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EXTENSION LECTURES PUBLICATION SERIES

INDO-ANGLIAN WRITINGS

TWO LECTURES

BHALCHANDRA NEMADE

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PRASARANGA
KARNATAK UNIVERSITY, DHARWAD.

1991

INDO-ANGLIAN WRITINGS

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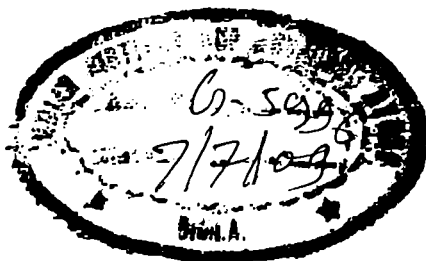
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PREFATORY NOTE

These two lectures were given in the Department of English, Karnatak University on 27th and 28th February 1987 in the scheme of Annual Special Lectures.

Dr. Bhalchandra Nemade is a Professor of English and a noted creative writer in Marathi. He was for some-time Head of the Department of English, Goa University. At present he is the Professor of Comparative Literature, holding the Tagore Chair in the Bombay University.

Karnatak University
Dharwad
November, 1991

Dr. C. R. Yaravinatelimath
Professor and Chairman
Department of English

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“Talk Hindi and let us get to the yolk of the egg.” Kim to the Bengali Babu, both in disguise at the Great Game.

I am quite aware of the large and loose connotations of the term ‘Indianness’ and can only hope that a substantial identity of values can be established, albeit negatively, about the ingredients of the term. Fortunately ‘Indian Writing in English’ does provide a clear baseline in both time and place, as the English language in India has a definite contact period and a well-defined institutional existence. And also we have at least one great author in Rudyard Kipling, who had demonstrated the clear case of ‘Indianness in English writing’.

The tautology in the title **The Indianness of Indian Writing in English** is quite significant in the context of the doubtful national character of this writing. What is understood today as ‘Indo-Anglian Writng’ is one of the latest nomenclatures of a body of books, hyphenisedly christened by university academicians. The writer of this ‘English’ species of Indian literary production is one who is Indian by birth or association and who, for a variety of reasons best known to himself, writes not in his mother tongue, but in English. The ‘how’ of this labour is discussed **ad nauseam**, however the ‘why’ of the entire activity is surprisngly scarce. Since India is

a country fabulous in all kind of idiosyncracies. it is futile to question the existence of this writing and to be fair to it, let us accept it as an abnormal case of a historical development, even as wryly as Saros Cowasjee, who treats it like a disease; "this is not a healthy trend, but it is there", she says. She also observes that it is read abroad not because it is good literature but because it is Indian.¹ Adil Jussawalla calls it a 'national folly', and several responsible critics have noticed a certain incogruity about Indian writing in English.²

Because the reading of most of these writers is least ingratiating, because all kind of absurd judgements on this writing vitiates our sense of language, literature, literary culture and creativity in general, and because it smacks of determined effort at mimicry, it is within our rights to examine the writing critically. When Raja Rao, regarded as the greatest Indian novelist in English admits that "English is the language of our intellectual make-up but not of our emotional make-up" and yet continues to write in it, I think it is important that we discuss its very *bona fides*.

1 "The Problem of Teaching Indian Fiction in Commonwealth Countries," *Awakened Conscience*, ed. C.D. Narasimhaiah (New Delhi : Stirling, 1978), p. 413.

2 "The New Poetry," *Readings in Commonwealth Literature*, ed. William Walsh (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 74.

The tragic predicament peculiar to Indo-Anglian writing is that it may blossom here, but will never take roots in the native soil. The reasons of this belief can be grouped in three major heads :

1. Historical
2. Socio-Linguistic, and
3. Literary cultural.

The other perhaps stronger reasons such as nationalist-nativist and psychological have been ignored here as these run the risk of being labelled under the fourth major head of "irrational".

It is surprising to see that such a large scale East-West contact as British India could have inspired few English writers to depict its central theme, although the British interest in India dates back to the establishment of East India Company in 1600 and British literary culture has been a developed system since then. The precise historical setting of the Indian writer in English would require a Hindu Caliban, a 'cultured' representative of the upper caste superstructure of Indian society, watching suspiciously the growing political position of the alien language all over the subcontinent to the early nineteenth century; and once it became a medium of social advancement and prestige by the mid-nineteenth century the shrewd Hindu Caliban would be seen making his decision to go bilingual and then, with numerous justifications, slaving for his stylistic perfection in the enemy's tongue.

The history of English education in India began as an act of charity with the initiative of European and American missions and by the early founders of the British Raj. Several contemporary British and native intellectuals compared the role of English in India to that of Greek and Latin in Europe during the Dark Ages. Soon, however, the Romantic idealism of early British rulers, inspired by the ideal of Utilitarian change, deviated to linguistic imperialism. Education for the haughty British rulers became synonymous with learning their language, for they themselves had no national system of education until 1870, when the Elementary Education Act was passed. The fundamental principle of British education (that is, ELT) policy laid down by Macaulay in 1836 was "to create an English-educated middle class who would be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern". Thus all the successive Education Commissions, in effect, emphasized the linguistic superiority of English, a foreign language, over all the native languages.

We may, however, recognize objectively the phenomenon of English in India as a part of the process of Indian acculturation and since the dynamics of acculturation are always creative, the English language may be said to have acted well in the diffusion of Western norms among the educated bilinguals. Since some amount of biculturism is implicit in bilingualism, English education also bordered on to anglicization of the educated few. It should be noted that it was only when linguistic-nativist movements supported by neo-Hinduism built up resistance against growing bilingualism that the

Indian writers began to divert the influence of English into their own languages and the stylistic systems of native languages were made to meet new semantic situations created by the new age. In other words, the second language was prevented from eliminating the first language, unlike that which happened in Ireland in the 17th century and in the Americas in the recent past, where the white man exterminated numerous languages along with their cultures.

It would be proper to say that the role of a 'classical' language that English was destined to play, has been played already, and now when every Indian writer's mother tongue is a standardized linguistic system, there is no strong reason as to why a foreign language should continue to attract his fair sense of creativity.

It is an admitted fact that the literary tradition of Indian society, despite its too well-known deficiencies possessed internationally recognised aesthetic systems, which had manifested themselves in a variety of literary movements, styles and cults, whether in the ancient Sanskrit works of gigantic structures or in the Prakrit works of magnificent tales and discourses or in the medieval works of the Bhakti movement or in the tradition of Urdu poetry exemplified by Ghalib and Momin. It was the changing national situation by the end of the 18th century, which marked the belated transformation of Indian society from the medieval to the modern, that found the native stylistic systems to be inadequate and insufficient, and required a stimulus

which it received from the West through the sole medium of English.

Unfortunately, the colonial contact of English demanded an outgrowing function of that medium, threatening the fundamental cultural values of the dominated linguistic groups, shorn of their political and military powers. The entire native tradition of the ancient civilization, evolved by large ethnic groups over centuries, was made to appear obsolete in view of the permanent need for English in India, so that at the time of independence it was no longer regarded as a foreign language, but one of the official languages. The English aesthetic norms and conventions in performance and appreciation of arts have alienated the elitist bilinguals from their own traditions which fortunately survive among the monolingual rural masses. There is a 'general Indian bewilderment,' to use V. S. Naipaul's words, in all the national styles resulting from the interference in native systems caused by the pressure of the dominant foreign system. The Indian Writer in English clings to such a system fostered by colonial set-up and forgets that he has to assert his role, by showing some visible sign of his 'freedom' as a member of linguistically exploited society.

It needs to be emphasized here that the use of the mother tongue is one of the natural rights of man and that all great civilizations have fought against the repression of this right. Unfortunately in India foreign superordination having been smoothly replaced by indigenous superordination, any nativistic claims are cleverly

assigned to cultural chauvinism. There exists a kind of surplus elitism in the country which, by force of circumstances, fosters the Indo-Anglian literary model.

One of the characteristic phenomena in the linguistic history of India is the existence of a *supra-language*. It has to be admitted that English served and continues to serve the geopolitical need of the ominifarious micro-minority Indianness made of numerous linguistic groups. For centuries, the vehicle of this need was Sanskrit, to be replaced by Prakrit languages between 300 B.C. and A.D. 100. This was followed by the revival of Sanskrit in the 2nd century. Later, Sanskrit was replaced by Persian after the 12th century (H. D. Sankalia)^a. English has been firmly established in this position since 1818, without, however, perpetuating the deeply rooted literary-aesthetic traditions of earlier supra-languages. The allegiance to any such supra-language, whether spoken, written, standard or foreign, is not given, unless there are other cultural subsystems—the epics, myths, legends, arts, ethics and religion—which together make the supra-language a part of the larger system of culture.

A *lingua franca* without such organic relationship to society's polysystem is a source of erosion of existing values. As stated earlier, the claims of English for neutrality among languages competing for supremacy in a

^a "Indian's Language," *Linguistics and Language Planning in India*, ed. N. G. Kalekar (Poona : Deccan College 1969), p. 16.

multilingual country like India, in fact, develop a surplus system. Its claim to be an international language can also be doubtful in the Indian context, since internationalism participates in the society within a national framework before joining the international megasystem.

Although the English language lives in us, we do not live in it. It has a distinct communicative sphere and its sphere of utilization is also clearly separate. It is also a fact that Indians have not so far established their own pidgin English in order to draw a sense of identity and rootedness from it. On the contrary, the 'Indian English' is a subject matter of humour and derision within our surplus elitism including Indo-Anglian writers. Take for example, Nissim Ezekiel's poem like "Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T. S." or "Very Indian Poem in Indian English." Here is the first stanza of the 'Indian English :

I am standing for peace and non-violence
 Why world is fighting fighting
 Why all people of world
 Are not following Mahatma Gandhi,
 I am simply not understanding.
 Ancient Indian wisdom is 100% correct.
 I should say even 200% correct.
 But modern generation is neglecting-
 Too much going for fashion and foreign thing.

What is humorous in the lines is in fact the very existence of English in India. Is this not humour out of adversity?

Sociolinguistic studies conducted in India by competent linguists categorically point out the phenomenon of social stratification connected with dialect and sociolect diversity naturally evolved by the multi-ethnic multi-lingual Indian society. If words are social patterns and grammatical features do indicate specific social attitudes particular to the community and if minute language variation is a part of Indian social structure, how miserably the Indo-Anglian writers like R. K. Narayan and Kamala Markandaya fail to represent the Indian reality through their evenly placid and hyper-correct standard of English? It does nothing but distort Indian reality. If English is to become a genuine medium for Indian creative writing, it has to develop its own varieties. And this is not likely to come by in the near or distant future, since notions of correctness predominate our utilization of English.

To be precise, the mode of operation of English as a supra-language in India has been cultural-written-formal rather than social-oral-conversational in the national linguistic context. Such a written variety which has not emerged from the soil is highly detrimental to creative use. The sphere of its utilization is communication among elitist upper castes, mostly rootless expatriots. In Dilip Chitre's words, these are "a tiny minority thinly spread over the entire nation, controlling its administration and commercial networks or serving those who control them." The English language has become thus a pathetic necessity for post-Independence Indians, the widows

of the British Empire, and it is retained in India mainly because it maintains what can be called 'equality of disadvantage' among Indians of different mother tongues. It survives on the impoverishment resulting from multilingualism encouraged by our tolerant national culture; and by occupying the position of a supra-language, it aggravates this impoverishment further. In J. G. Gumperz's words, a language contains rigid norms, like secret language, and mastery of its linguistic conventions becomes more important in gaining success than substantive knowledge of the content dispersed through it.

If we were native speakers of English, the phenomenon would not have been problematic to us at all. But writing in a language which is not infused into our native culture does create a complex of problems relating to language, style and literary culture. The relative advantages of writing in English such as good publishers, wider audience, more economic gains, the prizes which raise the status of a writer overnight etc. do not compensate for the limitations inherent in such a writing. Individual cases apart, on the socio-linguistic plane we have to rule out the possibility of native-like control of a foreign language. Bilingualism means less than two complete semantic systems at the bilingual individual's command. Having been deprived of the conceptual system for organizing experience like a native speaker, the content of a writer in a foreign language is deformed by his limited 'underlying language competence.' He, therefore, writes pseudoprose or pseudoverse in English. It is natural

that such writers should prefer to make westernized cities (and in some cases western cities) as their home ground. According to Whorfian theory, their competence to operate outside their culture would develop a 'neutral' language. Whereas every word in the mother-tongue presents its own geology, the words in a foreign language offer insipid solidarity to the writer's competence.

A foreign language thus suppresses the natural originality of Indian writers in English, enforcing upon the whole tribe the fine art of parody. It is worth noting in this context that the cases of Indians' command over English are more frequent than those of Englishmen making patronising under-statements about Indians' use of English. This smacks of Crusoe-Friday relationship, since an Indian nightingale does not receive even the status of a crow in the history of English literature.

There is a possibility of isolated works of great merit being produced in Indo-Anglian writing, but they would always have a synchronic dimension because such a writing lacks the historical dimension of natural evolution. This catastrophe arises because Indian Writers in English cannot be bound to a homogeneous tradition. For lack of such a tradition this writing produces only minor poets from Toru Dutt to Nissim Ezekiel, its major novelists like R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao remain minor novelists on the canvas of World Writing in English, and its intellectual writers like Nirad Chaudhuri are given the role of cultural clowns. Any writer, working in a strong literary tradition "spread over the nation's history, time and

'space'', performs the role of a giver of standards, an ethical interpreter of the language community. Unfortunately, an Indian Writer in English is permanently doomed to be a receiver of foreign standards, because the culture which envelops his literary text is not recognized as 'an English language culture'.

Another degenerating factor in Indo-Anglian writing is its low stylistic component. There should be a high degree of reciprocity between linguistic and stylistic systems. Individual style must be rooted in a broad linguistic continuum available to a writer in the society in which he behaves linguistically. The linguistic features he selects and the linguistic norms he violates—both these freedoms are granted to him by the language community of which he is a member. Since both these freedoms are not available to the Indo-Anglian writer, his selectivity is controlled by a limited import of linguistic elements in India. The linguistic behaviour he experiences in a bazar or a 'hair cutting saloon' is of no use to him. Naturally, therefore, his narrative techniques are either borrowed or unreal, and he develops a fragmented linguistic personality. He cannot make coinage, loans or calques as these need sanction from the language community which he is deprived of. Thus, incapable of strengthening individual style, he is forced to write in a stagnated period style. His innovations may not prove to be 'aesthetic,' because the aesthetics of *parole* is wholly decided by the *language* of the foreign language community. On the whole his linguistic behaviour is parasitical, sponging on a foreign stylistic code. The direction of evolution and change

which characterizes the style of all great works is totally missing in his writing. In short, Indo-Anglian writing is incapable of producing a great writer, because the two parameters of any great writing, namely, national culture and national language are both missing in it.

We are now in a position to question whether a writing of this kind can ever achieve the status of literature, in the sense we understand a tribal or English or Kannada literature as literature, as a part of a larger polysystem of ~~the~~ total culture of speech community, an aggregate of phenomena operating for the community. A writer whose mother tongue is not English and whose speech community thinks in a different language can only produce 'books' and certainly not 'literature'. A few knots of refined poets writing some kind of modelled poetry, some fine novels with well-executed plots, little drama and less criticism do not make what should be called literature. Literature is what cultural stakes the community places upon it. It is for this reason that Shakespeare was more valuable to the British than the Empire. Keeping alive a literary tradition and the finest capacities of the language, inaugurating an ambiguity that enriches all levels of language and structuring one's creative faculty in the language are the pre-requisite of a bona fide author. Much of the sanctity associated with literary art springs from these pre-requisites, which, in turn, are perfectly integrated into the literary institutions of society. Here we have to distinguish between informing people about one's experience and inviting them to share in the process. The language of literature is neither an instrument nor a

vehicle; it is a structure of the writer's consciousness which is also related to wider cultural structures.

The language of Indo-Anglian texts is so alien to the life it deals with that it becomes a kind of distance for its own sake. a distance to suggest that Indian reality has nothing to do with the activity of writing. We are not emphasizing here the mere psychological basis of a mother tongue, but the functional flexibility, natural efficiency, economy and accuracy. The mother tongue has been exploited by great authors even to the extent of communication collapse, but the necessary correlation between the linguistic style and the content enhances the aesthetic merit of such linguistic experimentation. There is also a causal link between the two, because the author's style is a continuum—beginning with the cognition of reality to the rhetoric of the text.

The literary status of Indian writing in English remains problematic, because the language of this writing has an entirely different function from to focus on language itself. No writing can ever dispense with orality; yet in textual bilingualism of the Indo-Anglian kind, culture-bound styles are transcreated in a foreign language as if they were artificial codes, a medium which is the end itself. In a real communication, the sender is in a position to sense what would be the response in the receiver's mind to which his own message can relate. This anticipated feedback missing in the Indo-Anglian textual bilingualism, the deviation of meaning can indeed be vast and abysmal. Adopting England or America in itself may not produce

large-scale Conrads and Nobokovs, because a writer has to adopt both the ethos of the country and its language. So long as Raja Rao carries in his brahmanical head his Vedas, and Himalayas and the Ganga wherever he goes and so long as R. K. Narayan chooses a small town location 'somewhere in south India', there is little possibility of genuine linguistic metamorphosis coming through their writing in English.

R. V. Dhongde effectively demonstrates that if language is a part of the landscape, we can expect only loose Indianness as well as loose Englishness in such texts, for true Englishness would demand greater discount on the Indianness, and true Indianness would do the same on the Englishness.⁴ In both cases, neutralization of Indianness is inevitable and the creative work will develop deficiencies of content and style by the standards of either. Any author would find this situation aesthetically unacceptable.

⁴ "The Concept of 'Indianness' in Indian Fiction in English," *Bulletin of Deccan Collge Research Institute*, 44 (1985), 65-70.

The Achievement of Indo-Anglian Writing

While making a statement on the achievement of Indo-Anglian writing, I am afraid I cannot avoid the dangers of generalization. Besides, the assessment of this body of books has never been properly done (either by Indian or by English critics, a natural consequence of what can be described as an intellectual exercise twice removed from reality, a linguistic refraction of one culture through another culture's medium totally purposeless. Fortunately, a number of critics have attempted to discuss the value of this writing. V. S. Naipaul, Buddhadev Basu, Saros Cowasjee, B. Ratan, David McCutcheon, John Oliver Perry, and Kersy Katrak regard the entire body of Indo-Anglian writing as more or less a dilettantish activity.

The second group of critics is the Indo-Anglian writers themselves, who, surprisingly enough, do not seem to discover much merit in their predecessors or contemporaries. For example, Nissim Ezekiel finds Aurobindo as unreadable a poet as Saleem Peeradina finds Nissim Ezekiel a superficial poet 'without depth or accuracy'. We cannot learn much from the Indo-Anglian writers' criticism, anyway, as their critical remarks show shifting contexts and absence of critical framework.

The third group constitutes the University mills—M. K. Naik, V. A. Shahane, K. R. Shrinivasa Iyenger and C. D. Narasimhaiah. This criticism is obviously informative and without any direction, although the sense of commitment to the cause of Indians' handling a foreign medium is quite genuine and appreciable in the critical writings of these veterans

The fourth group is represented by critics from abroad, mostly from the United Kingdom—William Walsh, Linda Hess, Caren Smith, John Press, H. M. Williams, Margaret J. O'Donnell, S. C. Harrex, Alastair Niven and several other Commonwealth specialists. None of these are even heard of as significant critics in the context of English literature in general and they do not seem to have even the rudimentary knowledge of literary criticism. If any great English writer is found to speak something by way of a stray comment on Indo-Anglian writers, it is either derogatory or scrupulously damaging to Indians' unwanted linguistic ventures. For example, Yeats declaimed against Rabindranath Tagore's Poems in English as "sentimental rubbish," and Eliot could imagine only three literatures in English in future—British, American and Irish.¹

Then there is a frightening amount of "research" material produced by teachers of English in Indian Universities, which floods the book-market and bankrupts our

¹ "Tradition and the Practice of Poetry," *The Southern Review*, Autumn 1985.

universities I am sure this critical production only helps its careerist producers. This indeed marks the most shameful phase of Indian academic criticism.

A few linguists like Braj B. Kachru have however attempted a serious linguistic interpretation of "textual bilingualism," a rather valueless term for Indo-Anglian writing. A few journals like *New Quest* regularly publish evaluative articles on this writing and some few journals are exclusively devoted to criticism on the Indo-Anglian trends.

All this intenerary would suggest that although journals and publishing houses devoted to Indo-Anglian creative writing are, like little magazines, short-lived, the critical patronage this writing enjoys in India is indeed out of proportion. Despite such a rich crop of criticism, there is hardly an attempt to evaluate the work of the writers in purely critical canons. I feel that the Indo-Anglian critics are tireless in paying the Indians' use of the English language too big a compliment. It is a pity that they do not realize how damaging it is to the writing and writers themselves. An overview of Indo-Anglian writing has not been taken by any of these critics.

It is therefore extremely difficult to fix the standards of achievement in a writing devoid of cultural sustenance from its own roots. Benedetto Croce suggested that aesthetic progress of an art form can be decided by three tests :

- 1) Whether the art form shows more catholic taste,
- 2) A negative test : it should not have a number of imperfect and inferior works, and
- 3) The degree of refinement.²

Even if we apply these available tests to Indo-Anglian writing, the results are far from the signs of progress. The negative test brings forth innumerable Indo-Anglian poets, novelists, and autobiography writers mired into profound mediocrity. As to their catholicity and refinement, the first question that arises is: to which cultural framework do they relate their works? A writer who lives in the first language culture but writes in a second language is up to creating confrontation between two cultural systems along with their corresponding subsystems-aesthetic, stylistic, social-civil-and-political, and linguistic. This kind of confrontation involves huge tasks of cultural undertakings. We would illustrate here how the Indo-Anglian Writer is incapable of handling such tasks by examining a few tenets of three representative Indian works in English: *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951), *The Guide* (1958) and *Jejuri* (1976).

In a contrastive perspective, it would be clear that while a representative Kannada or Marathi writer, being a part of the broad language community, participates in the exchange of ideas and value formation processes of

² Aesthetic, trans. Douglas Ainslie (London: Peter Owen, 1962, rep. 1909), p. 137.

his society and is actively concerned with revitalization of his society in some way, an Indo-Anglian writer looks upon his society only for supply of raw material to the English, i. e. foreign readership. We can appreciate Jhabvala's strange choice : "Invariably one writes not for Indians, but for Western readers".⁸ But how can we tolerate Mulk Raj Anand, seeking a certificate of creative merit from E. M. Forster ? Both aesthetically and ethically this is not a satisfying behaviour fit for any creative artist.

In the three works cited above, no loud clash of bicultural values can be heard mainly because they are written in English. The writers seem to prefer a negative space left out between two cultural systems. A light, harmless, often cynical back-drop dominates their feeble world-view. The India that we know is misrepresented. The consciousness of being sort of cultural interpreters spreads all through the texts. Indian reality irritates their English syntax and the writers do not seem "to eat their own dinners". All the three writers are very familiar with English ethic which is necessary to write these works in English; but Indian ethic is not at all necessary, on the other hand, it is ridiculed. Individual morality is absent. Literary conventions are totally Western; imagery, rhetoric, narrative techniques are borrowed from Western literature.

⁸ New York Times, April 20, 1975.

Perhaps the most serious drawback of these works lies in the fact that their writers forget the binary relationship of language with culture—language being both the result of culture and the condition of culture. It is for this reason that Indian Writing in English appears to be the extension of Western literary culture, rather than of Indian. What kind of audience do these writers keep in mind while writing? Certainly not the millions of Indians who are 'unknown', who visit Jejuri every year as a serious traditional ritual, or who cannot dream of meeting a sexually starving Bharat Natyam dancer. The Western literary norms, such as the Aryan myth (*Autobiography*), extra-marital sex (*The Guide*), and cynical agnosticism (*Jejuri*) overdo their functions. What native rhythm of the Indian life do we find in these books, if they are to be treated as Indian works? Nothing except Indian substance which provides the raw material to these bilingual city-dwellers, who sell it so cheap to the putative English audience. The low rational component in Indian cultural sensibility has been unduly emphasized, but the rich emotional component, which we find represented in Bengali, Kannada or Marathi works is missing. Why should it be missing? Perhaps these writers do not desire that the robust problems of Indian reality should enter the brittle frameworks of their linguistic artifacts. Again why is the Western concept of individualism, i. e. individuality expanded to the full, played up in all the three works? Why do they not give the feeling of the sufferings and dreams of the Indian people?

Obviously the writers are not competent to transmit the Indian reality they perceive in one language to the other. The Writer's filial relation to one culture and language is intercepted by another culture and language. Such writing perpetuates the hegemonic values of a dominant foreign culture. For example, Nirad Chaudhuri states all kinds of minute details regarding the squalor and poverty of India in his *Autobiography*, but feels shy of holding 'the merciful British Empire' responsible for the colonial exploitation, although so much information in this regard is available. To take another pertinent example, he avoids in his *Autobiography* how many 'children he bred', because breeding about a dozen children, the real cause of Indian poverty, would not create a good impression on the B. B. C. or the New Statesman reviewer. Had he written his autobiography in Bengali, he would have proudly mentioned the number, because our Krishna worshipping culture adores childhood *ad libitum*.

R. K. Narayan plots the spiritual 'no-exit' of his criminal hero in a totally non-Indian perspective. Fasting is not always an instrument of miracle in the Indian spiritual order, but it appears in *The Guide* as a 'pleasing' interpretation of Oriental stupidity as it would please the English readership. The American T. V. Reporter's interview with the dying Swami, the doctor's official reply and the light vein that dominates the narrative to the end of the novel would not appear in the same form had Narayan written the novel in Tamil. For a Tamil reader

the American reporter would appear a buffoon. Similarly, Narayan's attitude to Rosie would force him to take up some cultural position as regards temple prostitutes, because sacred prostitution has a historical-social dimension, which he can afford to miss in English. After all, the pudding is for the foreign taste.

Similar philistinism is overbearing in Kolatkar's *Jejuri*, "Scratch a rock and a legend springs", he writes. With little sympathy for the poor pilgrims, beggars, priests and their quite happy children at Jejuri, Kolatkar comes and goes like a week-end tourist from Bombay. He should know that the ancient culture, which stores up everything in its rocks, also stores up the English language he uses, and that Jejuri pilgrimage is after all not so degenerate as, for example, a Juhu beach cocktail party. He would not find similar idiom in Marathi, because the Marathi language has a history enriched by generations who adored the primitive god *Khandoba*.

In a vital literary tradition a single technique, a symbol or a stylistic device is invented in relation to the literary conventions of the tradition. A Joyce, a Beckett or a Tagore pursues a particular mode of expression with total commitment to his language by naturally revolting against the conventions and naturally generating strong resistance and even acrimony in the tradition. It is impossible to discover any dialectics of anxiety of influence, or the felt harmony of cults and movements, or the foregrounding of style, or Chatterly-ban-type controversies in Indian writing in English, because its writers have

chosen to live in the backwater of Indian cultural life. This paradox of conservatism at the heart of the elitist avant-gardism in our country is extremely spectacular. If the worth of a writer is to be judged on the degree of linguistic innovation, few of our nice novelists and poets are seen capable of generating a literary legacy.

It is no wonder then that Indo-Anglian criticism has not even begun (can it?). The relationship of literary value with literary interpretation does not exist in its wholly institutional survey-type professorial criticism. There is no base for critical canons to exist in this production, also because the writers themselves are oblivious to the disintegration of their own creativity by a wrong choice of literary sociology. The so-called well-known Indo-Anglian writers are merely consumed through institutions set up with professed non-aesthetic objectives, such as Indian journalism, Indian Universities, sinking publishing houses and unreadable literary journals. It is kept alive by artificial strategies—like tea kept hot in a thermos. This is the way nuisance is institutionalised in a pseudo-democratic country like India.

I believe, literature, the living literature, comes into being from all sides of society, people high and low. Critics in the newly colonised countries like Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa do not consider their early literary phases as genuine for lack of folk songs, women's lore, ballads, popular songs and the like. It is the grass-root non-academic taste that makes literature a

literature. A live interaction between the author, the text and the reader is in fact literature. *Achievement* in a history of literature is its organic growth, in literary theory it is a culminating of disciplines, doctrines and personalities internally developed. In literary criticism achievement is again related to some system of concepts, some points of reference, in relation to historical conditions. The Indo-Anglian writing has not proved to be such an interaction or organic growth or relationship outside itself. Even the political cultural role it played superficially before Independence has vanished. It has not proved to be a source of social cohesion anywhere in India after Independence and it floats as a miserable print culture over the thin upper crust of the population of 600 million Indians, speaking 1652 distinct native languages of the country.

The most outstanding names, not only in the context of Indian fiction written in English but in English fiction as a whole, are Rudyard Kipling, G. V. Desani and Salman Rushdie. Even these three have such a widely different background that it is difficult to place them in any single tradition. Of these, Desani has only one classic, *All About H. Hatterr* to his credit, and Rushdie's subject matter tends to be shrinking and his linguistic devices appear to be rather exhaustible. It is important to note that all the three have chosen a similar cross-cultural situation for their Eurasian heroes. Their themes tangentially reveal the fantastic view of "this great and beautiful land." They create a typically Indian bizarre

atmosphere by internalizing the English language, which characteristically suits 'the happy Indian disorder.'

Perhaps India *is* such an entity of an absurd incorporation, and to find the real Indianness, it is only the absurdist view that seems to do full justice to the Indian content. Other Indo-Anglian novelists like Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Kamala Markandaya, Malgaonkar and others fail miserably on account of their straightforward realism, may be because their realism cannot cope with the monstrous Indianness. The absurdist stance is perhaps the only possible device that generates an absurdist style in English, because Indianness taken as a whole requires exactly such a style. While Kipling's absurdist narrative is pre-modernist and post-Victorian, Desani and Rushdie make a remarkable advance on post-Joycean English narrative style. All the three novelists are Indian by sensibility; this separates them from other Indo-Anglian novelists, who are Indian either by birth or by ancestry, and who have cultivated the English sensibility only to fall back upon their Indian subject matter. The diatypes of the English language the three great novelists have created are as much personal as they are unique in the history of English fictional style. The linguistic security they enjoy with utter confidence is rarely found in other Indo-Anglian novelists.

The way the three novelists involve their characters in the terrible confusion of India's past and present, myths and politics, history and landscape, flora and fauna is in itself a great stylistic adventure in the art

of fiction. They deliberately use artificial narrative methods and **pastiche** in order to throw into bold relief their typical Eurasian heroes against Indian social setting. Thus the consciousness of Kim, H. Hatter or Saleem Sinai is at once Indian and para-Indian, Hindu and Muslim and Christian, brown and white. In fact these interiorised cross-cultural constituents in the protagonist naturally maintain the beautiful balance between the English language, which alienates him from the narrow group structures of the land and the Indianness, which holds his identity down. The result is the absurdist stance extremely congenial for the representation of Indian reality.

Such attempts have been made by several Indo-Anglian writers—belatedly by Raja Rao in *Comrade Kirilov*, by Nissim Ezekiel and Arun Kolatkar in their light-humoured poems, for example— but they lose their balance sometimes in favour of Englishness, sometimes in favour of Indianness. This problem of finding a favourable stance to represent Indian reality could be seen as a Chief factor in Kamala Markandaya's continuous failure in portraying Indian social situations. She is seen comfortably dividing her vision of India into two opposing view-points, borrowed from western sociological framework. Most often she places an English character with an Indian Mira, and Richard in *Some Inner Fury*, Lady Caroline Bell and Valmiki in *The Possession*, Helen and Bashiam in *The Coffer Dams*, Tully and Rikki in *Pleasure-Garden* and so on. In *The Nowhere Man* she is at last nearer the basic conflict of her creativity, however Srinivas's search for Indianness ends where it should have

begun and his Indian ethos progresses crudely backwards into his past instead of advancing in the face of British racism. The naive contradictions such as traditional rural India Vs. Industrialization (*Nector in the Sieve*), the rural Vs the Urban (*A Handful of Rice*), the husband and the wife (*A Silence of Desire*) do not add anything to the complexities of the themes of her novels and one wonders whether she knows what the art of the novel means in terms of sociological processes.

Raja Rao, who opens his masterpiece *The Serpent and the Rope* with a statement "I was born a Brahmin" hopelessly alienates himself from the general humanity all through his novel. What his India has to offer to mankind is his purely philosophical hermeneutics. In other words, he offers a merchandise to society through his uneven and disjointed English novels what society does not ask him. We do not have to read twice the other novelists like R.K.Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand to understand how nicely they execute their plots and make themselves admirable only for that. One often remembers Oscar Wilde's statement that mediocrity is always at its best in the context of our Indo Anglian novelists. While the art of the novel was making tremendous strides in the west and in Indian languages, our Indo-Anglian novelists have been producing a kind of 'tourist fiction' of little worth in the history of the world novel.

The nature of much Indo-Anglian poetry is, to use Patrick White's phrase, "like formally complete sterile eggs". Since poetry as a linguistic discourse can afford

to be an esoteric and exclusive art form, in which constantly deviating linguistic features and the resulting mystification may become a virtue in itself. Especially in the modernist era, it is only a trained mind that can distinguish a poem from a pseudo-poem. The Indo-Anglian poetry has been full of innumerable 'poetic poets' who model their versification on Anglo-American linguistic experimentation. Stylistic sophistication pertinent to a particular age in England or America has been deciding the worth of Indo-Anglian poetic imitation. The Indo-Anglian poetic tradition is a formally beautiful tradition in which works like *Savitri*, an alcoholic confusion of thousands of lines could become a landmark. The Aurobindites seem to have mistaken bad prose for poetry, which *Savitri* is.

It is no wonder therefore that the successive Eliotan modernists and Americanists could win their day with second-hand imported imagery and obscure wobbling syntax, which is their concept of modern poetry. The Learning House and New Ground poets and the Poetry Workshop versifiers have been basking in the glory of western modernists. Everyone of these poets is trained to drop some British or American technique on us, everyone claims a right to violent English syntax without the necessary suffering behind such violence. Poets like K. Ramanujan and Arun Kolatkar have at least one root in their parent culture, and they often are seen jilting it in Indo-Anglian image; but for those like Nissim Ezekiel, R. Parthasarathy, Gieve Patel, the Daruwallas

and several other disaffiliated Indian poets, there is indeed no escape from the uniform static monotonous verse. A poet like Jayant Mahapatra is the extreme case of sterile imagery that suits the kind of non-committal, amoral and too beautiful an organization of English words. If any one of these poets seems to be good, it is because everyone else is so bad.

Even here we may be warned of using the term "Indo-Anglian Poetry", because poetry is the central form of linguistic experimentation in any literature, and any poetry achieves its sense of human identity with linguistic inventiveness. However, in Indo-Anglian writing, it is the novel that is at the centre. This speaks of the depleted linguistic sources of Indo-Anglian poetry as a whole. As John Olive Perry observes, the Indo-Anglian poet is "very isolated, involuted, almost inevitably elitist and culturally alienated".⁴ It is therefore futile to attempt to discover anything new in this genre by way of content, form or style. As for its language, it is wholly derivative, a ready made recipe of modernist poetic idiom, which does the poet's thinking and writing for him.

It must be observed in this context that nowhere in the twentieth century any poet, whether Yeats, Eliot, Pound, Auden or Neruda, has turned his back to the current problems of life, whereas every Indo-Anglian

⁴ "Current Shiftings in Aims and Relationships among Indo-English Poets," *World Literature Today* 60 (1), Winter 1986, p. 49.

poet works in a value-neutral zone, a negative space carved out by the two cultures he pretends to own.

The Indo-Anglian writing is indeed a unique phenomenon in world literature, a natural consequence of colonial language spread. For the students of cultural anthropology, it offers numerous problems for study. At its best, it reveals an Internationalism syndrome, a vain shout to the western world that Indians exist—a fact nobody has ever denied. Yet it is told in an alien language, pitifully. It is all the more pitiable because the values of Indo-Anglian writers are not shaped by their first culture, much less by their first language. This seriously affects linguistic associations of culture objects. In Indo-Anglian writing culture consciousness precedes linguistic consciousness and the latter depends upon the former. By encouraging a foreign language system to be a fit medium for creative writing, they bring their already low-value culture still lower. It is doubtful whether this writing will add any 'Indianness' to world writing in English. A well-planned programme of translations from the regional languages into English will at once make this writing obsolete. Until then, let it survive as a clear case of mimicry.