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CONTEMPORARY INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE: NURTURING NATIVE SENSIBILITY WITH LINGUISTIC ADAPTATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Language is a social artifact which gives symbolic representation to diverse experiences and works within a cultural boundary. Within linguistic-cultural landscape, literature takes place as a cultural phenomenon. English language has been internalized in the non-English speaking world in lieu of a 'universal linguistic heritage'. But how far this adapted language has been able to express Indian experience or to what extent native Indian writers have been able to cope with this is a matter of discussion. Indian literature is still in process to cope with the traditions of native English and to express Indian consciousness through native colouring of an alien language. It is like the growth of self-consciousness. To understand the present position of Indian English literature in relation with linguistic adaptations and appropriations, one has to make a comparative statement of the initial stages of our literature and the contemporary one. Indian English literature that is true, original, natural and conveys the present-time spirit is bound to be popular among the masses along with getting academicians' response.

Key Words: Native, Colonial, Self, Adaptation, Linguistic, Language, Canon

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Language can be interpreted as a cultural construct which remains vitally connected to the very basis of a 'native' culture. For literary creation language works as the raw material which later gets crystallized within a particular language boundary. Literature is a cultural phenomenon which takes place in linguistic-cultural landscape. When the talk is about new trends in Indian English literature it seems considerable to analyze the present day effect of efforts done by our writers to internalize or better say indianize the linguistic sensibility of our literature. It is a social artifact which gives symbolic representation to diverse experiences and works within a cultural boundary. Gradually a particular language begins to work as a symbolic identity for a particular community and becomes an integral part

of its literary tradition. However, literature of particular area or community may exhibit certain internal divisions but it can be identified as a single entity due to bonds of some standard parameters. For example, In India a Hindi speaker can regard the entire literature of Hindi-speaking areas as belonging to the Hindi literary tradition despite the obvious area-wise linguistic classifications such as of Braj, Awadhi, Maithili, Rajasthani and the like. It is because the dialectical differences do not disturb the bond of similar national and cultural experiences.

Now as fallout of the colonial experience, English language has been internalized in the non-English speaking world in lieu of a 'universal linguistic heritage'. Indian writers too are making

efforts to express Indian consciousness and sensibility through an alien language but obviously with a certain native colouring. Sethna refers to it as an effort to express "Indo-Anglian consciousness" (Khubchandani 113). But how far this adapted language has been able to express Indian experience or to what extent native Indian writers have been able to cope with this is a matter of discussion. Whether it has worked as an effective means of expression or it is still an alienating force? Whether it is reminiscent of old colonial past or a departure from that? All these questions need immediate answer from academic giants. They should answer when Indian English literature would be able to sever the linguistic umbilical cord and possess an independent national language that would guarantee its literary independence? Raine expresses his doubt when he says "English learned as a foreign language can never nourish the invisible roots of poetry.... I do not believe that we can.... write poetry in a language other than our own" (Khubchandani 113). Indian English literature doesn't have English characters. Its events don't take place in an English background. The spoken Indian English has its own accent pattern, own type of intonation scheme. The native colouring of English language is evident in the practical usage of English language in India. Like British and American forms of English language, today we have African English, South-Asian English and of course Indian English. Many words of Indian languages are finding place in the vocabulary of English language. Oxford Advanced learner's dictionary has secured special space for a separate chapter on such new additions from Indian languages under the title "Supplement to Indian English". It may be referred to as a process of Indianization of English or may be interpreted as a strategy to cope with an adapted language.

Indian writers writing in English still have apprehension about sure expression in English language. Bhabani Bhattacharya writes, "Even to render in English a certain thought-idiom common to the Indian mind becomes a big task, since the English language has a 'genius' of its own" (Khubchandani 114). Indian literature is still in process to cope with the traditions of native English and to express Indian consciousness through native

colouring of an alien language. It is like the growth of self-consciousness in linguistic usage as a foreign language can't be a substitute for existing native languages but simply can be used as a second language to fulfill demands of understanding between persons of different nationalities. Rao says that the task is to "convey in a language not one's own a spirit that is one's own" (Prasad 192). Language is a social activity and in this fashion Indian English literature has been trying to achieve a balance between the requirements of 'good' English and influences of society on its usage. This debate may end with the conviction that language being "shaped by ideas, perceptions and feelings of those who use it" (Singh 201) will achieve gradually an independent status and thus will be able to create independent national literatures at some point of time.

To understand the present position of Indian English literature in relation with linguistic adaptations and appropriations we have to make a comparative statement of the initial stages of our literature and the contemporary one. Besides language problem, Indian – English literature like literatures of other third world countries is in constant struggle to find its identity in the canonical structure of English literature. It is mainly due to the absence of some unanimously accepted common nomenclature for literature in English language produced by third world countries. Today we have a complex of various 'Anglo centric labels.' Since the mid-sixties, literature of various British colonies came to be studied under a comprehensive label "Commonwealth Literature". Its systematic study began in the early sixties at the University of Leeds from where published *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. However, gradually resentments were evident against the use of this term mainly because the conceptual centrality of England is implicit in it. Rather than a creative or a theoretical concept, it is more like a term used for pedagogic convenience. Salman Rushdie expresses his resentment when he says that "literature is an expression of nationality.... Its insistence on lumping together very disparate writers just because they happen to write in English but keeping the British writers out of it" (Mukherjee 6). The problem with

the term is its tendency to always refer to a powerful but absent centre and thus questioning the identity of independent countries. Just as British crown has ruled from far over British colonies during colonial period, it again is trying to rule through a mighty reference without being a part of referred. This term, in a way, interprets English language not as an international language but as the linguistic asset of a particular country. It seems to believe as if Britain is in the role of a guardian for the third world nations who now have adopted English language to share their experiences with the developed countries.

Some early Indian English fiction writers used too simple English that shows somewhere their lacking-of mastery over language. Characters and setting seemed to be transported from elsewhere. Many-many good fiction works have been produced till today but it can be said that the perfect chemistry between Indian consciousness and thought pattern on one side and the means of communication on the other is somewhat missing. The task remains for many Indian English fiction writers is to convey in a language not one's own a spirit that is one's own. It is perhaps not something that comes from within. Certain contemporary diasporic Indian English fiction writers exhibit originality in usage of English language but being expatriate their experience of Indianness is to some extent artificial. Many writers writing with post-colonial themes or following such new trends are good to read but most of studies are limited to academic canons and don't have the mass appeal. Literature that is true, original, natural and conveys the present-time spirit is bound to be popular among the masses along with getting academicians' response. Perhaps it is because with such works we relate our experiences, we find our 'selves' in the pages of books, we share feelings of characters. Whether Indian English literature has become able to find out such adjustments necessary to mark its originality and such efforts has gained how much applause in the world literary canon is an important point of discussion.

Literary writing is expected to be expressive of 'self' --- the real 'self' which we as a commoner, as a thinking person can feel. Originality in thought-

patterns and themes is required. Indian stories can be stories of our own or our next-door neighbours. These will be hundred percent contemporary without knitting various threads in years back past. It is something which we don't need to understand because we know it. Language can be without clichés or jargons. Language used in such works will not be imported rather it will reflect real life situations—real life in India. A proper correspondence then can be perceived between what the writer thinks and how he communicates. This will be English which is writer's own and not a confused echo of pre-thought notions translated later on – a language that is expressive of true Indian sensibility. It may emerge as an authentic means of communication not only for native learners but for anyone who reads English fiction.

It's high time that Indian English writers should be original in approach and the originality should be without tags. It will be unlabeled/unbranded originality. May be they appear not following any theoretical school intentionally but the talk they will do in their works will be the talk of a sensible educated Indian who is just sharing his experiences with a fictional mode. This may establish a new pattern of writing which is not bound to be analyzed according to west-oriented theories. This formula will lead to exhibition of true 'self'; be 'at ease' with what you feel and write without any imitation or without any outward unnecessary influences. This trend will surely make Indian English literature popular among Indian people just as Indian-Hindi literature, Indian-Punjabi literature, Indian-Oriya literature and so on. Such Indian English literature will be telling of intelligent Indian 'self' and is able to convey authentically Indian linguistic sensibility and thought pattern both at home and in the entire English literary canon. Such an initiative will surely draw positive response from readers and academicians. This may merely be an aperitif that welcomes the unmarginalization of Indian 'self' and applauds Indian thoughts in own English language. Hopefully a major part will definitely follow this with better probabilities for Indian English literature on the global scenario in future.

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