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Indian English Literature: Issues and Challenges

Dr. R. Meena^a

^aAssistant Professor of English & Principal I/c, Government Arts and Science College for Women, (formerly BDUC Model Arts and Science College for Women), Veppur (Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli).

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Abstract

English was not the native language of India. While using this language the Indian writers faced many challenges and problems. India's significant contribution to world literature is largely due to the plenteously creative literary works generated by Indian novelists, poets and dramatists in English. In this paper, an attempt is made to study the issues and challenges faced by such writer.

Keywords: IWE, IEL, Diaspora, intelligibility, translation

1. Introduction

The seed of Indian Writing in English was sown during the period of the British rule in India. Now the seed has blossomed into an ever green tree, fragrant flowers and ripe fruits. The fruits are being tasted not only by the native people, but they are also being 'chewed and digested' by the foreigners. It happened only after the constant caring, pruning and feeding. Gardeners' like Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao-to name only a few, looked after the tender plant night and day. In modern time, it is guarded by a number of writers who are getting awards, honour and recognition all over the world.

2. Importance of the Indian English Literature

Indian English literature refers to the body of work by writers in India who write in the English language and whose native or co-native language could be one of the numerous languages of India. It is also associated with the works of members of the Indian Diaspora, such as V.S. Naipul, Kiran Desai, Salman Rushdie, Jhumpa Lahiri, Agha Shahid Ali, Rohinton Mistry, who are of Indian descent.

English was not the native language of India. While using this language the Indian writers faced many challenges and problems. Even though India's significant contribution to world literature is largely due to the plenteously creative literary works generated by Indian novelists, poets and dramatists in English. Indian writing in English has commended unstinted admiration in both home and abroad, is now in its full swing. It has carved out a new track, a new vision—a vision that is replete with an unanswering faith and hope, myth and traditions, customs and rites, etc. If we dive deep into the works of the Indian English literature, it is revealed that their works are not an imitation of English literary pattern but highly original and intensely Indian in both theme and spirit. They have given a new shape and colour to English literature in the same as the Australians and Americans have evolved their own literature in their respective countries.

3. Why Write in English?

The question is “Why do these Indian writers write in English?” There are many reasons for it. They write because,

1. It is the language of wider range, vocabulary and thoughts. It is powerful language and a dominant language for them. They feel they can express their thoughts, feelings, experiences, etc., in English more effectively.
2. They want to reach the reader beyond their vernacular. They want to be recognized by the people whose mother tongue is different. This love of recognition is either personal or of his culture.
3. English is more flexible than his own mother tongue. It is the language of his emotional and intellectual makeup. It has the qualities of adaptation and development.

4. The Problem of Intelligibility

The problem of every Indian English writer is “how to be intelligible” to his readers, especially the foreign reader. He tries his best to be intelligible to his reader by using either literal translations or interpretations such as the idioms, phrases, slogans, expressions, etc., from his mother tongue. Some of these literal translations and interpretations have a great marked local colour. These are easily understood by the people who speak the writer’s mother tongue. But these are not easily understood by the foreign reader. Therefore, the Indian English writer explains to them by putting the explanation either after the comma or in the brackets immediately after them or giving footnotes. Otherwise the reader has to understand it in the context itself.

5. Challenges and Issues in Indian English Literature

Today Indian English has undoubtedly been accepted as ‘a variety of English’ as American English or British English. Indian English has a special tone, sensibility, vocabulary and to some extent syntax. English is an acquired language to all the Indian writers’ writings in English. They are naturally faced with many problems. They find difficulty in presenting Indian consciousness, thoughts, scenes, reality, culture, beliefs, etc. And it is quite clear from their writing that they are successful in bending the English language for their purposes of creative writing.

6. Translations of Indian Plays in Indian Writing in English

Many plays written in various Indian languages are being translated into English and other languages. By translating the plays being performed in languages other than their own, the dramatists are marching towards the possibility of building a national theatre movement. One aspect common among these playwrights is that they accept the traditional set up and project the influence of Western ideas in a new challenging manner. As myth and legend have greater hold on the Indian imagination. Within the framework of Indian myths and folk tales, the modern dramatists have deftly assimilated various Western dramatic techniques.

Rabindranath Tagore, whose plays are compared to the plays of famous Irish playwright W.B. Yeats, introduced suggestive and meaningful symbolic techniques in his plays. Sri Aurobindo modelled his plays exclusively on late Victorian pastiches of Shakespearean drama and his characters look like Elizabethan personages in Indian garb. T.P. Kailasm, who can be compared to Ibsen or Shaw, wrote his play *Karna* on similar tradition with Sophocles’ powerful tragedy *Oedipus, the King*.

In late sixties and early seventies, Indian English playwrights like Pratap Sharma, Nissim Ezekiel, Gurcharan Das, Asif Currimbhoy, Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani tried to establish their relationship in the modern context by fusing the Western norms and the Indian tradition. They were influenced by modern European playwrights like Shaw, Sartre, Camus, Giradoux and Brecht. They mixed Western

ideas with myth or history in order to give a message to the contemporary society. In his Author's Introduction to *Three Plays* (1994), Girish Karnad clearly stated:

“To my generation a hundred crowded years of urban theatre seemed to have left almost nothing to hang on to, or take off from. And where was one to begin again? Perhaps by looking at our audience again, by trying to understand what experience the audience expected to receive from the theatre.”

The Indian playwrights had no established theatrical traction to begin with. They had to face a situation in which tensions between the ‘cultural past of the country and its colonial past’, between ‘the attractions of Western modes of thought and our own traditions’ had to be resolved. It is at this point that the famous German playwright and drama theorist Bertolt Brecht came to their help. Like Brecht, the playwrights create a kind of distance between the audience and the happenings on the stage. So that instead of being lost in the action, the audience sees it in a double light with critical minds.

6.1. Modernity and Indian Drama

When a society is moving towards modernity, there are more theatrical techniques in the experimental plays of contemporary Indian English playwrights, Mahesh Dattani, ‘a playwright of world stature’. India's first playwright in English to be awarded the Sahitya Academy Award for his contribution to world drama, comments on the relevance of Indian theatre.

Dattani's plays expose the violence of our private thoughts and the hypocrisy of our public morals. They expose the dark secrets of the human consciousness that torment in the present. They reveal the physical and spatial awareness of Indian theatre on the one hand and the textual rigour of Ibsen and Tennessee Williams on the other.

6.2. Remarkable Growth of Drama

Contemporary Indian English drama has come a long way, opening new vistas, both technically and thematically. The dramas written in regional Indian languages and their English translations have gained a remarkable growth in the recent decades. At present, this audiovisual medium of expression has become relevant to the modern conditions of India.

7. Challenges and Issues Faced by Fiction Writers

In Indian English novel if we refer Raja Rao, he famously argued in 1938, in the preface to his novel *Kanthapura*, for using English, but English adapted to Indian conditions:

“English is not an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up like Sanskrit or Persian was before but not of our emotional make-up. We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us in our own language and in English. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We can only write as Indians (...) our method of expression will someday prove to be as distinctive and colorful as the Irish or the American.” (Ingale 2013)

Fiction, being the most powerful form of literary expression today, has acquired a prestigious position in Indian English Literature. It is generally agreed that the novel is the most suitable literary form for the exploration of experiences and ideas in the context of our time, and Indian English fiction occupies its proper place in the field of literature.

The novelists and their novels paved the way for the great trinity: Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao whose emergence was the most remarkable event in the realm of Indian English fiction.

They were the harbingers of the true Indo-English novel. These novelists began writing around the mid-1930s.

After gaining independence India had many challenges to face and many changes came over Indian life. Complications took place in social, political, economic and cultural spheres but India handled thoughtfully and adequately and progressed step by step. The fact of being independent and having its own identity spurred Indian English writing. It provided the writer with self confidence, broadened his vision and sharpened his self-examining faculty. As a result of these developments important gains registered, especially fiction, poetry and criticism. Fiction, already well established, grew in both variety and stature.

After the 1960s Indian English fiction, like its Western counterpart, shifted its focus from the public to the private sphere. The mass destruction caused by nuclear weapons in World War II brought unrest and anxiety all over the world. The situation gave rise to psychological disorders and loss of moral values, and profoundly disturbed man's mental peace and harmony. World literature, responding to the new era, started to deal with the different gloomy faces of modern society.

Indian novelists could not remain aloof from these currents and henceforth they were not exclusively concerned with the exploration and interpretation of a social milieu, but dealt with new subjects of human existence and man's quest for self in all its complicated situations. This shift of focus in Indian English fiction becomes clearer particularly with Anita Desai and Arun Joshi who explore the agonized existence of modern man in their writing which 'changed the face of Indian English novel'.

8. Experimentation with Language

The Indian English writer faces a special problem because of his situation. He writes in English which is not his own language, and it is, perhaps, not the language of his readers. Therefore, the echo of the writer's mother tongue is bound to come through and affect his writing. He tries to give his characters shape, movement, gestures and local habitation; for this, he translates or transcribes their words, emotions or gestures which have peculiarly new references and situations.

Experimenting with language means finding new, natural and startling means of Expression. Dr. S.K. Desai mentions the following four strategies of the experimentations of Indian English writers: (Ingale 2013)

1. Using a number of native words for which there are no exact words in English.
2. Using translations of certain characteristic expressions, idioms and sayings.
3. Imposing the syntax of the native language without, however, doing great violence to English grammar.
4. Imposing the native speech rhythms on the English language spoken by the Indian characters.

The experimentations of Indian English writing have two main aspects:

Interpolations and literal translations. The use of interpolations has the following aspects:

1. Interjections, invocations, etc., from Indian languages, which cannot be translated, are interpolated, e.g.,
ohe hacha, ohe acha
Hei Sri Wahe Guru!
2. Greetings, blessings, modes of address, etc., are interpolated to give flavour of Indianness, e.g.,
Ram Ram, Radhe Sham!
Wadahi, Wadgai
3. Words, phrases, etc., from Indian languages are interpolated because they have no equivalents in English dictionaries, e.g.,
hukkas, Rajas and Maharajas

Maya.

4. Pidgin Hindi expressions are deliberately used to show how the character speaks in Indian situations, e.g., *vay ja ja*, go away.
5. Swear words, abuses are interpolated to reach the climax in the dialogue and to give catharsis for emotions, e.g., *ohe chup, ohe chup*.
6. Hybrid expressions are interpolated sometimes humorously, and sometimes as a bold experiment, e.g., *Don't buck*.
7. Pronunciation spelling is used to show rough, substandard, and uneducated speech of characters, e.g., *Holdar, Soshialists*.

Literal translations, on the other hand, may be used for the following reasons:

1. To convey Indianness, e.g.,
oh, may I die for you!
As they look on me as their father mother.
2. To convey through English vast range of expressions, beliefs, Observations, etc., from Indian life and culture, e.g.,
caste brothren,
eat one's head
fall at one's feet.
3. To show how an Indian will sound it in his speech if it is translated in to English, e.g.,
vay! May you die ! May you die!
Aao ji ao, come on my head, come on my eyes.
4. To describe peculiarly Indian phenomena in a forceful manner, e.g., *What will repentance do when the birds have wasted the field.*
5. In order to be intelligible to the foreign readers, e.g.,
cat-killer's lane (Billimaran)
Ocean of Nectar (Amritsar).

Indisputably, the Indian English novel has gained a unique viability, vibrancy and vitality, attracting a remarkably wide readership and universal acclaim, to which the new novelists have made a positive contribution. The novels of the nineteenth century brought to limelight the social injustices, superstition and the abominable conditions of the peasants and workers that plagued the Indian society. Women's emancipation, education and widow remarriage also became common themes in the novels and this phase is dubbed as the 'Renaissance' of Indian writing in English.

9. Conclusion

We come to know that a cross-section of the linguistic and sociolinguistic characteristics of Indian Writing in English and the translation problems that may arise. There is development of the diachronic evolution of Indian English in recent times or any inherent differences between men's and women's writing. The writer tries to give his characters shape, movement, gestures and local habitation; for this, he translates or transcreates their words, emotions or gestures which have peculiarly new references and situations. Globalization has made writing in English an internationally marketable product with a wide expansion of readership. An Indian English writer has to be a genuine Indian, living in India or abroad, and also a citizen of the whole world. Thus, handling of post-coloniality/ Diaspora, writer's paradoxical double identity, global marketability, etc., are some of the major challenges to address.

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