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The Nativization of Macaulayan Language: Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*

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Abstract

The participation of the intelligentsia and elite class in various sectors like law, trade, teaching and administration of colonial state had developed into curious yet scandalous relationship towards English language and other various regional languages. English has emerged as a site of power structure which implies that the literature written in English assumes a greater identity than those written in regional languages. But, at the same time, regional languages could not be ignored or neglected altogether because of its inevitable necessity to connect one with past as well as bringing about the concept of integral India. The present papers explores how the experimental use of English language can help retain the cultural identity which has seriously been dented by the same

Key words

Language, intelligentsia, colonial state, nativization, cultural identity

During the 1950s and 60s, in literary world, the difference between various indigenous languages and English language was termed as a choice between decolonization and

recoloni-zation, rootedness and rootlessness, integrity and corruption, and wholeness and fragmentation. It has also been termed as a quarrel between indigenous vs alien, authentic vs fake, westernized vs 'Indian', and even tradition vs modernity. The Father of the nation Mahatma Gandhi has expressed his serious concern over the obsession with English language in his classic *Hind Swaraj*. In his *Hind Swaraj* he declares, "To give millions a knowledge of English is to enslave them. The foundation that Macaulay laid of education has enslaved us" (103). He further added, "It is we, the English-knowing men, that have enslaved India. The curse of the nation will rest not upon the English but upon us" (104). The noted novelist Shashi Deshpande and noted poet Meena Alexander too have expressed their concern over this problem. As Shashi Deshpande observes:

One of the problems I've had to face as a writer is the isolation one works in when one writes in English in India% an isolation that is emphasized when one is a woman... For me the problems amounted to this: there was nothing, nobody I could model myself on. I could only tell myself, I don't want to write like this, not like this, not like this. (229)

Somewhat the same dilemma is experienced by Meena Alexander when she writes in English language: "English had alienated me from what I was born to; it was also the language of intimacy and bore the charged power of writing" (116).

The term nativization of a language can be defined as the rendering of an alien language in one's own linguistic and socio-cultural framework. Theoretically the term nativization has been described variously by different thinkers. It can be described as 'acculturization', or as 'indigenization' or even 'hybridization' of a language in an altogether alien or non native socio cultural context. It can

also be described as a kind of deviation or divergence of a language or varieties of language respectively from a parent source. In the specific context of English, the term may refer to the changes and modifications which English has undergone due to its contact with other languages in diverse socio-cultural and geographical setting in the peripheral circle of English. This is done by a continuous process of coining and accumulation of new words and meanings to suit the native social and cultural requirements. This process is also known as language change in Linguistics. In this connection English is the classic example of language change in both aspects: diachronic and synchronic. English has been used in different environments different from its origin. It has been adjusting itself while changing its texture according to new socio-cultural dimensions. The process of nativization has definitely expanded the horizon of English as a language. In India too English has gone through different phases of moulding and even remoulding and refashioning. This process of rendering of English language into typical Indian context entails the passing of English through the phases of imitation, adaptation and innovation. English happily solemnized the marriage i. e. polygamy with other Indian languages which resulted in a new and distinct variety of *englishes*.

If we make an attempt to understand the role of English or nativized englishes in post-colonial India, we can safely talk about two distinct purposes: first, language of imperialism whereby the white masters rather Macaulays sought to colonize India and second, language as resistance whereby the natives responded or fought or wrote back to the whites. As an instrument of resistance English language could then be seen not merely as a means to engage in struggle, but as a principal site of the struggle. This struggle should be taken as cultural and political project to rethink the meanings of English in altered situations. The practice of famous phrase

‘writing back’ in English language necessarily involves the issue of powerful resistance against colonial and imperial powers by using the language rather reusing to shape new realities as witnessed and experienced not only by the Indian English novelists but also by several non native language communities. This does not mean only waging a war against Imperialist for freedom but it means the involvement into a kind of cultural battles and counter discursive positions, and thus involving into broader question of cultural politics.

Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in their celebrated text *The Empire Writes Back* talk about a difficult situation in postcolonial writing where:

... many writers were forced into the search for an alternative authenticity which seemed to be escaping them, since the concept of authenticity itself was endorsed by a centre to which they did not belong and yet was continually contradicted by everyday experience of marginality. The eventual consequence of this experience was that notions of centrality and the ‘authentic’ was themselves necessarily questioned, challenged, and finally abrogated. (1989 40)

Tiffin in one of her writings *Commonwealth Literature: Comparison and Judgment* talks about two stages in the postcolonial nativization process: “abrogation”, a denial and refusal of the colonial and metropolitan categories, its standard, and of normative or “correct” usage, its claim to fixed meanings inscribed in words; and “appropriation”, whereby the language is seized and replaced in a specific cultural location. Postcolonial writing abrogates the privileged centrality of English by using language to signify the difference while employing a sameness which allows it to be understood (1983: 19-35). By inscribing meaning, writing releases it to a “dense proliferation” of possibilities, and the “myth of centrality” embodied in the concept of a standard

language is forever overturned. It is at this moment that “English becomes english” (ibid). In a nutshell it can be argued that like so called standard English even Indian English/ englishes are linguistically well defined and systematic and most importantly culturally autonomous.

Long back ago before the emergence of postcolonial scenario in colonial era noted novelist Raja Rao has talked about the process of nativization of English language extensively. Already we have defined the term nativization of a language as re-defining or assimilating the language in one’s own linguistic and cultural framework. It is a process of invention thus accumulation of new words and meanings to meet the social and cultural necessities. In this connection it would be interesting to see how Raja Rao anxious about the use of ‘alien language’, brings about a transformation in the use of same, while incorporating native flavour and colour, in his classic text *Kanthapura*. Raja Rao, one of the first generation of Indian novelists in English, expressed the linguistic and narrative anxiety of the postcolonial writer while emphasizing the nativization of English and its new identities in the foreword of the novel:

The telling has not been easy. One has to convey in a language that is not one’s own the spirit that is one’s own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought-movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use the word ‘alien’, yet English is not really 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 [emphasis added] instinctively bilingual, many of us writing in our own language and in English.
(5)

Rao’s anxiety reflects the worries and concerns of non native writer writing in an ‘alien’ language. The risk is eluded

by assuming the target readership to be bilingual, speaking both English and any of the Indian languages. In this connection a noted thinker Rumina Sethi rightly observes:

Rao perhaps refers to Kannada, the language spoken in Karnataka, and there could be two reasons for that: the language and speech mannerisms used in the novel are close to those of Kannada, and Rao is, himself, a native speaker of the language. But in not specifying the exact location of the spoken language, the reader is at liberty to infer that the foreword is, perhaps, indicative of his or her own particular language, which is presumed to be shared by the author owing to the subtle construction of community suggested by first person plurals. The concealed information not only removes the difficulty of employing any single language in a multilingual country, it also legitimizes the use of English. This enables Rao to evoke a response from all readers so long as they speak and read English and one Indian language. By establishing English as the lingua franca, he can go on to write an Indian novel in English with convenience. (*Myths of the Nation* 41)

Further Raja Rao adds:

We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indian. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us. Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will some day prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish or the American. Time alone will justify it.(5)

The terms like acculturation, hybridization and indigenization which have been the part and parcel of process of nativization is clearly reflected here. Here he talks about the urgent need to construct new native idioms and techniques to suit the occasion. He emphasizes the utmost importance

of mixing of foreign into indigenous to forge a new multilingualism while giving more importance to local. Intellect and emotion must come to create a new whole. He is of the opinion that English can be indigenized if it is dressed up in native's rich mythologies.

Raja Rao does not stop here. He further talks about the stylistic elements in the process of nativization. In this connection he emphasizes the importance of stylistic transcreation, "After language the next problem is that of style. The tempo of Indian life must be infused into our English expression, even as the tempo of American or Irish life has gone in to the making of theirs" (6). This insistence on tempo of Indian life might refer to the oral tradition of Indian ethos. This orality must be incorporated even in a novel especially in the narration of long tales. This provides Raja Rao a vantage point to gradually shift from hybrid form of Indo-English speech to a more Indianized perspective. This can be done by the incorporation of certain cultural traditions in the narration, amalgamation of cultural strategies which are almost absent in the alien language's narrative technique. He talks about the unique feature of typical Indian storytelling which does not conform to punctuation strictly. He remarks:

And our paths are paths interminable. The *Mahabharata* has 214,778 verses and the *Ramayana* 48,000. *Puranas* there are endless and innumerable. We have neither punctuation nor the treacherous 'ats' and 'ons' to bother us – we tell one interminable tale. Episode follows episode, and when our thoughts stop our breath stops, and we move to another thought. This was and still is the ordinary style of our story telling. (6)

In the manner of Raja Rao Chinua Achebe, a renowned African novelist of the modern times, in a speech entitled 'The African Writer and the English Language' addresses this issue in the manner of Raja Rao. He says:

Is it right that a man should abandon his mother tongue for someone else? It looks like a dreadful betrayal and produces a guilty feeling. But for me there's no other choice. I have been given the language and I intend to use it... I felt that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new surroundings. (as quoted in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o 2007 7- 8)

Gabriel Okara too intensively talks about injecting indigenous elements in the form of proverbs, folklores and peculiarities of indigenous speech, in his case Senghorian 'black blood' into the rusty joints of foreign language. He remarks:

As a writer who believes in the utilization of African ideas, African philosophy and African folklore and imagery to the fullest extent possible, I am of the opinion the only way to use them effectively is to translate them almost literally from the African language native to the writer into whatever European language he is using as medium of expression. I have endeavoured in my words to keep as close as possible to the vernacular expressions. For, from a word, a group of words, a sentence and even a name in any African language, one can glean the social norms, attitudes and values of a people.

In order to capture the vivid images of African speech, I had to eschew the habit of expressing my thoughts first in English. It was difficult at first, but I had to learn. I had to study each Ijaw expression I used and to discover the probable situation in which it was used in order to bring out the nearest meaning in English. I found it fascinating exercise. (ibid)

The writer further explains his viewpoints and adds:

Some may regard this way of writing English as a desecration of the language. This is of course not true. Living languages grow like living things, and English is far from a dead language. There are African, West Indian, Australian, Canadian and New Zealand versions of English. All of them add life and vigour to the language while reflecting their own respective cultures. Why shouldn't there be a Nigerian or West African English which we can use to express our own ideas, thinking and philosophy in our own way. (ibid 9)

Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* is a classic example of a nativization of English language. Here the novelist self consciously uses an alien language for storytelling. This may be rightly called as intuitive translation. The novel has a female narrator Achakka, the grandmother. She beautifully uses colorful figures of speech to bring in the Indian aroma and flavour to an alien language:

He has refused bride after bride, some beautiful as new opened guavas, and other tender as April mangoes (18)

Kanakapala knew the true from the false, as the rat knows the grain from the husk (20).

They looked hale and strong as exhibition bulls (21).

Oh! To have had father with a heart pure as a morning lotus (19).

According to Sethi the narrator performs the function of mnemonic acculturation for the benefit of an audience who have lost the world of primitive cultures (45). To Sethi Rao brings about a radical change in the structure of sentences to reproduce the effect of spoken Kannada language. He corrupts the sentences by reversing the word order so that verb precedes the subject and the abandoning of the verb in

two of the clauses suggest a sentence structure which is typical to Kannada land (45-6). Let us look at these examples:

High on the ghats is it, high up the steep mountains that face the cool Arabian seas, up the Malabar coast is it, up Mngalore and Puttur and many a centre of cardamom and coffee, rice and sugarcane (7)

Kenchamma is our gooddess Great and bounteous she is (8).

Rao also adheres to the employment of images and vocabulary that connote culture specific norms like beliefs, greetings, salutations, speech mannerisms, abuse, name tags, blessing and so on so forth. For example: 'sparrow voice' (44) referring to strong personality, 'wooden tongue' (49) referring to stopping people from gossiping, 'the leaf is laid' (64) means food is served, 'stomach that has borne eight children'(164) means worldly wise person, 'coconut and beetle leaf good bye'(190) referring to fare well. 'Sons of concubines' (24), 'set fire to their dhoti and sari' (11), 'eat blood and mud' (119). 'limbs get paralysed' (103-4) are the classic examples of nativized forms of slangs, abuses, and curses.

Raja Rao beautifully infuses the culture specific terminologies to bring about local feeling. This local touch, evidently, is very difficult to understand by outsiders to that culture. Though to make the difficulty easier he also provides English translation yet it poses tremendous problem to Western reader to decipher the meaning. This is consciously done to bring about the sense of emotional attachment to the native readers irrespective of plurality of language. For instance:

Purnayya has a grown up daughter, who will '*come home soon*'(37).

(A girl's attainment of puberty.)

The youngest is always *the holy bull*, they say don't they (51)?

(Often after a rich man dies, a bull, bearing his name, is let loose in the village. It moves around freely and without fear, and is fed by everyone.)

I shall offer them a jolly good blessing-ceremony in the choicest of words(56).

(The meaning here is ironic and has to do with raking mischief.)

He walked out to preach the 'Don't-touch-the-Government-campaign' (99).

(The meaning here is to boycott the government with allusion to caste defilement, an expression that Gandhi himself would not have approved of.)

This is all *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*; such things never happen in our times (172).

(In spite of being sacred to the Hindus, the two epics also imply endless and ideal narration since they are full of fantastic stories.)

And the classic one;

Oh, no more of this *Panchayat* – we ask you again, disperse, and do not force us to fire! (240)

(A 'panchayat' is the self-governing body of the village. In the context of the novel, it indicates a needless and purposeless argument. This is an ironic comment and can be understood only by those familiar with the term.)

The novelist also uses literal translation of Kannada into English. These kinds of sentences can be understood on their own. For example:

He goes from village to village to slay the *serpent of the foreign rule* (22).

So you are a traitor to your *salt-givers* (25).

Otherwise brahminism is *as good as kitchen ashes* (45).

I am o *butcher's* son to hurt you (45).

Our Rangamma is no *village kid* (46).

Rangamma stood by the door, helpless as a calf (59).

O Maharaja we are *the lickers of your feet*. (70).

Raja Rao also uses Kannada equivalent to English idioms or proverbs. Rao changes the English instances with Indian to serve the purpose. While deviating from the original he doesn't go too far but roams on the boundaries:

Nobody who has eyes to see and ears to hear will believe in such a crow and sparrow story (27).

Here the English one is 'cock and bull story.' But Rao replace it with 'crow and sparrow' as this is in the oral tradition in Kannada.

Every squirrel has his day (112). In English it is 'dog'.

The Swami is worried over the pariah movement, and he wants to *crush it in its seed*, before its cactus roots have spread far and wide (44). Here the English substitute is well known 'nipped in the bud.' The nativized one is more original and culturally specific expression.

'Pin drop' silence is substituted by 'moving ant' (110).

A noted critic Jasbir Jain expresses her valuable opinion about Indian writing in English in one of her articles titled *The Plural Tradition: Indian English Fiction*. Her scholarly observations on the state of Indian English Writing do help a lot in uncovering and understanding the term Indianness in details. She ruminates:

Writing in the late fifties K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar referred to Indian writing as 'Janus-faced', others described it as hybrid, and still others viewed it in terms of the East-West encounter. Apparently on the face of it, it relates to two traditions, one on the basis of language, the other on the basis of culture. Hence, it has passed through several phases and different descriptions - Anglo-Indian, Indo-Anglian, Indo-English, Indian English, Indian Fiction written in English - descriptions which indicate the shifts in emphasis. Today it has arrived at a point where the differences between language and culture have been bridged and rendered irrelevant. Indian writing in English constitutes a pluralistic world wherein, the colonial past, the Indian heritage, the indigenous forms, the inherited and internalized cultural values, the oral tradition, the diasporic presence abroad, the parallels with and differences from language literatures, -all these jostle with each other. Partly it is representative of a multi-cultural situation; partly Indians are no longer apologetic, on the defensive or self conscious in their use of English.' (*Singh and Sheel* 1997:55)

Conspicuously the Indianness in writings in English lies in its fresh and incessant encountering with rich pre-colonial and colonial past. The very sense of India's rich cultural past and traditional heritage will give rise to the sense of Indianness. Thus must have been the conviction of Raja Rao behind his use of nativized form of an alien language. His visit to France at early age exposed him to European arts and literary style. This must have inspired him to display his love for his motherland. Though he did not make India his home for ever, he came to India occasionally, for short periods of time, but each time he made a meaningful encounter with tradition by vitalizing his intimate contacts

with India and its rich r traditional values. To make it more meaningful he often visited to Indian thinkers like Sri Aurobindo, Ramana Maharshi, Narayana Maharaj, Premayatana ashram of Pandit Taranath, and the asram of Mahatma Gandhi. Partha Chaterjee observes that Raja Rao's experiment with English can be seen as the expression of 'inner domain of cultural identity' (*The Nation* 7). To sum up, in the words of Rumina Sethi, we can say that his use of traditional concept of storytelling for the depiction of real events may then call for an evaluation within a social reality substantially different from the Western conventions of realism. His adoption and adept adaptation of episodes from *epics* and *puranas* allows him to glorify the eternal and timeless pre-British past which in the pre-independence India happened to be the cultural and literary inheritance largely employed by the intelligentsia to increase the value of present generation (71).

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