraj* that the ancient Hindus saw that India was one undivided land so made by nature, that India was one nation, and to bring this home to the people they established holy places in different parts of India and fired the people with an idea of nationality in a manner unknown in other parts of the world. Our national epic, *the Ramayana*, is the epic of India; *the Mahabharata* is the veritable grammar of national literature, and even in Rajaji's abridge version in English, it has done a great deal to project a consciousness of 'national identity'.

It is not necessary that a novel should, in geographical terms, comprehend the whole of India. The action may be located in one place (as in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*; Kabir's *Men and Rivers*, Narayan's *The Dark Room*, Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, Kamala Markandaya's *Nector in a Sieve* and yet it may create the impression that it could have happened almost anywhere in India. But novels like Anand's *Coolie* and Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* may immediately suggest the moving multiplicity of the life lived in the vast spaces of

India. In K.M. Munshi's epic of ancient India, *Bhagvan Parashurama*, and in the *Tapasvini*, the epic of modern India, there are total projections of India, the richness of the detail being as impressive as the unmistakable unity of the whole.

POST-INDEPENDENCE ERA

Post-independence literature in India is rather full of muffled voices or hysterical cries, and the average writer's world is filled too much with the irritations, frustrations and excitements of the moment. But there have been exceptions too. Bhabani Bhattacharya's *A Goddess named Gold* is a call to fidelity and faith addressed to the new Indian nation. Narayan's *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* is a modern rendering of the old 'Bhasmasura myth, and carries a warning to our mighty men of steel that they are foredoomed to achieve only their own destruction. And Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* attempts a portrait of the perennial India which, being perennial, is also modern.

However, the commonwealth are many though we speak, so to say, one language. In India, on the other hand, we wish to believe that we are one nation, though actually we speak a dozen different languages, It should be either way. Though one touch of nature makes the whole kin, but it is in literature that the heart-beats of a nation are heard, and it is through the medium of a commonly inspired and shared literature that we can exchange pulses as it were, and realize that while the differences are on the surface, the sense of unity flows as in an underground river and we duly receive the baptism of rebirth into the fellowship of a humane faith

How, about Indians writing in English? How shall we describe Indian creative writing in English? Even as the work of a Thoreau or a Hemingway is American literature. But Indian literature comprises several literatures Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kashmiri, Oriya, Punjabi, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Urdu, not to mention Sanskrit, for people continue to write in it though the readers are few and for between and Indian writing in English is one of the voices in which India speaks. It is a new voice, no doubt, but it is a much Indian as the others.

It is legitimate to view Indo-Anglian literature as a curious native eruption, an expression of the practical no less than creative genius of the Indian people. Indians have written and are writing in English for communicating with one another and with the outside world, for achieving self-expression too artistically using English, necessarily, in an Indian way. The best Indo-Anglian poets have given us something which neither English poetry nor any of our regional literatures can give us.

CRITICAL EVALUATIVE ERA

Indian writing in English is rather like one animal imitating the steps of another. Some have even gone to the extent of, calling this literature a parasitic literature. Diffidence and lack of faith have done as much harm as complacency and lack of right training, and Indian writing in English has suffered in consequence. But the following words of Sri Aurobindo for here only a

distinguished Indian can dispel the hesitations of fellow Indians should serve to give the quietus to such defeatism or derogation.

It is not true in all cases that one can't write first class things in a learned language. Both in French and English people to whom the language was not native have done remarkable work, although that is rare. What about Jawarhalal's autobiography? Many English critics think it first class in its own kind; of course he was educated in an English public school, but he was not born to that language. Some of Toru Dutt's poems, Sarojini's, Harin's have been highly placed by good English critics, and I don't think we need be more queasy than Englishmen themselves. If first-class excludes everything inferior to Shakespeare and Milton that is another matter.

To the critics in England it can be said English is a world language. This status carried privileges as well as responsibilities, advantages as well as disadvantages. To seek to preserve a norm yet permit ample variety is to walk on the razor's edge, but it can be done. August Wilson does not write like William Faulkner, and it is no wonder Mulk Raj Anand writes differently from both Wilson and Faulkner. They are all trying to be articulate each in his own fashion.

As Dr. Gunnar Myrdal the Swedish economist has pointed out, culturally an underdeveloped country has reasons for learning from all the world. But, in the developing world like India, the future is with English, not Hindi; And there is an intelligentsia scattered all over India that already knows English. It is wiser on the whole to foster to learn to be modern, we have to think of the future as well as the present, and we have to think of the mass, the people who have to be enabled to rise to a live of cultural and economic self-sufficiency.

We cannot list Rammohan Roy and Ranade, Vivekananda and Aurobindo, Tilak and Gokhale, Tagore and Gandhi in the calendar of our prophets and poets, and yet cultivate a blind antipathy towards the language they used as the forceful means of communicating their meaning the measures to India and the world. These stalwarts were among the marks of modern India, and what they said and wrote must therefore be cherished as our national literature. English then, is one of our national languages, and Indo-Anglian literature too is one of our national literatures.

There is also another side to the shield. Admitted or not, the fact remains that some of the leading practitioners of Indian writing in English are today occupying high positions in our public life. Our late Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, and our former Presidents, like Radhakrishnan, and A.P.J. Abdul Kalam are writers of great distinction, and their writing has been exclusively in English. We have bilingualists like India's elder statesman, C. Rajagopalachari, who is as much at home in English as in Tamil. Although the Indian Constitution does not list English as one of the languages of the Union, our National Academy of Literature (the Sahitya Academy, as it is called) has an Advisory Board for English; and the Academy official journal, Indian Literature, is also in English. Our journals and newspapers publish fiction and poetry in English poems a day, or over 10,000 per year. There is an Indian Association for English studies that holds Conferences annually.

There is a continuous Western critical tradition from Aristotle to T.S. Eliot, and more particularly and English critical tradition from Sidney and Ben Johnson and Dryden to the mentors of our own day, Eliot, Richards and Leavis. Likewise, there is an Indian critical tradition with the emphasis on *rasa* and *dhwani*, the *bhavas* and the *alankaras*, and in the line of

law-givers like Bharata, Bhatta Nayaoka, Mammata, Anandavardhana and Abhinavagupta have come modern thinkers like Tagore and Sri Aurobindo. But even as Indian English has not yet acquired an arresting distinctiveness like the American English of say, William Faulkner, Indian criticism too has yet to find its fact and stand its ground boldly.

Indian English is partly conditioned by Indian geography and the grammar and speech habits its in different linguistic areas, but it cannot go very far from the imperatives of standard English as it prevails in England. Thus one easily falls between two stools- or, wonder of wonders, one achieves the double triumph of honest translation and glorious transformation. The Indian critic should make allowances, be satisfied with what appears to be rather less than the whole are of the Indian way of artistic expression; and the English critic too should make allowances and be prepared for surprises, elaborations, and seemingly strange similitudes. An experimental new literature would need proper critical approach for its evaluation.

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