

## LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY IN INDIAN ENGLISH WRITERS' WORKS

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### ABSTRACT

*Language is central to the struggles of identity in Indian writers in English and similarly in post-colonial existence in general. English has been used as an import depleting from colonialism, and the writers employ it as a voice and contestation in order to express their cultural identities while communicating to a cosmopolitan audience. It, therefore, becomes clear that Indian English is an interesting overlapping zone for various voices and languages, as well as a site where Indian writers use code-switching and introduce local identification markers, thus utilizing Indian English as a tool to disrupt traditional English and vested dominance. This proposition aims to critically examine these writers who write in Indian English and how they portray the issues of class, gender, and region. Focusing on a number of texts, this paper aims to investigate how language inserts itself into the discussion of identity, where one belongs, and whose culture is superior in the context of postcolonial India.*

*Keywords: Indian English Literature, Postcolonial Identity, Linguistic Hybridity, Code-Switching, Cultural Negotiation, Colonial Legacy, Language Appropriation.*

### INTRODUCTION

Language and identity in literature are intertwined for the writers use prose as a means of approving their sociopolitical system. Literature in Indian English has consequently emerged from The colonial situation and ideology hence depicting a conflict between indigenous Indian culture and English language. Whereas English was once forcibly imposed on Indians as the language of the colonizer, the Indian writers have maneuvered it to become the language to rebuff colonialism to create a new literature that is statistically Indian but culturally English.

There are several forms of stylistic uplift – the inclusion of the idioms of the native culture, the transliteration of local dialects, inversion of English syntactical structures – all of which help Indian English writers to assert their identity and, thus, avoid conforming to the Anglo-American culture dominating the globe. Now many writers like Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, and Kamala Das have made elaborate attempts to merge the Indian linguistic habits with the English language. This linguistic innovation, therefore, transforms what Marrie's postcolonial literature means and brings out marginalized existence, gendered subjectivities, and regional contingency.

This paper will contrast and compare how language is a means of passage and a platform of war in the writings of the Indian English writers. It will also explore how the use of language contributes to themes of displacement, hybridity, and cultural resistance by the authors. In order for this research, an attempt has been made to establish the link between language and identity in the selected Indian English literary works in order to illustrate how Indian authors use English as more than a second language but as the voice of the writers, culture, and politics.

### **Objectives:**

- 1. Subsequently, one can analyze how those writers who use Indian English as the medium employ language in establishing linguistic and cultural identity.**
- 2. For the purpose of understanding the aspects of linguistic hybridity and code-switching within Indian English literature.**
- 3. Thus, the paper will analyze the English language as a means of postcolonial subversion and identity construction in Indian literature.**

### **Hybridity in Indian English Literature**

Actually, a majority of the writers writing in Indian English incorporate formal and informal English along with idiomatic expressions, slang, and even cultural markers, thus giving Indian English a flavor of its own. This hybridity is not merely a question of style; it is a question of existence which is hybrid because of indigenous and colonial social formations. Authors switch codes by using Hindi, Tamil, Bengali, or any other Indian language within the text of the English piece, commonly either through code-switching or even mimicking the Indian accent and fluency of Indian English.

Salman Rushdie made successful use of this function in *Midnight's Children* by giving his work an Indian flavor in the English language by the use of some Hindi and Urdu words in the General Indian temperament of the work despite the literary language being English. Similarly, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* also uses many Malayalam words and phrases till the structures of English become local. Here, this linguistic fusion functions as such a signifier and subverter of English Imperialism: to prove that English can be stylized to reflect the essence of India.

Hybridity in language also serves to make communication, as well as Indian English literature, accessible to the local and international communities. It may help the writers to stay rooted to their cultural context while at the same time writing in a manner understandable by audiences in the West. Some more, including regional dialects and native expressions, simply help the socio-cultural face of the program to be as realistic as possible. For instance, while maintaining the English prose, Seth uses the resources of Hindi and Urdu poetry in *A Suitable Boy* to reflect the multilingual context of India. Using language mixing as the focal strategy, Indian writers profit from the RU and expand the definition of the SP English language.

Moreover, the use of hybridity in Indian English literature can also be attributed to the fact that Indian identity is multilingual. Thus, the country's cultural heterogeneity can hardly be captured under the banner of any particular language. Thus, the writers combine and translate English with other languages; they write a book with two different systems simultaneously that reflect the Indian realities of double existence.

### **Negotiating Identity Through Language**

English literature written by Indian authors has many issues deriving from the question of representation. Those authors often wonder if it is possible to express Indian identity with the help of language that was once used by colonizers. This conflict is a common topic in Indian English literature; the freedom to opt for English and the problems arising from this decision. English as a medium of literature in India today being a tool of oppression and exploitation, has become a medium of the oppressed to express themselves; however, the colonial influence plays a big role in Indian writing in English, and many writers ponder if they are writing in English because it makes them alienated from their own culture?

The earliest apprehensive discussion of this issue can be traced down to 1934 in Kanthapura by Raja Rao wherein he wrote in the foreword that English basically needs to be Indoized, employing the resultant hue of the thinking hearts of India. This deliberate use of the English language also indicates that language is not natural but rather a paraded site where identity is continually performed and re-performed. Similarly to the above-mentioned authors, R.K. Narayan employs a rather plain yet remarkably Indian English to ensure that the concerned narrations stay easy for the reader to understand as they reflect the everyday life in the country's southern regions.

Lahiri's books, especially *The Namesake*, portray protagonists in the United States who lose their ability to belong to either India or the West. The story revolves around the main character, Gogol, who struggles to embrace the part of him that is Bengali and the part that is American, and the key to his inner conflict relates to language. This aspect is evident in the way Lahiri uses English in her work; even if her work is written in English, she constantly portrays the immigrant's feelings when attempting to negotiate between the two languages.

This negotiation of identity through language also happens in the works of Shashi Tharoor, who portrays the impact of colonialism in present-day Indian culture. *The Great Indian Novel* is a novel by Shekhar Deshpande in which, desiring to satirize the epic Mahabharata and a recent event in Indian history, the author employed English, which is as historical and as metaphorical as India's political history.

For many new Indian English writers, English is not a language that has been imposed on them. Therefore, they do not 'choose' the English language as if rejecting their Indian languages; rather, they assert that English, too, is an Indian language. They reuse it based on the Indian context as they explain to the audience that identity is not a fixed construct.

## **Language as a Tool for Social Commentary**

The impact of language in Indian English literature does not only promote or display culture but also constructively criticizes society. These insights provide the spectators with issues like caste discrimination, the oppression of women, and the effects of globalization in Indian society through the choice of words.

Both Bama and Omprakash Valmiki pen the experiences of the socially ostracized Dalit people through the medium of English. S. Bama does not embellish language in her book *Karukku*, and similarly, using the Dalit expression of Hindi and the English prose, Valmiki in *Joothan* uses a different and informal style of learning the language by marginalized sections of the society.

*The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy focuses on questions of patriarchy and the caste system in society, especially in the state of Kerala. Her language is quite poetic and associative, but it is not coherent, which is quite appropriate for the fractured lives of the characters. Based on her works, of course, bends language conventions aiming at reflecting the condition of her protagonists and demonstrating that even words may be a weapon.

Now, class and social mobility are major themes of the novel *A Suitable Boy* written by Vikram Seth; the characters from different class backgrounds talk in various ways. The lower class characters use different language from the other higher classes of Indian society to portray social stratification. In the same vein of magical realism, Salman Rushdie's *Shame* and *Midnight's Children* provide South Asian political commentary continuing political turmoil of India and Pakistan through English interspersed with regional dialects and non-linear narrative.

When writing in English, Indian writers, therefore, not only narrate stories but also comment on other societies and the structures of authority and provide a voice for those who have been denied one.

## **Regional Variations in Indian English Literature**

For this reason, regional distinctions can also be seen in Indian English literature, as it is rather representative of the linguistic variety of India. Every writer from different states of India tends to include linguistic features specific to their origin, hence varying greatly in tone and language. This essentially situates them in another vortex of regionalism and identity politics within India.

For instance, R.K. Narayan's works have a cultural setting of South India, especially Tamilnadu. His style of writing English is colloquial and humble, and the translation of many characters' dialogues is purely Tamil in essence. Like *The Glass Palace* and *The Shadow Lines*, Amitav Ghosh's novel is also enriched with the typical shades of Bengali dialogues and contexts that endue the flavour of the Calcutta and Dhaka of the historical backdrop.

On the other hand, north Indian-born Indian English writers like Khushwant Singh use Punjabi English, which is full of humorists who are more or less shaded Satiric. His novel *Train to*

Pakistan utilizes sparse and rather plain-fashioned English, occasionally combined with traditional Punjabi abusive language, making the story quite raw and real.

Some writers from the Northeast, flowing with the trends of postcolonial writing in India, employ native Naga dialects and creolized English to write and bring different indigenous entrances into the large provision of Indian English classic collections. In the same manner, the Assamese writer Easterine Kire's works, which evolved out of representation of Naga culture and language, address the question of homogeneity of Indian English writing.

Specifically, these regional influences tell us that the identity of India is quite diverse. Thus, using the peculiarities of regional accents, proverbs, and cultural allusions in their English writings, Indian writers guarantee their works' relevance to the national cultural context while presenting them to an international reader.

### **Code-Switching and Multilingualism in Indian English Literature**

Code-switching, which uses different varieties of interrelated languages within a single text or an arrangement, is thus a characteristic feature of Indian English. Accustomed to writing in English in a multilingual context, most of the writers located in India include Hindi, Tamil, Bengali or other regional languages into the text as a subsystem as a way of depicting the South Asian region's heterolinguistic complex.

An example of code-switching can be traced in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, where English contains Hindi and Urdu translations lending realism to the characters. Often, Arundhati Roy uses Malayalam words and phrases throughout this novel, leaving the reader no indication of whether the phrase is in italics or merely a loan word – apparently, the author trusts her readers to understand what a ' akka ' or an ' insulin ' is by using context. It goes well with the view delineated at the beginning, which points to the fact that Indian English literature does not need to prove itself on the canvas set by Western literature.

One of the recurring issues of Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* is language in relation to immigrants and their personalities, implicating the use of Bengali and English in various situations. Similarly, Amitav Ghosh has used words and expressions in use in Bengal in *The Shadow Lines* so as not to distort the cultural context of the particular story.

Multilingual is the key characteristic of Indian English writing and serves many functions. It provides protection to regional languages and conserved aboriginal languages as being in favor of Indian linguistic culture as opposed to preventing language standardization. On this page on the lessons of Indian writers, Petievich supports his idea with numerous examples of how code-switching makes English an Indian language and how Indian writers turn the language to meet their needs while not adhering to colonial English.

### **Gender and Language in Indian English Literature**

Gender issues, particularly the position of women in society, are common themes in Indian English literature, where language itself becomes a theme. Female writers mainly actively

subvert hegemonic ideologies, arguing that the English language can and should be progressed to become a tool of a woman's liberation.

Kamala Das is India's most famous contemporary poet who changed the common theme of English poetry by including personal statements. Her poem *An Introduction* contains references to female sexual desire and controlled sexual desire, and she uses English in an unconventional manner in her poetry. Shashi Deshpande also portrays the inner turmoil of middle-class Marathi women in her novels like *That Long Silence*; her language is quite moderate yet quite effective in portraying the oppressive condition of middle-class women.

Arundhati Roy employs syntactical shifts in this text to draw attention to the internal monologue of her female protagonist. The language also reflects the social and psychological disintegration that is so familiar to women who have to live under patriarchal oppression.

Mahasweta Devi is a Bengali writer, though she translated her novels into English to present the plight of tribal women in India. Her stories, for instance, *Draupadi*, are written in raw, unadulterated English that paints a terrible picture of gender-based violence.

Focusing on gender in Indian English texts reveals that language plays a specific role in determining one's entire identity. Some of these writers sought to claim English and transform it as a medium to reflect women's experiences.

### **English as a Postcolonial Language: Resistance and Adaptation**

The English language in Indian literature can be seen as a way for the colonized people to fight back and adapt in some ways. English was introduced in the Indian subcontinent under the colonial rule of Britain; however, Indian writers in modern times have turned it into a medium of protest, politics, and assertion of Indian identity.

Ngũgĩ wrote: 'Once a people have their language, there is no reason why they cannot tell their own story in it to the world', but the Indian writers turned the tables and asserted that the English can indeed be indigenized, and there is no need to eliminate it as long as it can be subdued and domesticated to the Indian context, which is exactly what R.K. Narayan did by writing simple, unprocessed English and presenting thoroughly Indian stories. Likewise, Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* does not use English in a matter-of-fact manner; thus, its English has a certain loose structure of the Indian tongue.

Salman Rushdie goes further by transforming this perspective into a bildungsroman and creating insouciant styles of grammar and syntax in *Midnight's Children*. The same peculiarities of capitalization and fragmentation of the text are employed in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* as well; they mirror the mental fragments that are so characteristic of memory and trauma.

After publications from writers like Rabindranath Tagore, the reputation of English writings in India diminished, and even contemporary writers like Chetan Bhagat and Amish Tripathi may be criticized as 'Commercial writers', but they bring English literature to the public at large.

Similarly, they blunt the literature by using idiomatic expressions and having a lower literary standard as compared to Modern Standard English, thus, making it easier for an Indian audience to read and comprehend.

In this manner, Indian English writers built and used English not as the colonizers' nuisance language but as a tool for enunciating stories, rebels, and identity. It establishes that English in India is not only the language of a privileged section of the society but is actually a language of the masses that has evolved and adapted to the Indian realities of life.

## **Conclusion**

Analyzing language and identity within the context of Indian English literature helps us understand how the English language is interlinked with a people's representation. Technological advancement in the use of the English language amongst Indian English writers portrays the language not only as a vehicle of the Indian culture but as an agent of change, power, and creativity. Regarding language and style, the writers adopt code-switching, bringing in regional dialects, and hybridity in language that avoids the monopoly of standard English.

In post-colonial English literature, we see the English language used both as a colonial leftover and as a post-colonial tool as authors like Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, and Jhumpa Lahiri use it. Whereas some of the writers have a problem with the authenticity of the English language, others use it as a platform to convey works that can be enjoyed and understood both in India and internationally. This linguistic negotiation was quite reminiscent of the fact that the identity is dynamic in postcolonial India because language is not only a tool of social interaction but also an interface that defines the country's colonial past and postcolonial present.

Moreover, Indian English literature makes a sociopolitical statement about the country's society through highlighting the problems of untouchability, women's oppression, and states/regions' differences. Mahasweta Devi, Shashi Tharoor, and Vikram Seth employ the English language to voice the oppressed sections of society and reflect the new India. It is apparent in their works that language is not simply a reflection of social relations but rather a part of a colonial regime; prior works have shown that colonialism is that writing is in a minority language and post-colonial writing is the writing back of a now autonomous and agency-bearing post-colonial subject.

Conclusively, Indizlish is a booming literary culture of India and not a post-script of colonialism, and all modern characteristic features are manifest in the literature. Thus, it supports the fact that Indian English literature is not just a secondary language but has become a genuine part of the country's literature and culture. This subject shows that Indian English literature will always be an important part of identity construction and response to postcolonial hybridity that is reshaping the world and its literary socio-cultural map.

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