Past, Present and Future of Indian English Language and Literature: Some Random Observations

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Introduction

This paper attempts to analyze the evolution of both Indian English as a language and as literature and show how the development of one actually influenced the other and cannot be judged as separate monolithic constructs. Moreover, both the English language and literature as practiced in India cannot be evaluated without considering the socio-political background in which they were written. Glossing over a wide arena, this survey is divided into several sections. At the very beginning a lot of known historical facts are reiterated as this is necessary to understand how and why the English language actually arrived in India. The next section tries to show how Indian English has established itself as a language category of its own and cannot be equated with the original Queen’s English. Scanning through the decades beginning from the eighteenth century to the present times, we shall then see how this language policy flourished in the literary context from those early times to the present day. Finally the analysis will hopefully be able to dispel the myth that Indian Writing in English is a new form of literary genre flourishing in India in postcolonial times like other variants of Asian Englishes.

Let us begin with the very basic definition of ‘Indianness’ which has been at the core of debates on Indian English literature and language since the very beginning of this area of study. As Makarand Paranjape states in his article, “Vernacularising the Master Tongue: Indian English and its Con-texts,” for some of his theoretically sophisticated friends, ‘Indianness’ “is not just an elusive and contested notion, but a dangerous chimera.” He aptly points out how debates over this issue have occurred in cycles and “have often been counterproductive, even leading sometimes to cultural intolerance.” He reminds us of the nasty debate that occurred between P.Lal and Buddhadev Bose in the 1960s when the latter made the claim that Indians couldn’t really write very well in English. This debate recurs over and over again through all the decades among various scholars, editors, critics and anthologists thrashing it out over who should be included/excluded in various Indian English anthologies. Here I would just draw the reader’s attention to two anthologies of Indian fiction edited by Salman Rushdie and Amit Chaudhuri and the ensuing problems of the genre that are related to it.

In the introduction to the book The Vintage Book of Indian Writing (1997) edited by Salman Rushdie and Elizabeth West and celebrating the fiftieth year of Indian independence, Rushdie went on to claim that “this new, and still burgeoning, ‘Indo-Anglian’ literature represents perhaps the most valuable contribution India has yet made to the world of books”(x) and that “the ironic proposition that India's best writing since
independence may have been done in the language of the departed imperialists is simply too much for some folks to bear” (xiv). This was controversial, since the "Indian writing" of the title was equated with "Indian writing in English" and not the different bhashas in which Indian literature was written. Rushdie made his stance clearer and wrote further,

…the prose writing - both fiction and non-fiction - created in [the last fifty years] by Indian writers working in English, is proving to be a stronger and more important body of work than most of what has been produced in the 16 ‘official languages’ of India, the so-called ‘vernacular languages’, during the same time (x).

Though we are aware of the brickbats Rushdie received from critics for making such a blasphemous statement, one must admit that Rushdie also made a candid attempt to locate the genre:

For some, English-language Indian writing will never be more than a post-colonial anomaly, the bastard child of Empire, sired on India by the departing British; its continuing use of the old colonial tongue is seen as a fatal flaw that renders it forever inauthentic. (xii)

On the other hand, Amit Chaudhuri in his edited book *The Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature* (2001) wondered,

Can it be true that Indian writing, that endlessly rich, complex and problematic entity, is to be represented by a handful of writers who write in English, who live in England or America and whom one might have met at a party, most of whom have published no more than two novels, some of them only one?

Chaudhuri of course begs to differ from Rushdie. How, he asks, would the ‘West’ react, if, in the event of some unanticipated bibliographic disaster, all of Britain's modern and ancient cultures disappeared from view, leaving the rest of the world to judge English literature on the basis of a few paltry contemporary novels? What if Julian Barnes, Angela Carter and Martin Amis, alone, were entrusted with the literary labour of bringing England out of an apparent age of obscurity? Chaudhuri in this volume draws our attention, anew, to the symbiotic development of vernacular and English literatures in modern India. If colonial education led directly to the rise of English in this country, it also provoked a concurrent efflorescence within the vernacular languages. So much so, that "many of the greatest and most interesting writers in the vernacular languages were or are students or teachers of English literature." Thus, like other continuing debates, these two different opinions, expressed not just by two critics, but by two established creative writers of Indian English literature, lead us into the basic problems of defining the genre itself.

Dismissing the debates going on decade after decade Paranjape reiterates that “it is a great challenge to produce Indian English texts that are both culturally meaningful and artistically satisfying; while it is not impossible to do so, it is certainly very, very difficult.” He also believes that the recovery of the Indian selves, which is an ongoing process, has had some specific directions in the last two hundred years or so and is “a huge and ongoing narrative.”
I: Reiterating History

In order to comprehend whether Indians are mere subjects of history or conscious agents of change, let us begin from the beginning. This section is selectively divided into four sub-groups done chronologically to help us understand how Indian English arrived, flourished and established itself on the Indian soil. At the outset one must admit that it is not an all-inclusive survey—some historical events and authors have been discussed in detail whereas others have been totally omitted. This is not to belittle their influence or importance but has been done merely for the space constraint of this study.

i) From the beginnings to 1857

It was during the seventeenth century that the East India Company, whose original aim was primarily commerce and not conquest, started trading in this subcontinent. Soon there was a pressing need for Indian clerks, translators and lower officials in administration and knowledge of English was essential for these jobs. At the same time, with the rise of the Evangelist movement in Britain, the idea of spreading the word of Christ among the natives assumed vital importance for some Englishmen. So India attracted the Englishmen for two reasons, namely business and religion. In 1757 a British force under Robert Clive defeated the powerful ruler of Bengal, Siraj-ud-daula, thereby taking effective control of a large part of India. On the other hand, the English missionaries began their efforts at educating the local people and before the close of the eighteenth century, schools which taught English besides the vernaculars were already established in the South, in Bombay and in Bengal. It is a well-known fact that linguistic colonialism soon and inevitably followed on the heels of the political acquisition of South Asia by the British in the mid-eighteenth century. In 1816, a gentleman from Calcutta named Baidyanath Mukhopadhyay pleaded with Edward Hyde-East, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Bengal, stating that many leading Hindus were desirous to impart English education to their children; by 20th January 1817 the Hindu College was founded in Calcutta. 1822 saw the establishment of the Anglo-Hindu School and in 1823, Rammohan Roy in his persuasive Letter on Indian Education to Lord Amherst argued for imparting English education in India instead of Sanskrit.

What was the literary output during such times? Apart from Shaikh Din Muhammad’s Travels of Dean Mahomet published in 1794 from Ireland, the first published composition in English of some length by an Indian was Cavelly Venkata Boriah’s “Account of the Jains” written in 1803 and published in Asiatic Researches or Transactions of the Society instituted in Bengal for inquiring into the History and Antiquities, the Art, Science and Literature of Asia (Volume IX; London, 1809). In 1817 appeared Raja Rammohan Roy’s essay “A Defence of Hindu Theism”. During this period a lot of prose writing on religious, social, historical and political subjects was also to be seen. This literary flowering proceeded at an amazing speed and by 1831 we already see the publication of the first Indian English play, The Persecuted or Dramatic Scenes illustrative of the present state of Hindoo Society in Calcutta written by Krishna Mohan
Banerjee, a disciple of Henry Derozio. This was an attempt to present the conflict in the mind of a sensitive Bengali youth between orthodoxy and the new ideas ushered in by Western education.

There are critics who tend to view Indian writing in English as a pan-Indian phenomenon born with the Bengal Renaissance of the nineteenth century since many of its first exponents like Raja Rammohun Roy, Henry Derozio, Radhakanta Deb, Toru Dutt, Rajnarain Dutt, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Kashiprosad Ghose, Sri Aurobindo and Vivekananda were products of that Renaissance. Interestingly, all of them were from the Bengal region. This first period of Indian English literature may be said to end in the 1850s, a few years before the Indian Revolt of 1857. By this time, most of the region now identified as South Asia, specifically the areas that now constitute the sovereign states of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, had become part of the British Empire.

Here we have to mention two significant events that occurred in the year 1835. The first was the creation of English speaking bilinguals in India. Initially, British administrators debated amongst themselves whether they should impose English on the people of the Indian sub-continent or whether they should retain Persian and Sanskrit for legal and administrative purposes. This gave rise to a whole group of ‘Orientalists’ who favoured the retention of the ‘native’ languages for administrative work. But by 1835 the ‘Anglicists’ – the group in favour of the widespread use of English in offices – won the day since this was the year when Thomas Babington Macaulay, the English politician, historian, and writer, produced his famous Minutes on Law and Education as a member of the Supreme Council of India. According to Macaulay, introducing the English language to the subcontinent was essential:

…it is impossible for us, with our limited means to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, -- a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.

This verdict was further ratified by Lord Bentinck, the governor-general of the period who declared that “the great objects of British [rule in India] ought to be the promotion of European literature and science among the natives of India and all funds appropriated for the purpose of education would be best employed on English education alone,” implying thereby that the process of ‘civilizing’ India could only take place through the propagation of the English language. That very same year 1835 also saw the publication of the first fictional narrative in Indian English by Kylas Chunder Dutt, a student of the Hindoo College, Titled A Journal of Forty-Eight Hours of the Year 1945, it is a prose fantasy in which the author depicted a future rebellion against the British in which martyrs would die with rousing speeches of patriotism. This presentation uncannily foreshadowed not only Khudiram and his brigade’s swadeshi acts of revolt but also the time of possible deliverance missing the actual date by only two years. The style of Dutt’s narration reminds one of the long-drawn convoluted sentence structures of
nineteenth century prose, and it attempts to imitate the master’s art. Thus it becomes clear that as an Indian, the history has been shaped as much by the institutions of this empire as by long tradition of struggle against them.

ii) From 1857 to 1920

According to the literary critic M.K. Naik, “Indian English literature really came of age after 1857, when India’s rediscovery of her identity became a vigorous, all-absorbing quest and when she had learnt enough from the West to progress from imitation and assimilation to creation.”(35) Naik therefore defines this period as ‘Winds of Change.’ Apart from the trio of Bengali intellectuals, Sir Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore and Swami Vivekananda who significantly contribute to this period, we witness Indianness for the first time flourishing in the literary arena. In 1964, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay published his English novel Rajmohan’s Wife [serialized in a Calcutta weekly called The Indian Field], now considered as the first novel in English. Though borrowed heavily from the Gothic romance tradition of the British novel, for the first time in India, we meet a young landlord hero, obviously a beneficiary of the Permanent Settlement and educated in the colonizer’s new system of education, who is always at odds with his family and society. 1874 is also a significant year as it saw Reverend Lalbehari Day’s Govinda Samanta: The History of a Bengali Raiyot as the first realist fiction in India illustrating the ‘Social and Domestic Life of the Rural Population and working classes of Bengal.’ Govinda is the first underdog protagonist -- a peasant oppressed equally by Hindu society, British government and natural calamities and is not borrowed from the west.

The rest of the period also saw English being written in different narrative forms. In 1876, Toru Dutt’s A Sheaf Gleaned in the French Fields was published. In 1910 Mahatma Gandhi translated his Hind Swaraj into English; 1913 brought the Nobel Prize for Rabindranath Tagore for his Gitanjali. During the 1920s, the rise of the Swadeshi movement brought some anti-English sentiment with it, even though the movement itself used English as its medium.

iii) From 1920 to 1980

This period is the most productive for Indian English writers. Let us first cast a look at Dhan Gopal Mukherjee’s works. Living in the United States, he wrote a lot of juvenile fiction like Kari, the Elephant (1922), Hari, the Jungle-lad (1926), and a novel called My Brother’s Face (1924). Though not very well-known, Mukherjee experimented with traditional Indian modes of storytelling such as ‘emboxed narrative’ and the mingling of prose and verse. India’s past is brought to life through the many legends, folk tales, and songs woven into the novel. His ‘Indianness’ is clearly marked in his works -- as the first to introduce Sanskrit poetry into Indian English fiction, he generally used translations but sometimes transliterated mantras when the sound demands it.

The three most well-known novelists who straddle the entire twentieth century are of course Mulck Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao. Often known as ‘the triumvirate’,
all the three were born in the first decade of the century, and each one published his first novel in the thirties. For Anand it was *Untouchable* (1935), for Narayan, *Swami and His Friends* (1935), and Raja Rao’s first book was *Kanthapura* (1938). But the similarity ends there as each wrote totally different kinds of novels and there was nothing common in their background, ideology and their use of the English language. Yet, interestingly, as Meenakshi Mukherjee rightly pointed out, the themes handled by them were “pan-Indian; the caste system, the national movement, and later the partition of the country, the clash between tradition and modernity, faith and rationality and similar clichés of east-west encounter, disintegration of the joint family, exploitation of women – experiences that are familiar all across the country”(2). Anand wrote his first novel when he was living in England, Raja Rao while in France and Narayan never left India until he was in his fifties. Anand believed in socialism and wrote of the underprivileged and the exploited. His narrative mode was fundamentally based on traditional nineteenth century realism and he combined it with a vigorous style interjected with expletives and abuses in Hindi. Illustrating an important aspect of the Indian English novelist’s struggle to get himself published, Anand recalled his dark days when he failed to find a publisher:

> I must confess that I felt suicidal, until a young English poet, Oswald Blakeston, took the book to a small publisher called Wishart Books Ltd., and brought the assurance that they would publish it if E. M. Forster would write a preface to protect the book against being called ‘dirty’ because it dealt with dung.

Behind the bravado of the concluding part of the statement lurks the uneasy admission that *Untouchable* was accepted for publication because Forster wrote a preface for it. For Narayan the case was not much different. He too had to get a recommendation from Graham Greene before his long and illustrious career could begin. Creating a fictional world of Malgudi, he developed a unique narrative mode to present a galaxy of very ordinary men and women in mundane situations but from a point of view at once detached and comic. He kept his English as simple and transparent as possible and with him the Indian fiction in English gained acceptance in the academia.

As for Raja Rao, he was initially a Gandhian but later he veered towards metaphysics and began foregrounding his Brahmin identity. Thus he experimented with his sentences making them sound sonorous like Sanskrit. His *Kanthapura* is an attempt to convey fictionally the transformations wrought by Gandhi and the freedom struggle in the Indian consciousness even in remote and rural India but it is also notable as an experiment with form and language. Rao claims that stylistically he had tried to convey the rhythms of Indian life in his own way. The celebrated and oft-quoted ‘Foreword’ of his book is now considered a manifesto in Indian Writing in English because it proposes very clearly a dual identity – different from English, yet not wholly Indian, both national and international, a hyphenated self. In his ‘Introduction’, Raja Rao also makes his readers aware that he is attempting his own version of a sthala-purana, that is to say, the ‘legendary history’ of a place popular in the Indian narrative tradition. As far as the language is concerned, he tries to find an answer to the problems faced by the Indian English novelist who feels compelled to tell a story “in a language that is not one’s own [in] the spirit that is one’s own”(5).
With India gaining its independence in 1947, the perception of English as having an alien power base changed. The first exceptional Indian English novel that appeared in 1948 was G.V. Desani’s *All About H. Hatterr*. A comic masterpiece and a linguistic experiment, it deals with the journey of a half-cast orphan through self-realization and hilarious adventures accompanied by his friend, philosopher and guide Banerji, who is a quintessentially Anglophile babu. This ingenious mixture of the picaresque and the *bildungsroman* derives unique character from its inimitable style, a garrulous outpouring of Eurasian colloquial dialect with all its outrageous imperfections continuously digressing on almost everything on earth. The novel, revised again and again, practically went unnoticed until it was reissued with an introduction by Anthony Burgess in 1970. In several ways Desani was a writer born before the readers were ready for his kind of writing. In *Hatterr* he played with the English language, Indianising it with comic abandon and whimsical self-mockery, and celebrated hybridity and dislocation long before Salman Rushdie made such things trendy.

While Desani spent his creative energy playing with the language, Sudhin N. Ghose, a contemporary of his, was doing just the reverse. Ghose’s fictional tetralogy -- *And Gazelles Leaping* (1949), *Cradles of the Clouds* (1951), *The Vermillion Boat* (1953) and *The Flame of the Forest* (1955) were experimental in nature, close to modes used in magic realism. In fact he was probably the only novelist during this time who tried seriously to make a synthesis between the inherited narrative tradition and the imported form of the nineteenth century novel. The Indian literary scenario became a lot more diverse during the fifties to the seventies decade. Nirad Chaudhuri’s *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951), Kamala Markandaya’s first novel *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), Khuswant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* (1956), Anita Desai’s first novel *Cry, the Peacock* (1963), Kamala Das’s *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), the novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya, B.Rajan and several others are random examples showing how the genre flourished. 1975, the year Emergency was declared and fundamental rights of Indians were suspended by Indira Gandhi, saw the publication of Bharati Mukherjee’s *Wife*, which spoke about new issues like expatriate problems and acculturation.

**iv) From 1981 to the present**

The 1980s is a very important decade as it ushered in the reconfiguration of the ground realities in politics, economic technology and demography that had far-reaching consequences in the field of cultural production. The collapse of the Soviet Bloc led to the emergence of a uni-polar world with the increasing hegemony of the United States (whose language was also English) and globalization transformed the major part of the world into a single market whose commercial vehicle was English. Hence, English also became the preferred language in India. For convenience sake, most critics consider the year 1981, the year Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* was published, as the watershed year dividing the old and the new schools of Indian English literature. It also triggered off the boom in Indian writing in English. The novel also marked a moment when the Nehruvian dream was about to be splintered in India. There is a nostalgic evocation of Nehru’s unity-in-diversity ideal in the novel but Rushdie also critiques it by
reminding the readers of all the multiple histories that were erased to write the grand narrative of the nation.

The last two decades of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence and widespread acceptance of a class of writers belonging to the anglicized upper middle class whose success stands in contrast to those peddling to the Western demand for enticing glimpses of Indian life injected with local flavour. Thematically their writing reflects very little of the Indian middle class ethos, unlike writing in regional languages which are firmly entrenched in ground realities of Indian social life. They do not profess the simple polarities that were present in the novelists of the earlier decades. Instead there is an implicit acceptance of hybridity as the necessary condition of postcolonial life. “They are misappropriating the English language, creating and marketing imaginary homelands. Moreover, their jargon is tailored to the elite pseudo-culture in India,” endorsed critic Nilanjana S. Roy who called Indo-Anglian literature “a Doon School – St. Stephens’ conspiracy”(66). Thus it has to be accepted that the Indian Novel in English from this period onwards also seemed to become a product of a distinct culture as the writers were not only English speaking, but most of them were part of a pan-Indian urban community. Not only did Rushdie’s masterpiece overwhelm literary circles in the West, its impact was also decisive in making The New York Times dub the young crop of Indian English novelists, viz., Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, I. Allan Sealy, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Sashi Tharoor, Farrukh Dhondy, Rohinton Mistry and Firdaus Kanga as “Rushdie’s Children.”

Another significant aspect of Indian English writing during this period is that a lot of writing actually came from writers of the Indian diaspora. It was the beginning of many paths, opening up of new directions. Though the postmodern devaluation of conventional realism and valorization of exile may seem to suit the diasporic Indian novelists who lack the wherewithals demanded by the traditional form, in their best works, success depends on a very competent mingling of the individual, the family, and the nation in a complex and meaningful network which has been received very well, particularly in the West. Situated in a transnational, fluid state often with multiple identities, some of these contemporary Indian novelists like Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, Gita Mehta, Rohinton Mistry, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Manil Suri, and many others hop, skip and jump continents at will. Their novels also represent sometimes the actual India or what Rushdie terms in his famous essay “Imaginary Homelands” as ‘Indias of the mind.’ Interestingly it is these diasporic Indian writers who have been keeping the flagship alive by winning maximum number of prizes and making the presence of Indian English fiction being felt globally. Speaking about “The Diaspora in Indian Culture,” Amitav Ghosh states that India is, and has always been, a pervasive emotional and psychological presence for “anybody anywhere who has even the most tenuous links” with it and “the mother country simply does not have the cultural means to cut him off.”(250)

II: Language: Then and Now

…Why not let me speak in
Any language I like? The language I speak
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses
All mine, mine alone. It is half-English, half
Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,
It is as human as I am human, don’t
You see?...

– Kamala Das, “An Introduction”

Indian English is a distinct variety of the English language. Many Indians claim that it is very similar to British English, but this opinion is based on a surface level examination of lexical similarities. Of course, one must keep in mind that not every linguistic item is used by every Indian English speaker and that a great deal of regional and educational differentiation exists. Even so, items can be identified which are indicative of Indian English speech and which are widely used. These operate on various phonological, morphological, lexical, and syntactic levels. It was during the Imperial period of the British Raj that British linguist, John Rupert Firth who had intensively researched the linguistic scene of the subcontinent and was Professor of English (1920-1928) in Lahore, commented about Indian English that “[m]ost Indian English is kept going by the government, and though it has therefore, a certain local currency, it has no gold backing.” Firth rightly emphasized that “to be linguistically solvent you must be able to exchange your terms somewhere and somehow for gold of intrinsic social value.” And now, as linguist and scholar Braj B. Kachru endorses, during the years that passed since Firth made this pragmatically insightful observation, not only has the face of the subcontinent altered – politically and otherwise – but all over Asia, linguistically speaking, the English language has become ‘solvent’, and has indeed turned into linguistic ‘gold of social value.’ In spite of over a century of unending acrimonious debates on language issues, “Asia has undoubtedly reached the Age of Asian Englishes”(xviii).

In his erudite article “The Un-Makers of ‘Indian’ English” Sudhakar Marathe focusing on ‘English Teaching Enterprise in Fifty-year Old India’, remembers the achievements in English of some sensitive and intelligent visionaries like Jawaharlal Nehru and Sri Aurobindo and at the same time takes stock of the situation at the opposite end of the historical as well as numerical scale. According to him the success threshold for the teaching of English is therefore enabling. How far has the English teaching enterprise succeeded in its task of enabling young Indians to exploit the English language fully and competently as and when required? This question definitely has a historical dimension, just as it has a social-justice dimension. That is to say, as the numbers of learners and teachers of English has grown astronomically during the past fifty years, so must the question confront the situation both numerically and demographically. Professor Marathe then gives us a good picture of the entire situation:

Before 1947 English was our colonial rulers’ language, imposed on an extremely miniscule proportion of contemporary population of India. (That population has grown enormously now.) Some people had to learn it. Others wanted to learn it. Some saw personal advancement coming by means of it. Others plotted to use it by turning it against its own natives. Some saw it as a window on Europe (and on the rest of the world’s approach to life and knowledge of it). Others still saw it as historically inevitable that English had to be learned by some if India were to make its way in the as-yet-imagined
independence within a drastically modernizing world. In other words, English involved an extremely small number of people yet it did so terrifically significantly in political, economic, technological, cultural, even global terms. (283)

Now let us examine the evolution of Indian English (‘Inglish’) from ‘Raj Bhasha’ to ‘Rashtra Bhasha’, from a state imposed language to a national language, in the postcolonial context. English was once perceived to be a colonial language, waiting to be discarded from a pluralistic Asian subcontinent in the 1940s. But -- gradually, unexpectedly, and rather interestingly-- what actually happened was that the language turned into a linguistic commodity with nativized ideological and functional reincarnations in the Indian context. Re-crafted at various linguistic, sociological and cultural levels and relocated in the sub-continent, English is now noted for its flexibility, vibrancy and inclusive nature. It is now adopted as an ethnically neutral language for wider communication. And in all societies of India, the English language still has strong association with higher education, internationalism, modernity and, at a personal level, job mobility and career development. These have ultimately contributed to a regional profile of English in India and to the gradual acculturation of Indian English on the one hand, and to the Englishization of regional languages of India on the other.

Indian English is a recognized dialect of English. If we trace its gradual evolution we notice that we have moved away from the farcical manner of babu-English as spoken by many nineteenth century Indians; to the early twentieth century in which Raja Rao (in 1937) talked of an Indian identity of English and propagated its use; to the late 1960’s linguistic scene when social and political leaders like Atal Behari Vajpayee and Ram Manohar Lohia both articulated chants like ‘Angrezi hatao’ and ‘Hindi lao’; to the ‘chutneyfication’ of the language as extolled by Salman Rushdie in the 1980s; to the support it received from the elite English-medium educated contemporary writers in the last two or three decades. For most of them, English is their first and often the only language for communication and creative writing.

With English the commonly spoken language in India, Indians are contributing their bit at enrichment. The effect of Indian English, more commonly known as ‘Inglish’ or ‘Hinglish’ as well as Indian words or Indianisms is being felt everywhere. For example, the latest edition of The Oxford English Dictionary, considered the world’s favourite word store, is a reflection. The new collection of linguistic twisters for the Western readers and also many words of daily use in English are of Indian origin. In an interview, Catherine Soanes, the editor of the OED, rejected criticism that misuse of English words was being legitimized. “We are merely reflecting the language as it is today,” she said. “Indian English is one of the growing areas of language, which is contributing to the language as a whole.”

According to Collins English Dictionary, English has also included commonly used words by Indians. Distinctly Hindi words that form the vocabulary of a large section of English speaking Indians have been incorporated. Like the Oxford English Dictionary, the editor of this dictionary has also officially acknowledged the role of ‘Hinglish’ in the evolution of English. “The inclusion of Hinglish words in the dictionary marks an
exciting development and a new phase of borrowing in English,” says editor in chief, Jeremy Butterfield. “In the long run we can expect Hinglish to influence English in many fields, in the same way that Latin and French have over several centuries.”

Professor David Crystal, author of the *Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* (2004) feels that ‘Inglish’ is the Indian’s journey to “conquer the world.” He predicts that Indian English will become the most widely spoken variant based on India’s likely economic success in the twenty-first century and her sheer population size. “If 100 million Indians pronounce an English word in a certain way,” he says, “this is more than Britain’s population – so it’s the only way to pronounce it.” Thus according to him, the language of the twenty-first century might well be ‘Inglish’ or at least English heavily influenced by India. The British linguist and writer David Graddol in *English Next* (2006) “tries to look at what’s been happening around us in the last four or five years and make sense of it.” Dealing with the transformation of English from a foreign language to a global one,” English is according to him “customized by all those who use it.” Graddol also states that India “will play a major role in the development of global English” and argues that India and China will be responsible for the way English as a language will transform from one of literature to one of commerce and industry.

Discussion and explanation of the bilingual’s creativity have resulted in a welcome shift from anecdotal research on ‘mixing’ and ‘switching’ of South Asian languages with English. These two processes have now been studied within various socio-linguistic, stylistic, and psycho-linguistic approaches. Braj B. Kachru in his book *Asian Englishes: Beyond the Canon* (2005) speaks about the Asianness in Asian Englishes and their gradual, yet marked, distinctness which has developed over a long history in contexts of language and cultural contact. According to Kachru,

> Asian Englishes are parting ways with the traditional canons of the Raj in the mantras they articulate while strengthening and expanding the link in the use of the English medium. …There is palpable excitement about what was earlier essentially a colonial linguistic weapon now turned to represent various dimensions of Asianness (xv).

Thus the Janus-like two faces of English -- the *nativization* of English in South Asia and the *Englishization* of the languages of the region -- are attracting increased attention. The scholar even detects ‘linguistic schizophrenria’ in the policies of the government, having both a ‘visible’ language policy and an ‘invisible’ one.

Here it would be interesting to review the connection between ‘glocalization’ and ‘Inglish’. Statistics tells us that in India already 333 million people “use” English to some degree – although only five percent of the population can read or write it. Yet English is already having a significant impact on shaping the future English of industry, commerce and the Internet. Already the number of English speakers in Asia exceeds the number of mother-tongue English speakers and according to demographers, this number is likely to peak around 2 billion in India and China in the next decade. Also, as the use of English widens, it is becoming more localized with different cultures absorbing words and expressions from their own languages to make an English of their own. This localization of English in India has produced ‘Hinglish’ or should be called ‘Inglish’ because it is
Increasingly becoming pan-India’s street language. So what is Inglish? According to Gurcharan Das (Outlook India, 3 May 2005), mixing English with our mother tongues has been going on for generations, but what is different this time around is that ‘Inglish’ has become both the aspirational language of the lower and middle middle-classes and the fashionable language of drawing rooms of the upper and upper-middle classes.

Similar attempts in the past were considered downmarket, contemptuously put down by snob brown sahibs. This time ‘Inglish’ is the stylish language of Bollywood, of FM radio and of national advertising.

Evaluating the current status of ‘Inglish’/‘Hinglish’ we see that it has now become a two-way interaction, and our mass culture has taken English to the bazaar. Now very frequently English is interpolated with Hindi words in regular usage and this aspect of hybridity is very significant. Sometimes Hindi words are transcribed verbatim into English. Again there is the use of Hindi with interpolation of English words within a single sentence. For example, the advertisement “Ye dil maange more” for Pepsi or “Thanda matlab Coca Cola” convey the idea of glocalization much better than theoretical paradigms. So, Inglish is now our “conquest of English” to use Rushdie's famous words. So far so good. But the obvious question that perplexes the average reader is why then Hinglish? We all know that Hindi as the national language of India, the “Rashtra Bhasha,” is still not accepted in the Southern and some Eastern states. Prevalent much more in the cow-belt (and with lots of political clout), it is regularly fed through the nationalized television channel Doordarshan and several other private ‘Inglish’ channels too. Like the inroads that SMS and emails have made in the globalized world, thus decimating chaste Queen’s English, these advertisements usually cater to the burgeoning city-centered upwardly mobile Indians. Some items are directly related to characteristics of Indian languages. Indians will often ask, "What is your good name?" which is a somewhat literal translation of "Aapka shubh naam kya hai?" Shubh means auspicious or good, and it is basically used as a polite way of asking for someone's full name. An Indian English speaker says today morning (aaj subha) or yesterday night (kal raat) to mean this morning and last night.

David Graddol speaks of the importance of multilingualism and how the ability to speak more than one language has put other European nations at an advantage over the UK. To illustrate this phenomenon, I now focus on the use of ‘Inglish’ in contemporary media and advertisements. A random survey done on leading Indian journals and newspapers in English like India Today, Outlook, The Statesman, The Telegraph, and the in-flight magazines of Air Sahara and Jet Airways shows that most of them are bilingual, deliberately using Hindi words with English syntax. So, the target readership is obviously the middle and upper-middle class English knowing Indians.

To conclude this section about the evolution of English as an ‘Indian’ language it must be mentioned that in our great “linguistic melting pot country” we now speak ‘Inglish’ in all its local and regional variations with special emphasis on bilingualism, especially in the use of Hindi or regional syntax. Much of the rapid Hindi-ization (or regionalization) of English is thought to be the result of globalization, glocalization and British Asian interaction. However strange they may sound, the deliberate use of Hindi words attempts
to bring in the linguistic unity of our language within culturally diverse groups, something that could not be implemented through legislation. It is true that the ‘post-colonized’ can never retrieve the pristine purity of their languages, as Simon During observes. English has acquired new structures and tonalities in India in the process of adapting it to native use. At a time when we have ceased to speak of Queen’s English and speak instead of many Englishes, we need no longer be apologetic about Marathi/Gujarati/Bengali/Tamilian English that carry the tonalities and inflections of these mother tongues.

Thus however much the purists may argue, we cannot write off the presence of English in India over the past two centuries. If it was the language of colonial domination, it was also the language of anti-colonial resistance; our national leaders including Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru had employed it in the service of the freedom struggle arousing the nation to fight the Empire. We may also remember that it was our own decision to retain English as a link language and a language of intellectual, emotional and imaginative articulation even after the British had left the country. Today India is the third largest English-using nation in the world; only the USA and UK have greater number of users of the language. It is used in India by close to five per cent of the population; some of the languages of the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution have far fewer than the 35 million users English has. English is also the state language of some of the Indian states in the North East; it is our associate official language and the chief link language for not only international but even inter-regional communication. India has a large network of newspapers and journals in English besides several publishing houses that bring out books only in English. In fact India today is one of the three largest publishers of books in English. Salman Rushdie’s Aurora Zogoiby (The Moor’s Last Sigh) was not far wrong when she said, ‘Only English brings us together.’

In the present age of globalization on the one hand we have Indian English facing the same problem as other Englishes – language as a means of communication through texting, SMSs, is changing the language too fast. As it is, marketing gurus have already woken up to the fact that technological revolution which globalized English may in its new avatar displace it, now that software and digitalized intellectual property have crossed language barriers allowing new technical vocabulary to develop in languages other than English. It would become a new and different ballgame then.

**IV: Literature: Then and Now**

Moving from language to literature, we must once again remember that Indian English literature began as an interesting by-product of an eventful encounter in the late eighteenth century between a vigorous and enterprising Britain and a stagnant and chaotic India, and is more than two hundred years old. It is literature written originally in English by authors Indian by birth, ancestry or nationality. It is no part of English literature, any more than American literature or Australian literature can be said to be a branch of British literature. It is legitimately a part of Indian literature, since “its differentia is the expression in it of an Indian ethos” (Naik). Sahitya Akademi, the Indian National
Academy of Literature has also accepted ‘Indian English Literature’ as the most suitable appellation for this body of writing. The term emphasizes two significant ideas: first, that this literature constitutes one of many streams that join the great ocean called Indian literature, which, though written in different languages, has an unmistakable unity; and secondly, that it is an inevitable product of the nativisation of the English language to express the Indian sensibility.

The constraints that Indian literature in English encounters have best been articulated by one of its living practitioners, Shashi Deshpande in an article she wrote in The Hindu. One is, of course, its lack of a long tradition and the assurance that comes from it. There is hardly any archive, cultural register or community memory that it can fall back upon for drawing its images, archetypes and cultural symbols. It tries to make good at times by drawing on the larger ‘Indian’ mythology and epics or Greek, Roman or Persian traditions thus making it difficult to locate it specifically: this is particularly evident in Indian poetry in English as poetry depends, more than fiction does, on cultural memory to achieve its vertical semantic and associational dimension.

Before delving into the analysis of Indian English literature, it must be kept in mind that the definition of what constitutes this category is itself a matter of debate among critics and scholars. Firstly, we have to remember that this category of literature went through several nomenclatures like Indo-Anglian literature, Anglo-Indian Literature, Indo-English Literature, Indian English writing, before it was accepted as Indian Writing in English or simply Indian English Literature. Again, there is also the debate about whether a writer could be called an Indian English writer by just being a resident of the country or whether his passport defined him in the case he was a non-resident Indian or was a writer of the Indian diaspora. M.K. Naik, whose seminal work A History of Indian English Literature (1982) analyzes in details the different nomenclatures, emphatically states,

> Strictly speaking, Indian English literature may be defined as literature written *originally* in English by authors Indian by birth, ancestry or nationality. It is clear that neither ‘Anglo-Indian Literature’, nor literal translations by others (as distinguished from creative translations by the authors themselves) can legitimately form part of this literature (2).

Naik also categorically explains that the writings of British or Western authors like Kipling, Forster, Sir Edwin Arnold, John Masters, Paul Scott and many others concerning India obviously belongs to British literature. Similarly, translations from the Indian languages into English cannot also form part of Indian English literature, except when they are creative translations by the authors themselves. According to academic and critic Esha Dey, “[T]aken in its entirety, Indian Writing in English may not be perceived as a tree growing tall and sending deep roots into the soil, but it appears to have spread extensively like grass.”(274).

Thus, it can be said that it is the sum of differences in attitudes, world views and responses that makes a novel ‘Indian.’ Here again the word ‘Indian’ needs to be used with caution since writers in English too belong to specific geographical regions or languages and this gives their works a local quality. For example, Mulk Raj Anand
conveys a Punjabi flavour and is not very successful when he writes about regions other than his own; *Private Life of an Indian Prince* is an example. In R.K. Narayan’s fiction one can easily perceive the presence of his region in the customs and manners he deals with and the language he employs has Tamil overtones. Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* shows conspicuous use of the nuances of Kannada; Bhabani Bhattacharya’s fiction has something Bangla about it; Vikram Seth has Hindi beneath his English, and Arundhati Roy’s novel *The God of Small Things* has the flavour of Malayalam. But as Meenakshi Mukherjee rightly notes, this regional dimension is missing in the ‘public school English’ of the novels of Shanta Rama Rau, Kamala Markandaya or Manohar Malgonkar who are not rooted in any specific Indian culture. This forces many writers to try exotic or Orientalist Indian themes or catchy phrases in order that their works look Indian on the surface. F.W. Bateson coined the word *Métèque* as a way of referring to writers for whom English was a second or third language, who don't respect (or don't know) 'the finer rules of English idiom and grammar'.

Take the case of Desani’s novel again. The deliberately garbled English of *All About H. Hatterr* is a thoroughly self-conscious and finely controlled performance, as Burgess points out in the preface:

> But it is the language that makes the book, a sort of creative chaos that grumbles at the restraining banks. It is what may be termed Whole Language, in which philosophical terms, the colloquialisms of Calcutta and London, Shakespearian archaisms, bazaar whinings, quack spiels, references to the Hindu pantheon, the jargon of Indian litigation, and shrill babu irritability seethe together. It is not pure English; it is, like the English of Shakespeare, Joyce and Kipling, gloriously impure.

Interestingly, *All About H. Hatterr* is a book more referred to as the first Indian English novel to play with the English language than actually read, (one of the reasons being its unavailability in the Indian market). Its artistic twists of language are delightful to the reader:

> ‘The name is H. Hatterr, and I am continuing…

> Biologically, I am fifty-fifty of the species.

> One of my parents was a European, Christian-by-faith merchant merman (seaman). From which part of the Continent? Wish I could tell you. The other was an Oriental, a Malay Peninsula-resident lady, a steady non-voyaging, non-Christian human (no mermaid). From which part of the Peninsula? Couldn’t tell you either.

> Barely a year after my baptism (in white, pure and holy), I was taken from Penang (Malay P.) to India (East). It was there that my old man kicked the bucket in a hurry. The via media? Chronic malaria and pneumonia-plus.

> Whereupon, a local litigation for my possession ensued.
Desani’s love of playing with the language is also evident in the Epigraph of the novel:

‘Indian middle-man (to author): Sir, if you do not identify your composition a novel, how then do we itemise it? Sir, the rank and file is entitled to know.

Author (to Indian middle-man): Sir, I identify it a gesture. Sir, the rank and file is entitled to know.

Indian middle-man (to author): Sir, there is no immediate demand for gestures. There is immediate demand for novels. Sir, we are literary agents, not free agents.

Author (to Indian middle-man): Sir, I identify it a novel. Sir, itemise it accordingly.’

Commenting on All About H. Hatterr, Salman Rushdie maintains that Desani’s work has “showed how English could be bent and kneaded until it spoke in an authentically Indian voice…”. On the other hand, Amitav Ghosh believes that Desani was “haunted by the incommensurability of what he wanted to say with the language he was saying it in. This is of course, an awareness that haunts many of us who write in English. But Desani was unique in that he alone had the courage to follow his perceptions to their natural conclusion – into the unreachable otherness of silence.” (www.amitvghosh.com/essays/desani.html)

In Salman Rushdie, as it has often been said, English is in dialogue with Indian languages, especially so in Midnight’s Children. Upamanyu Chatterjee’s English, August also at times uses a mixed language as in the expression ‘hazar-fucked’, a typical marriage of Urdu and American slang. Amitav Ghosh has used multilingualism most effectively in his Sea of Poppies, though the tendency is evident in his other works like The Hungry Tide and The Glass Palace. In Sea of Poppies he uses the tonal music of Bhojpuri, the language of its woman protagonist, very effectively and even brings in Bhojpuri folk songs; he also uses Hindustani in many forms, at times mixed with English as in the slang used by the crew of the ship, Ibis. The experimentation with language becomes much more marked in the second volume of the trilogy, River of Smoke. Here babu-English, Bhojpuri, Kreole, pidgin English, Indian English, Cantonese, all rub shoulders as the story unfolds.

There is a self-conscious questioning of the boundaries of language in many of the works I referred to; often they bring languages into comic collision, testing the limits if communication between them. They celebrate India’s linguistic diversity and take over the English language to meet the demands of the Indian context. In the process they also question the ‘purity’ of Indian culture and prove that it is a mixture, receiving influences from outside the subcontinent. English thus becomes part of the polyphony and its colonial authority is relativised when it enters the complexity it describes. But English as a language has been associated with colonialism, modernity and the elite. The new writers are aware of this and hence refuse to privilege either tradition or modernity. The new writers after Rushdie are also more playful and confident; their avoidance of standard English is also seen as a sign of a certain cultural weightlessness, the
deracination of elite college boys, alienated from the natural community. It also might be interpreted by some critics to be an example of the Empire writing back.

V: Language and Literature: Interstices

In Amitav Ghosh’s *In an Antique Land* (1993) there is an interesting conversation which raises the issue of how language is defined by a particular location and cultural representation and cannot be defined in universal terms:

“You mean,” he said in rising disbelief, “there are people in your country who are not circumcised?”

In Arabic the word ‘circumcised’ derives from a root that means ‘to purify:’ to say of someone that they are ‘uncircumcised’ is more or less to call them impure.

“Yes,” I answered, “yes, many people in my country are ‘impure.’” I had no alternatives; I was trapped by language. (62)

This issue of being trapped within languages plagues Indian Writing in English in a great way. At the time of the inauguration of Sahitya Akademi, Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan uttered a thoughtful observation: “There are many languages in India but one literature.” This significant utterance should be recalled to avoid the controversy still raging – whether Indian English literature is indigenous or foreign and whether the native sensibility of the content and its expression in a ‘foreign’ language in terms of form are still two disparate entities. This may well serve as a guideline to critics evaluating all Indian literary output in English and the debate continues in various forms even today. Indian critics of Indian writing in English like M.K. Naik, C.D. Narasimhaiah, Meenakshi Mukherjee, Makarand Paranjape, Shyamala Narayan, P.K. Rajan and Vinay Kirpal, besides scores of academics who have been contributing to anthologies, have tried to explore the field in varied and useful ways. While some of them have been more open in accepting the new genre and its experimentation with the English language, others like C.D. Narasimhaiah have also been critical and less enthusiastic. He reflects,

It is unfortunate that Rushdie for all his brilliance lent himself to be lumped up with them [Vikram Seth and Arundhati Roy] by what must have been pleased to call Rushdi-itis – his magic realism, a poor product of deteriorating British salesmanship, which proved to be disastrous. Simply put, it has come to this: Publishing firms and the media have taken over the functions of the teachers of English. Universities may as well retire all teachers of English and invite media-men to take over. And let them rule the roost. Far from brave claim of the Empire ‘writing back’ it continues to be dictated by the colonial cringe (15).

It is clear that neither the old Sanskrit poetics nor the new western literary theories can adequately explain or interpret this genre of writing. Any meaningful criticism of this genre should necessarily take into account the multicultural milieu from which these writers emerge as they come from different regional cultures and linguistic backgrounds often woven into their texts.

As mentioned earlier, language has been one of the central issues in postcolonial fiction. After going through a phase of mimicry as found in the works of Raja Rao, it has led to
chutneyfication’ (coined by Salman Rushdie to explain the idea of the ‘pickling effect’ of language wherein a gratuitous mix of English, Hindi and Urdu words is found). This hybridity along with the chutneyfication of history has added a new dimension to the ongoing effort in theorizing the postcolonial discourse. In fact, on more than one occasion, such diction comforts the Western audience of Rushdie that after all Indians – or Asians in general – can only use a sort of pidgin English, or what used to be called Butler English. The focus has shifted from theory to textual politics in that as Jonathan White (1993:209) claims: “the novel [has become] an alternative way of doing history and politics.” The impetus for such a shift has come from Said’s contention that imperialism is not imposed by use of unbridled physical force only but by colonial textuality for it produced the orient as colonizable. With or without the Caliban paradigm it may be argued that breaking the English language and reproducing it as one’s own not only is symptomatic of writing back but also in a way of channelling the native energy for reproducing the hybrid language as a polyphonic reality.

According to K. Satchidanandan, the charge of ‘elitism’ against Indian writing in English is also hard to sustain as much of modern Indian writing in the languages too is considered ‘obscure’ and ‘inaccessible’ by some readers and critics. This is not in fact a question of the medium or class, but of the varying levels of sensibility. Some complain that the English writers cater only to the urban middle classes and hence deal only with the issues that concern them. But this is not a true complaint either, as writers from Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and G.V. Desani to Shashi Deshpande, Amitav Ghosh and Arundhati Roy have dealt with village life and the subaltern classes with great sympathy and understanding. Many of the writers in the languages too deal with the problems of the middle class as they constitute the majority of Indian readership in either case and as it is an interestingly varied, struggling and mostly upwardly mobile class. Indian writers living in India, whatever the language they write in, live in the same milieu, undergo similar experiences, think and feel more or less in the same way and dream in the same way too. There is, no doubt, a difference in the writers who have spent most of their life abroad, a difference that is obvious in their concerns with issues like migration and their often exotic gaze that packages ‘Indian’ life for a largely foreign readership. Meenakshi Mukherjee in her Twice-born Fiction points to certain linguistic problems the Indian writers in English face: one, they have to write in English about people who do not normally speak or think in English; two, they have to write in an acquired language which is a situation very different from those of the American, Australian, Canadian or West Indian writer who can make use of living speech.

This leads us to the use of language and what creative purpose must have been meant to be achieved with the inclusion of Indian words in Indian English writing when they actually create a barrier in the understanding for the international reader. Here one notices a major shift in the handling and use of words and phrases from the writers of the early decades of the twentieth century with those of the later and more contemporary ones. Earlier, with the aim of the comprehension of the Western reader in mind, we had Indian words being incorporated within the text, with italics and even a long a glossary at the end of the text. For instance, Sudhin Ghose’s novels even explained words like ‘sindoor’ as vermillion. This is what Ruchir Joshi defines as ‘The Footnote School.” With Rushdie
and even G.V. Desani such glossary was done away with but the texts displayed several stylistic experiments – these were found in the use of Hindi and Urdu words, expressions, expletives etc. In the present state non-English words are no longer even italicized. Amit Chaudhuri’s novels have several references to the alna, the unoon, the still eye of the pabda fish on the dining table, the lovely luchis for breakfast etc. Sometimes it seems that the writers are doing this kind of exoticization with a sort of vengeance now – a kind of the empire writing back. In an interview given to me by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni a few of years ago, I had raised this point. Chitra disagreed about the exoticization element. According to her, when you create characters that are Indian, who think in the Indian way, why not express the Indian language too? Though she believes that it lends depth and authenticity to her characters, this is not always the case. In her latest novel, *Oleander Girl* (2013), set partly in Kolkata and partly in the US, the Bengali ambience is created by the author through un-glossed, un-italicized words where characters are free to have a dinner of khichuri with sona mug dal and kamini bhog rice. Another good example of perfecting the art of using non-English words with élan in the text of course is Jhumpa Lahiri’s latest novel *The Lowland* (2013). Set mainly in Kolkata during the Naxalite movement in the late 1960s, the novel is replete with very culture specific Bengali words as parts of the main text and they jell so well with the narration that it does not seem to be imposed specifically to sell exotic India/Bengal to the Western readers at all.

Closely related to this issue are also the uncertainty of context and the ambiguity about its own historical positioning. One may well ask why there are no movements, like the Dalit movement for example, in English, but for *Touch* a recent novel by Meena Kandasamy. The more intelligent of the writers in English are aware of these issues and are trying to find the means to overcome them. The Man Booker Prize winning Arvind Adiga’s *The White Tiger* is another novel of critical dissent where he pits the darkness of the rural world of India’s poor against the light of the new world of the rising upper middle class; here too he invents a language that is apparently light and full of fun, yet adequate to portray the horrors of Indian reality.

In recent times, the writer who has consciously included non-English words in his novels after doing serious research is none other than Amitav Ghosh. These include not only Indian words (without glossary or italics) but also local words in other regions as per the situation and locale of his transnational novels. In *The Hungry Tide* (2005), Ghosh experiments with non-verbal communication between the Indian American research scientist Piya (who cannot speak Bangla, her mother tongue) and Fokir, the illiterate boatman in the remote region of the Sunderbans. Juxtaposed between these two extremes is Kanai, the official translator of languages who lives in Delhi but has come to the Sunderbans to meet his aunt Nilima. Kanai’s inability to be an actual interpreter of languages in the real life context is something that Ghosh wants to highlight in the novel. Ghosh’s serious interest in non-English words and their origins is further illustrated in the introduction of The Ibis Chrestomathy in *Sea of Poppies* (2008), the first volume of his trilogy. Basically, chrestomathy is a selection of passages from an author or authors used to help learn a language. In the novel Ghosh makes the character Neel become interested in *The Ibis Chrestomathy* thus:
Words! Neel was of the view that words, no less than people, are endowed with lives and destinies of their own. Why then were there no astrologers to calculate their kismat and pronounce upon their fate? The thought that he might be the one to take on this task probably came to him at about the time when he was first beginning to earn his livelihood as a linkister – that is to say during his years in southern China. From then on, for years afterwards, he made it his regular practice to jot down his divinations of the fate of certain words. The Chrestomathy then, is not so much a key to language as an astrological chart, crafted by a man who was obsessed with the destiny of words. Not all words were of equal interest of course and the Chrestomathy, let it be noted, deals only with a favoured few: it is devoted to a select number among the many migrants who have sailed from eastern waters towards the chilly shores of the English language. It is, in other words, a chart of the fortunes of a shipload of girmityas: this perhaps is why Neel named it after the Ibis.

“After the Oracle has spoken the name of a word, the matter is settled: from then on the expression in question is no longer (or no longer only) Bengali, Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Laskari or anything else – in its English incarnation, it is to be considered a new coinage, with a new persona and a renewed destiny.”

The experiment with languages becomes even more pronounced in Ghosh’s *River of Smoke* (2011), the second volume of the Ibis trilogy which is full of non-italicized words from Kreol, Bhojpuri, Indian English, Hindusthani, Gujarati, Cantonese, and especially pidgin English as many of the characters land up in Canton, China. The careful reader has to negotiate with words and phrases and the convoluted style of English spoken by several characters including the protagonist, Bahram Modi, the Parsi opium merchant from Bombay. But what is more interesting is the fact that Ghosh’s own interest in the evolution of different hybrid languages is conveyed in details to the readers at different points in the novel.

The interest in pidgin does not stop there. Neel, while working as a munshi of Bahram Modi in Canton, gets interested in the evolution of the Chinese language expressed through ideograms when he is sent by his employer to meet Mr. Compton who brings out a business paper called ‘Ghost-People-Talk.’ Soon he comes up with a proposal for Compton to produce an English version of ‘Devil-Talk’ and like the *Ibis Chrestomathy* of the earlier volume, he decides to do a new one again:

> Neel could already see the cover: it would feature a richly caparisoned mandarin. As for the title, that too had already come to him. He would call it: *The Celestial Chrestomathy, Comprising A Complete Guide To And Glossary Of The Language Of Commerce In Southern China.* (272)

This renewed interest in the way Indian English writers are using non-English words to augment the uniqueness of their craft now is actually the reverse of what their counterparts were doing in the nineteenth century, namely trying to ape and imitate the style of the British writers who wrote in chaste Queen’s English. The process seems to have come to a full circle. According to Esha Dey,
The secret of the Indian writers’ success lies in their creative use of English and complete mastery of medium, their ability to draw upon eclecticism going beyond Anglo-American stereotypes, their effective exploitation of post-modern aesthetic devices to bridge the unbridgeable gulf between land and language. The universe gained by Indian Writing in English coincides, indeed, forms part of the whole process of globalization which valorizes uprooting and migration, when exile has become a universal phenomenon. (274)

VI: Indian English Tomorrow

In his article on “The Autonomy of Indian Writing” Amit Chaudhuri states:

…Indian writing, in the last one hundred and fifty years, represents not so much a one-dimension struggle for, or embodiment of, power, as a many-sided cosmopolitanism. It isn’t enough, today, to celebrate Indian writing’s ‘success’, after having identified what its marks of success are (as if a whole tradition must only, and constantly, be thought of as an arriviste would be); one needs to engage with its long, subterranean history (as hard-earned as political freedom itself) of curiosity and openness (4).

How Indians are using this in their literary output is clear from the sudden onrush of chick-lit flooding the Indian market. Every other day a new debut novel by an Indian author is making its way into the stands and unlike the more serious aspirants for the Man Booker or the Commonwealth Writer’s Prize, these writers cater to the desi Indian English readers, particularly the younger generation. That is why Chetan Bhagat’s Five Point Someone catapulted him into the limelight and fame overnight. His next novel, One Night@ the Call Center set in the world of the call centre at Gurgaon is also critical of the new lifestyle which is seen as a re-colonisation of the city. Here again Bhagat uses colloquial English, the lingua franca of the urban middle class. The author is not concerned with literariness, but with the possibilities of identification. He freely mixes Mahabharata and James Bond, western pop and Indian fables. Novels like Samit Basu’s The Simoquin Prophecies and Rana Dasgupta’s Tokyo Cancelled attain a new level of freedom by reflecting the new global space created by the market through their multiple locations. Their language reflects the new texture of life in India, a world where jazz and Bob Dylan is as popular as Bollywood film songs and ghazals. It is an openness that calls for interrogation as it traces the inner cartography of liberalized India that switches between cultures and is rooted nowhere. Novels like Amish Tripathi’s Meluha series again raise different issues as they have nothing Indian about them. As regards globalization we also find a shift in attitude of the writers. While Raja Rao’s generation suffered from loneliness, longing for roots, the modern Indian writer celebrates displacement. Take Bharati Mukherjee for example. She has distinguished herself in the New World and regards her writing as part of the American literary tradition. Her latest novel till date, Miss New India (2011) speaks of a globalized India where the young protagonist from a small town changes her identity once she reaches Bangalore, the hub of the IT industry in the country. We can be certain that such confidence and exuberance would take various directions in future, some of which may be traced from the present trends. Also for many Indian writers like Vikram Seth, labels of nationality or frontiers of political and geographical divisions will cease to exist.
This leads to the last but important question - do Indians appreciate their own English? Ultimately, I think they do. It has been said that Indians have made English into a native language with its own linguistic and cultural ecologies and socio-cultural contexts. Its special functions have engraved English into the cultural life of India, and it is very much a part of the experience of being Indian -- even if one does not speak it. Many Indians feel that the use of English should be actively encouraged because of the many advantages it confers - the greatest of which is its universal character. The Indian writer and philosopher Raja Rao wrote,

Truth, said a great Indian sage, is not the monopoly of the Sanskrit language. Truth can use any language, and the more universal, the better it is. If metaphysics is India's primary contribution to world civilization, as we believe it is, then must she use the most universal language for her to be universal.... And as long as the English language is universal, it will always remain Indian.... It would then be correct to say as long as we are Indian -- that is, not nationalists, but truly Indians of the Indian psyche -- we shall have the English language with us and amongst us, and not as a guest or friend, but as one of our own, of our caste, our creed, our sect and our tradition. (quoted in Kachru 12).

Many others fear, perhaps legitimately, the loss of India's native languages. English has changed Indian languages in many ways -- mostly through the incorporation of new words. However, the population of English speakers in India, though socially influential, is a small minority compared to the rest. Also, most of these individuals are conversant in at least one, if not two or three, other languages, and unless the situation necessitates English, they usually speak in their native language. Way back in 1968, Professor C. D. Narasimhaiah had defined Indian Writing in English as “primarily part of the literature of India in the same way as the literatures written in various regional languages are or ought to be.” Esha Dey’s point of view expressed as late as 2006 sounds much more optimistic:

The future Indian writer may not be a Balzac or a Proust because we are no inhabitants of a monolithic ethos, nor have we participated in a uniform evolutionary process for centuries. India is a great mosaic of many motifs and patterns and its transition from various stages of civilization, primitive, ancient, medieval to the modern, going on simultaneously, offers great challenges to writers in English, particularly of fiction. We can be sure that Indian Writing in English has a bright future provided the status quo is maintained: the continuance of India as a union of states, the growth of English medium education as a means to cross territorial limits and the place of English at the leading edge of technology and scientific development (278).

In Midnight’s Children, Rushdie had used the idiom of the pixel dots to explain how the contours of the actual face gets distorted when one sits too close to the cinema screen and how the objectivity of the viewing subject thus gets distorted beyond proportions. Borrowing his logic it seems that it is not fair to evaluate very recent Indian Writing in English as it is absolutely impossible to predict how it will be defined just ten years from now. Perhaps we will need a few decades to put them in their right place.
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