

MAKING MODERN INDIA THROUGH LITERARY RENAISSANCE

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Abstract: Indian literary trajectory is a dynamic process in its multicultural and multi-linguistic dimensions. It has transformed the restricted canonical writing to the democratic literary production with full autonomy. It is on rise with cultural treasures. In ancient India, the literature of the rulers was produced with unbound eulogy about their political exploits. Sanskrit was a potential medium for literary expression and glory of the past. It represented only mainstream Indian cultural life. Never was discussed in the past the representative role of a woman in the positive sense. Male domination through its patriarchal system ruled the roost at all levels. Sanskrit was rated as a divine language which was meant for a few people of the elite section. The larger masses of Hindu society was out of its reach. It is a historical fact. In this restricted scenario, education was hardly imparted to the common masses. Thus Sanskrit knowledge was confined and reachable to a few elitist people.

The present paper foregrounds the English language and how its seed was sown in colonial India, which grew like a banyan through the colonial and post- colonial periods. It also examines as to how the British strived their best for its dissemination. The English language loaded with western culture was imposed on the Indian masses. This paper further looks into how the culturally and politically embedded English language contributed to Indian English writing by the English educated Indian intellectuals who were instrumental in placing India on the world literary map today.

Key Words: Sanskrit, Persian, Caste system, Linguistic Plurality, Indian Culture, English, Indo-Anglian writing, Indian Intellectuals, the British.

Historicizing English in British India

India was colonized by the British for more than two centuries. It is the British who made an entry with an idea of trading in India to spread Christianity and expand their political base with the English language as a communicative potential. It is true that Sanskrit and Persian were hegemonic in all spheres of social life. Despite the historical role of Sanskrit and Persian in India, the British officials and Indian intellectuals collective found these languages inadequate in acquiring global knowledge. They preferred English as a substitute for the purpose given the fact

that these dominant languages didn't provide any opportunity to the majority people for their wider participation. Caste system as social evil obstructed the mutual interaction of the various communities within the country can be cited as one of the strong reasons for this. The prevalent socio-economic and cultural circumstances led the British to advance their political ideology and religious cause through the Christian missionaries.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the most enlightened Bengali scholar of his generation immensely contributed to the introduction of English in British India. With that cause, he had pleaded with the British Governor General, Lord Amherst, for an official sponsorship of the English education in the country. In fact, he was never averse to Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic languages though he was well versed in them. "The Sanskrit system of education would be best calculated to keep this country in darkness". (Roy 5). He expressed his discontent over Sanskrit which yielded nothing on the front of the scientific and technological development. He realized the fact that none of these languages could serve as an adequate source of knowledge and envisaged an enlightened system of instruction in the modern age. He was determined to advance his English cause in the interest of the country despite bitter opposition from the leaders of the orthodox Hindu society. He spoke the forceful English language and wrote it with the same spirit much before Thomas Babington Lord Macaulay produced his '*Minutes*'.

Lord Macaulay proposed to create English-speaking Indian middle-class elite, whose proposal was misunderstood and the Hindu elitists heaped allegations against him in many ways. He suggested saying, "English education would train natives who were Indian in blood and colour... English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect." (Macaulay 1979). Macaulay intended to take steps to democratize the English language in a way that could be accessible to the majority Indians.

It was the need of the day to carry out administrative and educational transactions effectively. In this backdrop, he was reluctant to recommend lavish expenditure on Sanskrit and Arabic colleges. "What we spend on the Arabic Sanskrit colleges is not merely a dead loss to the cause of truth; it is bounty money paid to raise up champions of error" (Macaulay 1979). During the Macaulay period, the number of English educated were on the rise and a good number of English books were sold in India. English Language being the powerful medium was used not only for imparting education but also for inculcating western culture in the natives and it served their political ends thereof. The vehicle of language carried with it food and dress culture for the colonized. Language is not just a medium, it endows many with other life-changing qualities and life-shaping attributes. For colonizers, it was (political) power that they won over the colonized, the Indian subjects.

Sanskrit had its hay days in Indian literary contribution through ancient and medieval periods until modern Indian languages came into place. There is no doubt to say that it is the English language which emerged as a powerful substitute for Sanskrit. Today, it is the language of art, science, commerce and other disciplinary intellectual discourse. The British perfectly colonized Indians but at the same time they democratized their language in India. In other words it was made reachable to all. Their thoughts about spreading English might give a scope for suspicion. The idea of introducing English might be prejudiced for a reason of their political exigency and

trading ambitions. In fact, the scope of the English language was made wide to be within the reach of the masses.

Rajagopalachari known as Rajaji, a South Indian leader vociferously argued for English practice in India and strongly suggested that it be continued as an official language and a medium of instruction in all higher learning institutions. Several India intellectuals were in support of English education. But Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's father, who was a learned scholar of Arabic and Persian languages denounced English learning and refused to back his son's formal schooling. This virulent opposition surfaced exceptionally among some Indians though they themselves were no less ambitious to learn English. The Indian elites were in favour of English while lower sections of society, who were relegated to the vernaculars, were far away from the precincts of the English education. With this consequence, one would hardly see any literary contribution by the marginalized during the colonial period.

We have to accept the fact that though English is democratized in the modern period unlike Sanskrit in the remote past, both were the languages of the rulers. It is true that Sanskrit was a medium of ancient Indian literature while, in the beginning, English was used to create a class to serve the British administration in India. Arabic and Persian also remained as the languages of the Muslim rulers while Urdu was relegated to the lower classes of the Muslim Community. "Sanskrit then and English now, both of them rulers' languages, took root in the Indian soil while Arabic and Persian also languages of (Muslim) and state languages for a longer period than English." (Narasimhaiah 65) Of these so called powerful elitist languages in British India, none of them could unify and integrate the Indian cultural and linguistic plurality. Nor these languages created the literature of the masses. It is because there was no unified law of the language. Sanskrit and Persian languages enjoyed prestige by overriding the boundaries of regional languages until the consolidation of the colonial power in India.

In this prevalent scenario, "English had the historical advantage of coming to India at a time when Sanskrit and Persian had long played out their mission as languages of enlightenment and had become mere custodians of past glory and sanctuaries of orthodoxy". (Kripalani 17) It is a clear manifestation of the waning of the elitist languages with the English language which has made foray into the Indian political and administrative spheres. Our country is a haven for a multilingual system given its diversity. English is only the language with a potential to unite different language speaking people. "English is the gift of Saraswathi to us." (Chary 66) For C D Narasimhaiah, "the regional languages and literature (including Hindi) stand for divisiveness while English is the only language that keeps the country united."(66)

English Writing with Indian Sensibility

The term Indo-Anglian literature is used to denote original literary creation in the English language by Indians. This term also distinguishes from Anglo-Indian literature and Indo-English literature. These three terms are different from each other in their meaning. "Many are allergic to the expression 'Indo-Anglian' and some would prefer 'Indo English'. The advantage with 'Indo-Anglian' is that it can be used both as adjective and as substantive' (Iyengar 4)." When the English language is further democratized, and modernized not as a foreign tongue but as an

intellectual make up, Indian literature flourished into Indian writing in English. “English is not a ‘foreign tongue in India, but it is only the language of intellectual make up, not of our emotional make-up” (Rao np).

An average Indian in general and an intellectual in particular cannot ignore the cultural and political history of one’s nation. It speaks volumes of facts about the life of people. The identity of a nation can possibly be carved out of the cultures and traditions of people. Representation of cultural and linguistic plurality of our nation in our literary writing with Indian sensibility, is a matter of challenge. With English as a medium of expression, bringing the entire Indian life into literary description would amount to Indian writing in English.

Indian literature is written in different Indian languages today. One language literature is different from the other with its cultural/caste identity. In that Indian literature(s) is abound with multiple voices. The unification of different voices and cultural identities need to be expressed in one unified literary writing. The attempt to write in English with a sense of ‘Indianness’ would serve the purpose. V K Gokak is of the view that Indian writing in English is Indianness of India.” (64) We need to examine whether Indian literature is different from Indian writing in English. Indian literature was written in Sanskrit in the ancient period or it is being written in any Indian language too. In the post-colonial period, Indian literature was immensely produced in regional/vernacular languages with their specific identity so as to be part of Indian literature. Is it possible to reflect Indian sensibility in English writing? English is accepted as a second language for study in various schools of the country and it has become one of the Indian languages because of its deep roots in the Indian soil.

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, than ever before (Iyengar 10).

Literature written with the native cultural sensibility by the Indians would be Indian writing in English. Though English is employed as a potential medium for literary expression in the Indian milieu, it cannot be termed English or American literature. English has become ours, it’s not less ours for being primarily the English man’s or the American’s, and Indo-Anglian literature too is ours, the literature which, with all its limitations, still taught us to be a new nation and a new people.” (Iyengar 8) Indian English writers and other critical literary practitioners give a justification that “they try to prioritize literary production in English over other Indian language literatures; defining a kind of nationalism-a pan Indian literary and cultural tradition in Indian writing in English as a systematic discipline.” (Saibaba 61).

Indian writing in English didn’t flourish by itself with mere spread of English language. There was a colonialist inspiration to its production and growth. In fact, the colonialist writings of Rudyard Kipling, William Jones, Meadows Tayler, William Jones, E M Forster laid a foundation for the tradition of English writing in India. For this literary enterprise, Anglo-Indian writing was a forerunner of Indian English literature. “G.S Amur praises Meadows Taylor as “the first major writer in Anglo-Indian literature who attempted the great theme of the cultural dialect between the east and the west and laid down the tradition for writers like Kipling, E.M. Forester, Raja

Rao and Kamala Markandaya”. Though his writing might not be within the frame of colonial thoughts, he could inspire Indian writers towards writing Indian English with Indian spirit and tenor.

The Bengali intellectual and poet Bankim Chandra Chatterjee wrote his first novel, *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864) in English, which portrays the landscapes and people of the 19th century Bengali village. He created a strong sense of Indian nationalism through his literary works abound with allegories and personifications. His *Anandamath* (1882) is another work that inspired Indian freedom fighters. His national song, *Bande Mataram*, also equally inspired generations of revolutionaries too. Sri Aurobindo was of the view that Bankim in his later works “will rank among the Makers of Modern India”. Apart from his English novel, he wrote several other novels in Bengali. The early English novel appeared at a time when the genre was still in a malleable stage. It is agreed that the novels came into being in India in the half of the nineteenth century.

The first Indo-Anglian writers of verse and prose include Derozio, Kashprasad Ghose. They belonged to the pre-Macaulay period as so far their English education was concerned. Michael Madhusudan Dutt, a Bengali poet came afterwards. The poetry of Henry Derozio was influenced by the romantic poets whereas the poetry of Kashi Prasad was conventional and imitative. He freely wrote English poetry, prose and drama. To Bengali poets, Madhusudan Dutt is something of a poet's poet.

The contribution of these writers can be located in the first phase of Indian writing in English. Rabindranath Tagore, the universally acclaimed Bengali poet, philosopher and dramatist, enriched Indian literature with his works written in Bengali and subsequent translation of his works into English. His *Geetanjali* is a case in point. “The Bengali language is likened to the Greek while *Geetanjali* is compared to the Paradiso. *Geetanjali* was trans- created by Tagore with additions and deletions wherever necessary. “The translations turned out to be substantial reworkings, many of them different in almost every imaginable sense from the originals.”(Chaudhuri 106).

The English educated Sarojini Naidu wrote poetry both in Bengali and English. She published three volumes of poetry under different titles. In fact, Naidu produced English poetry without the heart of India in it. Arthur Symons wrote an introduction to Naidu's ‘*The Golden Threshold*’ while Edmond Gosse advised her to maintain the revelation the heart of India. Naidu's poems, *Palanquin* and *Bangle Sellers* beautifully portray Indian customs and traditions. Thus she tries to retain the Indian sensibility in her English poetry. On Gosse's suggestion, she created Indianness in her poetry. Indian leaders like M K Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru effectively employed English to delineate the realms of varied experiences through their autobiographies. Indo-Anglian literature is of a recent origin when compared to Indian literature. The second phase of Indian English writing is associated with the internationally acclaimed novelists, Mulk Raj Anand, R K Narayan and Raja Rao, the trinity of the Indian English fiction. Mulk Raj Anand set his writing with the focus on the underprivileged sections of Indian society. His first novel, *Untouchable* (1935) set in the Punjab environs delineates the predicament of the Bangis.

Anand as a humanist understood the social trauma of the less fortunate and became a friend of millions of Indian untouchables. He used Indian words in his fiction to indianize the English language. R. K. Narayan who hailed from South India used English language at ease with thoughts and feelings originated in the Indian culture. *Swamy and Friends* (1935), the first of a trilogy of novels written by him, set in pre-independence days, severely criticizes the education system. Unlike Mulk Raj Anand, Narayan delineates the middle class life. Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938), the first novel, is replete with the theme of struggle for Independence basing on the principle of Gandhi's non-violence.

These novels in their thematic variations mirror the socio-political circumstances prevalent during the colonial rule. In the third phase of Indian writing in English, the younger generation writers like Kamala Markandeya, Babani Battachariya, Nayantara, Ruskin Bond, Anita Desai, Arun Joshi and Malgonkar (1950-70) produced Indian literature in English. And fourth phase of Indian writing in English begins with Salman Rushdi's *Midnight's Children*, a period which heralded a great freedom with language, fantasy, laughter, irony and satire. This phase includes other writer like Amitav Ghosh Vikram Seth, Shashi Despande and Shash Tharoor. One would see resurgence of women's writing critiquing the male-dominated society. The experiences of the diasporic writers cannot be ignored in terms of their contribution to Indian writing in English. So the Indian diasporic novels can be associated with Indian English literature.

Conclusion

English language as one of the Indian languages became a cementing force in uniting different linguistic and cultural groups in India. This is because of Indian intellectuals who emphatically asserted the need of the English education for Indians to gain knowledge in science and technology. Sanskrit and Persian were inadequate in imparting global knowledge to the citizens of India. Despite opposition within the country, English was/is accepted as a common language by Indian intellectuals to produce Indian literature in English. This English phenomenon led to English translation of Indian texts. Critics consider Indian English literature a narrative of Indian nationalism. It is a truly national literature. English with its pivotal role in all spheres of human life is building the Indian nation by revolutionizing Indian literary writing. Let's march towards indianized English renaissance in literary study with our native sensibility intact.

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