

## Socio Cultural Transition in Contemporary Indian English Writing and Translation

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### Abstract

As knowledge as an enterprise was the source of power, the colonial administration made it an indispensable part of its functioning. Translation made knowledge easily accessible the administration. The shrewdness of colonial administration discovered that, in order to understand the colonial terrains of existence, one has to understand the natives, study them, observe them and comprehend their culture and society. They realised that the natives and cultures could be better understood through the past. As the present was out there, as an easily observable phenomenon, the past was assumed to be documented, and directly or indirectly translated. As knowledge was regulated by power, the administrators transformed the local knowledge into the vast repertoires of colonial knowledge and control. This translated knowledge of various cultures, the ethnographic and anthropomorphic inputs received from a colonial state, etc. was supposed to be part of the composite whole. Colonialism governed through these pockets of knowledge.

**Keywords:** Imperialism, Colonial Power, Education, Popularity, Linguistic, Transformation, Translation, Transculturation, Subjectification, Oriental, Knowledge, Hegemony.

English has become established as a global language in the past fifty years. The story of English in India is ingrained deep within the story of imperialism. The British East India Company first arrived in India in the early 1600's and soon established trading posts in a number of cities. By 1765, the Company's influence had grown to such an extent that most parts of India were under British control. This was the beginning of the Raj which was synonymous with British imperialism-a period of British rule in India that lasted until Independence in 1947.

The genesis of English education in India can be traced to the design of the colonial power to perpetuate their interests in India. There is no doubt that English was introduced in India as a tool of control. The most decisive piece of writing on education was Thomas Babington Macaulay's "Minute on Education" written in 1835, which was propagandist in every aspect. It transformed the educational and literary scene in India forever. It was decisive in the formation of the British educational policy in India. The policy called not only for the study of English language by college students, but it required that instruction in all courses at college level should be given in the medium of English. Hence, the

formation of a distinct class of English educated Indians, with a distinct appellation "native Indians".

It is to be noted that Macaulay himself had doubts if India could be ever transformed completely into an English speaking country, but he felt that English education in India would create a class of Indians who are British in sensibility, which would be loyal to the Raj.

I feel... that 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 ... convey knowledge to the great mass of the population. (Minute on English Education)

During the British rule, English grew in popularity and prestige and it also became the language of power and social elitism. Although it was a foreign language at that time, Indians were quick to take to the language, and even the most prominent among those opposed to British rule voiced their resistance primarily in English.

Even after India gained its independence from Britain, English continued to be widely used, and in fact, the Constitution makers deliberated and wrote the Indian Constitution in the English language. While Article 343 of the Indian Constitution designated Hindi as the

official language of the Union, it also provided for the continued use of English for official Union purposes for a period of 15 years. After nine years, the Official Language Commission of India recommended extending the use of English; a recommendation that has subsequently been echoed by several other committees over the years. English came to be known as an 'associate official language' or an 'associate additional language'. Since independence, India's transformation in every arena of life – technological, social, economic, political and cultural – has been phenomenal. The area of language socialisation has been no exception to this rule.

Although the advent of English was primarily a language invasion, with the passage of time the invasion transformed itself, and in the process, got rooted in the new land. The foreignness of the language also underwent many changes. Today, we are witnessing a situation where English has lost its colonial essence and become more Indian. England has long since lost its copyright over the usage patterning of English. There is now a growing consensus among scholars that there is not one English language any more: rather there are many, most of which are disengaged from the language's early Anglo-Saxon tradition. The different English languages have an interesting mix of diverse linguistic, cultural and ideological voices and they are

studied the conceptual framework of world Englishness.

The introduction of English education in India was inseparable from the process of subjection or subjectification under colonialism. The colonial "subject" was indeed constructed through practices or technologies of power or knowledge. One such apparatus of control was translations. British rule over India lasted about two centuries. However, in 1793, when the proposal for English education for the natives was presented before the Board of Directors held wide consultations before shooting down the proposal. In 1835 Minute on Indian Education Macaulay, who was an avid reader of history claimed he had not found a single Orientalist. "Who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia." Trevelyan, Macaulay's cousin, also agreed with him whole-heartedly that Indian knowledge was worse than useless.

We can observe that the language that was disseminated as a device for colonial operation eventually became a mark of status through a complex production of the colonial subject within multiple discourses and on multiple sites. One such site is translation. Translation depends on the Western philosophical notions of reality, representation and knowledge. Reality is seen as something unproblematic out there, knowledge involves a representation of this reality and representation provides direct, unmediated access to a transparent reality.

Many steps were taken to discover, collect and translate whatever was extant of the ancient work in India. Sir William Jones was singlehandedly responsible for translating and introducing a textualised India to the whole of Europe. His translations were famous all over Europe and literary stalwarts like Goethe, the Schlegel brothers and Novalis were under the spell of his translations of Indian works.

William Jones was a good eighteenth century liberal. His construction of Hindus-as submissive and indolent, desirous of being ruled by a unifying and absolute force and emerged deeply in the mythology of an ancient religion-is one of the most powerful stereotypes which has survived the onslaught of time.

William Jones's translation of Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* took Europe by storm. His translations are said to have been read by almost everyone in the West who was literate in the nineteenth century. His works were carefully studied by the writers of the age, especially the Germans-Goethe, Herder, and others. As soon as Jones' new writings reached Europe, the shorter pieces were eagerly picked up and reprinted immediately by different periodicals. His translation of Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* went through successive reprints; Georg Forster's famous German translation of the translation came out in 1791, after which the play was translated into other European languages as well. In the eighteenth century, there were two kinds of translators. On the one hand there were translators who were administrators and civil servants and on the other, there were Christian

Missionaries like William Ward and William Carey. The missionaries were the first to translate Indian religious texts into English. Even as they were involved in making dictionaries and grammar books. They were more intolerant and prejudiced than their secular counterparts.

However, within a short span of time, translations pre popularity to Indian writers like Rabindranath Tagore. It was in 1912 that Yeats agreed to write an introduction to Tagore's collection of 103 short poems. Yeats was by then well established on the London cultural scene and, as his biographer notes, he relentlessly pressed Tagore's case in the circles where he wielded influence. In *Gitanjali*, there was the right mix of the mystical and spiritual and it was also an epitome of all stereo types oriental. Readers, stimulated by Yeats's stamp of approval al found in Tagore's poetry sustenance to satiate their thirst for Eastern spiritual guidance.

Interestingly, hand-in-hand with this bleak introduction of India and Indian literary works to the Western audience, which, consequently produced countless stereotypes, the new genre called the novel came into its own in India in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. English education uncovered new vistas of knowledge and opened up innovative modes of thought including the ideal of individualism. In addition to that, the English writer was a new arrival in India, who had centuries of literary tradition in the background. The real charm and beauty of the vernacular languages in translation was being explored only from 1970 onwards. Translation as a full-fledged activity flourished in India

from that period. Till then most of available translations of Indian vernacular texts were either of religious or archaic import or were from vernacular to vernacular translations. This sudden flurry of interest in translations from the vernacular to English unfurled the literary wealth of India. Bankim Chandra, Rabindranath Tagore, Chandu Menon and Hari Narayan Apte among numerous others, were unearthed from the recesses of oblivion and translated and interpreted with a renewed fervour. Contemporary writers of regional repute were also translated to a pan-Indian audience. Ashapoorna Devi, Mahasweta Devi, Prem Chand, Amrita Pritam, M.T. Vasudevan Nair, O.V. Vijayan, Bama, Gaddar, Buddhadeb Bose, Mardhekar, Kristina BaldevVaid, U.R. Anantha Murthy, Gauri Deshpande, Nabaneeta Deb Sen and MrinalPande were translated to English and they took a prominent place in the Indian literary milieu. Some of them were also included in the English syllabuses in India.

Indian English writers like Salman Rushdie, have drawn flak from the vernacular writers with his absolute irreverence for them. Notwithstanding the war of words between regional writers and Indian writers in English, translation as a literary phenomenon has helped to resurrect many texts and popularise many regional texts among a pan-Indian readership. Though writers like Rushdie have criticised the vernacular languages for parochialism, the translation of various texts of the vernacular has proved to be popular, culturally rich as well as undulating with the contextual situations that every Indian is familiar with. Some work also gives us an

insight into the ironic nature of the western education.

Interestingly, the varieties of English one comes across in India maybe considered distinct variants of the same language. Indian variants of English as they are called evolved out of British English, imbibing several features of pronunciation, grammar and semantics from the native languages of India. Similar to the different regional accents of English in Britain, Indian English has very distinct pronunciation patterns in different regions of India. The different areas, such as North Eastern India, Bengal, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka as well as Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Punjab and Bihar, all add different shades to Indian English pronunciation.

Limitations which constitute a larger chunk of Indian writing in English are overcome by translations. With the growth of the translation industry, the milieu of Indian experiences is fast expanding and also the diversities of Indian literature from every nook and corner of India, be it Garo, Konkani, Marathi, Kashmir, Urdu or

Gujarati are available to Indian readers of English, irrespective of what they are and where they are.

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