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RECASTING INDIAN ENGLISH WRITING IN WORLD LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

Indian writing in English is known as Indian English literature produced by Indian writers in the English language. Indian English writing has gained status in the world literature for its magnanimous literature known generally as Indian writing in English. Literature is the expression of life as it is a replica of society. As we understand, the importance of literature has been growing unbelievably to seek social reality in the era of globalization. Contemporary writers like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Anita Desai, Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Arundhati Roy, Vikram Seth, Jhumpa Lahiri and Amitav Ghosh have achieved wide recognition and positioned India on the world's literary map. It is noteworthy, however, that Salman Rushdie's "Midnight's Children" brought in a new literary model in Indian English Writing, different from the social realism genre existed earlier. It is now growing incredibly with numerous critics, novelists, poets and dramatists experimenting with form, diction, linguistic nuances and style that provide this canon of literature an admirable quality as well as an increasing global readership. The present paper aims at exploring the new directions in the study of Indian English writing as an established variety of English in the context of World literature.

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INTRODUCTION

Indian English writing is well known throughout the world for its complexity and depth, with the range of fiction published in the subcontinent reflecting the incredible diversity of India itself. Indian English has also been acclaimed internationally for its voluminous literature known generally as Indian writing in English. India is the third largest in producing a large number of books after the United States and the United Kingdom, and the largest number of Indian books are published in English as compared to other Indian languages. Creative writing in English is considered an integral part of the literary traditions in South Asia. According to an Indian critic, Iyengar, there seems to be an acceptance of Indian English literature as "one of the voices in which India speaks... it is a new voice, no doubt, but it is as much Indian as the others" (Kachru 1994: 528-529). Indian writing in English dates back to the 1830s, to Kashiprasad Ghosh, who is considered the first Indian poet to write in English. Sohee Chunder Dutt was the first writer of fiction. In the beginning, political writing was dominant (Kachru 1994: 530-531). For instance, Rammohan Roy wrote about social reform and religion in the medium of English (Sanyal 1987: 19).

In modern times, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, and Raja Rao are considered the big three in the field of Indian English

fiction. Other prominent writers are Manohar Malgaonkar, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Salman Rushdie, Arun Joshi, and Arundhati Roy, who have achieved considerable recognition in world literature.

Stylistic influence from the regional languages seems to be a distinctive feature of much Indian literature in English, especially the native language influence is reflected in the form of literal translation of local idioms (Platt et. al: 1984: 181). According to Kachru, South Asian novelists have not only nativized the language in terms of stylistic features but have also acculturated English in terms of the South Asian context (Kachru 1994: 530). He points out that English has functioned "as the main agent for releasing the South Asian languages from the rigorous constraints of the classical literary traditions" (Kachru 1994: 535-536).

English is virtually the first language for many educated Indians, and for others, who are bilinguals, English is the second language. Indian English speakers are primarily bilinguals or multilinguals, who use English as a second language in contexts in which English is used both as a "link" and as an "official" language. In a country like India, English serves two purposes. Firstly, it provides a linguistic tool for the administrative cohesiveness of the country. Secondly, it serves as a language of wider communication (Kachru 1986: 8). In

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fact, English functions in the Indian socio-cultural context to perform various roles that are relevant and appropriate to the social, educational and administrative networks (ibid, 111).

English appears in both public and personal domains, and its functions “extend far beyond those normally associated with an outside language, including the instrumental, the regulative, the interpersonal and the innovative, self-experience function” (ibid, 37). As mentioned before, the role of English in an Indian multilingual setting is not replacive: it overlaps with regional languages in certain domains (Kandiah 1991: 273).

Due to its longstanding interaction with various regional languages, Indian English has emerged as a variety in its own right. Crystal claims, “Already, a third of Indians are speaking the language, a percentage expected to rise in coming years. With the internet spreading English like no other tool ever, and Indians at the forefront of the IT revolution, Indian English will reach around the globe and take over from British and British forms”(2004: 2). He points out that, on the one hand English speaking communities are striving to nativize the language to reflect their own experiences and on the other hand many are of the view that a universally intelligible, more or less standardized medium would be desirable (Crystal 1988: 261-262).

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” (Kachru 1986: 12).

Indian English should command the same attention globally as any other variety of English. It deserves to be studied in every aspect similar to other established varieties of English. According to Crystal “Indian English, I think, will soon be one of the most spoken forms of English in the world. I see it playing the most important role of a bridge between the Standard English spoken in the UK and the US, and the non-standard English spoken in countries like China and Japan” (2004: 1).

Style Features

Style can be viewed socio-linguistically in terms of availability of different codes. Stylistic choice of linguistic alternatives in standard English thus will differ from those in a country like India where the speakers in a community have not only choices to make from a given language variety but from alternative codes e.g. regional language, English, classical language, lingua franca etc. Certain style markers like transfer features, code mixing, code switching etc., which are not part of the style markers identified by Leech and Short (1981), where monolingualism might be the reference point become relevant in the context of bilingual and multilingual societies like India. In the context of Indian English, code mixing and code switching themselves are powerful stylistic devices. Sometimes

regional language with English is combined to reveal the characters’ speech patterns. In a multi-lingual setting, Indian English writer with a large number of codes creates his own world.

As is discussed by various scholars such as Kachru (1983), Mohan (1972), and Nambiar (1973), Indian English has emerged through a creative process like other living languages. Indian English as a distinct variety is used as a stylistic device. The availability of a wide range of stylistic devices that Indian English offers to Indian writers, is not widely recognized, especially by foreign critics and readers. Creative use of English in the case of Indian writer results from the influence of the indigenous Indian languages. Every Indian language has its own characteristic features that are carried over at the phonological, lexical and syntactic levels into Indian English, and certain pan-Indian characteristics result from this.

In the view of Nambiar (1973), the language of the novels of Indian writers certainly depicts all the distinct characteristics of Indian English. However, this may not be true in the case of all Indian English writers. The writers differ greatly in their competence in the use of English. They can be placed at various points along the ‘cline of bilingualism’ (Kachru 1983, Nambiar 1973). Their placement on this ‘cline of bilingualism’ will limit the linguistic competence of individual writers as well as their access to creative stylistic choices to indicate character and personality types.

Kachru (1970) has made a comprehensive study of the style features of Indian English, which mark it as distinct from other native and non-native varieties of the English language. Some of these features are, reduplication, pre-modification of nominal heads, compounds, distinct collocations, loan words, transfer features of idioms, metaphors, proverbs etc.

CONCLUSION

No full-length description of Indian English is available yet, although, some research has been done on the phonological, lexical, grammatical and stylistic features of Indian English. Indian English literature has been growing in various literary forms, for example, fiction (Mukherjee 1971), and poetry and essays (Iyengar 1962). Several literary and aesthetic aspects of Indian English writing have been studied by various scholars. From the linguist’s view Indian writing in English offers rich data. Indian English has been recognised as a distinct variety like any other established variety. It is necessary that linguistic studies of Indian English literature must concentrate on those stylistic, syntactic, lexical, collocational and semantic features, which distinguish it from writing in native varieties of English. More work has to be done to describe Indian English as it is used by creative writers for special literary effects and what kind of English is used for various other purposes.

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