

## Globalization, Language and Literature

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When Faustus, a character in Christopher Marlow's play sold his soul to the devil, he thought he was only in for a few add on's: a little more knowledge, a little more power in an otherwise unchanged life, little did he know he had crossed the frontiers into a different scale of reality where his wishes were no longer the one's that counted. Have we also Faustus like, regardless of consequences entered the global mega system whose life is governed by considerations alien to human beings.

To begin with what do we mean when we talk about globalization? Most commonly it means the removal of national boundaries as impediments to the free flow of capital, of goods, of service. The entire system is crafted, of course, mostly by and for the great multinational corporations who are increasingly in the business raising capital in one part of the world, investing it in another, to produce something that can be sold in a third. Any great imperial system is always accompanied by declaration of noble purpose. 19<sup>th</sup> century colonialism was justified as the white man's burden: the Soviet grip on Eastern Europe was justified as upholding the proletariat against the bourgeoisie: likewise the rule of the multinational, the new imperialists of our age, is justified as leveling the international playing field and allowing fair competition (Hochschild: 1998: 1235). But this we know is far from the truth. If globalization refers to a unified world, then the divisions of the world into first, second and third loses its significance. In reality, however, this division does exist, the process of uneven development is likely to be intensified by globalization and its impacts are going to be unequal and different in different parts of the world.

The neologism to describe international economic flow was coined in the 60's by Marshall McLuhan's famous articulation of the notion of the global village. The global is claimed to be natural order in today's technology driven world in which time space has been compressed, the end of geography has arrived and everywhere is becoming the same. The view of globalization as an inexorable and

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virtually unstoppable force which can obly be accomodated, rather than resisted, has become the conventional wisdom. In fact, globalization consists of a number of distinct but overlapping discourses in which meaning is highly contended. I would like to add here with dickens that: 'it is the best of times; it is the worst of times'.

To say globalization is ubiquitous is stating the obvious. For globalization has become a household name in boardrooms, local and international institutions, the academy and the media. It also shapes the everyday life of all but the most disadvantaged Communities. The effects of globalization are more far reaching than those of the trade in tangible objects, for here we are talking about forces that mold minds, tastes and values. forces of capital (the base) affect culture (the superstructure) in significant ways. To define culture simply as social, as a way of life where it expresses the structures of feelings of a social group which is expressed in the social groups rituals, family structures, courtship patterns, eating habits, its films, media, language, literature among other things.

Media plays is sifnificant role in this globalized world as it creates a mass of cultural transmission that cognitively 'map' or orders the world in a certain way. The eating habits of cosmopolitan Indians have been inundated with influx from Mac Donald's. Pizza huts, Wimpy's. Kentucky Fried Chicken and so on. Trends of celebrating days like Fathers day, mother's Day, Valentine day, Friendship day have become rampant-with cards and gift companies cashing in the great celebrations. All this indicates to a whole production and marketing of culture. Mass media confronts the viewers with a myriad of lifestyles and cultures. In this way one culture intersects other culture inother words centre intersects with periphery and vice versa. However this intersecitonis often characterized by asymmetrical power relaitons. This inequality works in the realm of language. I will now try to analyze how the economic and plitical forces impinge upon languages and literatures in general and Indian English writing in particualr.

### Language

When we talk about globalization and language we cannot but help talking about English. English is increasingly referred to as global language, a world language or an international language. All these terms stem from the fact that English is by far the most widely spread language in the world and has become the *de facto* internaitonal lingua franca in many domains, including science, technology, medicine, air travel etc.

Also there are more people learning English than any other language worldwide. The globalization of English language, however, is not only a matter of sheer numbers. Indeed, there are certain issues which concern not only socio linguists but each one of us. Here I will only raise three questions which have important bearing on the use of language and language policy of our country, with some of my reflections on them :

- 1) **English and imperialism** : Is the spread of English driven by economic forces and does it reiterate the colonial paradigm of the superiority of judeo Christian societies? We all know that British colonialism brought many countries in contact with Britain and also quite naturally with its language. In India this contact lasted almost for 200 years. The colonial exercise was not merely about conquering territory and economy, which the wealth of 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain is clear evidence of, but also about conquering minds. This is encapsulated in Macaulay's famous dictum on the purpose of British education for Indians: "a class of persons, Indian in blood and color, English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect". What this leads to has been pithily noted by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o "it is the final triumph of a system of domination when the dominated starts singing its virtue". After independence in India, the problem of choosing a national language was a tough nut to crack. In government sectors and in academia many supported English as the best candidate for the job of national link language and its automatic uplink to the global system. For all practical purposes English remained with us after independence as an associate language, link language or library language or by whatever name we choose to call it. The scenario in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is that millions of Indian immigrant as well as people in cosmopolitan cities are losing their mother – an experience which affects millions of people world wide through the pressure to assimilate to a dominant language. The emotional intensity of losing your mother tongue is captured by Shakespeare when a character in Richard I reflects on what banishment and exile means:

The language I have learnt  
..... Now I must forgo  
Within my mouth you have engashed my tongue,  
What is thy sentence, but speechless death  
Which robs my tongue from breathing native breath.

Shakespeare's character expresses the tragedy of language loss for the

## Mekal Insights

individual. It is much graver loss for humankind when an entire language and culture disappears. Perhaps 90% of the world's oral and sign languages are threatened. The agony was expressed vividly by a delegate from Mali (Africa) to UNESCO, when pleading for funds to record the oral memories of old people, because Mali's history was still almost entirely oral and would die with that generation he has aptly said: "when an old man dies in one of our villages, a shelf full of books is lost". Contrast this with the worlds of Lord Macaulay, whose educational minutes in India in 1835 set the tone for language policy throughout the British Empire. It was a considerable interest among British expatriates in learning Indian languages. Macaulay wrote: "I have never found one amongst them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia".

India has been at the receiving end not only of colonial language policy but of global. Obviously yes, if we look at what's on TV, what people eat and war corporate structures and management, advertising, trends in higher education and research. It is not hard to see that it is occurring gradually and is not imposed by force, but through much subtler process of globalization. Attitudes towards things British and American have been generally positive and receptive.

2) **English and language death:** Does the spread of English cause the death of minor language and the decline of 'other' big language? The power of language is reflected in its imagery. English tends to be marketed as a language of success, hedonism and international mobility - which it is for many people. By contrast it is described as a killer language. John Swales, working on characteristic genres of scientific English, describes English as *tyrannosaurus rex*, a language that gobbles up other people's languages. According to the Kenyan writer Ngugi, linguistic cannibalism of this sort is a common feature of dominant languages. So we need to recall that a language that connotes success for some entails failures for others. We have to be careful not to allow seductive metaphors to obscure the fact that there is nothing inherent in any given language that makes it good or evil, better or worse than others. It is the uses to which humans put language that need critical scrutiny, along with the imagery associated with expanding and contracting language. Nothing I have said so far should be construed that I would suggest that anyone in our part of the world should stop learning or using English that would be foolish. But we need in every context to assess whether choice of language has been decided

on equitably and whether the linguistic human rights of all speakers of all languages are being respected. As the many labels used to describe English indicated opting for English is never neutral, English impacts on the local language ecology in multiple ways and interlocks with regional and global challenges and constrains. The world we inhabit is a world of English speaking have's, and non English speaking have not's, a world in which many of the decisions affecting the entire world's population are increasingly taken in English.

All languages are work in progress but English's globalization unprecedented in the history of language will revolutionize it in ways we can only begin to imagine. In future, suggests David Crystal, there could be a tri-English world, one in which speakers could speak local English based on dialect at home, a national variety at work or school, and international Standard English to talk to foreigners. We have to be wary of such a world envisaged by David Crystal where all the people of the world become monolingual and our linguistic ecology will be destroyed.

**3) English and englishes:** Is there one standard English or is this language fragmenting into increasingly unintelligible varieties? Descriptions of the expansion of English have produced terminological cornucopia. Some scholars maintain there is now several English languages in different parts of the world. This process started in North America in 1789, with Noah Webster pleading for "an American tongue", an American declaration, a language with a pronunciation and spelling quite distinct from British English. What was achieved for American English has been followed by more recently in Australia, Canada and New Zealand making English a poly-centric (one with complete norms in different countries) and polyethnic language (one expressing different ethnicities, Irish, American, Indian etc.).

English in India albeit introduced by global (colonial) powers, has become part of the local political (and linguistic, as Kachru would agree) landscape. Global English in India is Indian English Language localization is one such phenomenon that must be understood by observing the way people have molded it to fit into their culture. To pass by the glossy sign for Mac Donalds' – the byline reads "I'm loving it" – such advertisement caters to a target audience in a way that will appeal to them and in a language they will understand. This is the way many Indians speak English, I just wonder whether the advertisement agency was not actually taking a playful dig at the Indian tendency to use progressive in place of static verbs like—"I am understanding it", "she is knowing the answer" was the byline a cheeky dig. The mix of Hindi and English now crops up everywhere- "hungry kya?" queried

a recent Indian ad for Domino's pizza. Though there are many opponents to this trend, many believe it to be positive whether it is advertising professional writes or scholars they all believe it is about effective communication and the fact that English is becoming localized shows its popularity with the masses. Of course, it is incorrect to believe that this hybrid version is used in business or professional communication: this is a casual style of speaking English adapted to the life of the millions of Indians who speak the language. Some even may scream sacrilege but it is really about the evolution of a language mirroring the changing attitudes of a society. Bollywood is also not far behind in this language localization trend. We have names to popular movies like '*Jab we Met*': '*Ek Chooti se Love Story*' among many others these stand witness to this fad. And for the millions who speak this hybrid version "well what to do, we're loving it". Other than localization of English languages, other trends impinging on English language is the use of abbreviated, cryptic messages of SMS's and use of emoticons that has gone a long way in changing the hue of language use.

### Literature

To be sure English as a literary language resonates with local color Anand, Rao, Bhabini Bhattacharya, Khushwant Singh and others of the older generation tried to use English translation of phrases and expressions from Hindi, Punjabi and so on into the dialogue part and chaste Queen's English in the narration part. Sometimes such translated expressions produce comic effect. These expressions present interpersonal relationship in Indian socio cultural setting :

- 1) Where have you gone and died (Mulk Raj Anand's *Gauri*)
- 2) What honorable name does our does your bear (Khushwant Singh *Train to Pakistan*)
- 3) Bless my house with the dust of your feet. (Bhabani Bhattacharya *So Many hungers*).
- 4) Sardar Sahib you are a big man and we are but small radishes from unknown garden. (Khushwant Singh / *Shall not Hear the Nightingale Sing*).

The essential grammatical structure remains intact, and so does its essential semantic structure, but beyond this point it appears to be a new language, the same word now carry new meaning and new concepts in a new cultural environment, the English words are referential in a different ways in that they refer to new items

of human experience and new categories of an alien culture. Khushwant Singh in his novel *Delhi* captures the Indian habit of using one noun together with a similar sounding nonsense word to suggest somewhat identical terms. The custom officer interrogate the narrator on his return to India:

“Any whisky - shisky?”

“No”.

“Transitor - shranzistor”?

“No”

“Watch - Shotch?”

“No” (1990:3-4)

In recent Indian English fiction it is evident in the texts of Arundhati Roy, Salman Rudhdie among many others, yet the tendency to use English in place of mother tongue underwrites a linguistic homogenization that attests to the capital currency of the most powerful economy of the world. Arundhati Roy whose *God of Small Things* (1997) has received international critical acclaim, claims to dream in English, and her novel intersperses English with untranslated Malayalam, an idiomatic mix that has a very specific regional location in India.

Other symptoms in literature and specifically in recent Indian English fiction that one can see are :

1) Asymmetrical power relations in the language of literature:

Language inequality work in the realm of the medium of creative expression, more specifically the language of literature. what we observe is the books published in certain languages have greater visibility and marketability than those in any other language. In fact, language can be ranked in terms of their market power. English, of course is the quintessential global poer language. If a writer writes in one of the minor languages of the world, he/she has little chance of being taken seriously, let alone survive financially. On the flip side one is aware of the astronomical sum of money that Roy, Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Allen Seally and others get as signing amount even before their books have proved their worth amongst the reading public. The world cultural system compels you to write or be translated into on or more of these major internaitonal languages, the inequality between languages has other more damaging consequences: several languages are dying each year either because their speakers are themselves becoming extinct or because these speakers are switching toother languages. Globalization, then is forcing greater and greater

conformity and homogeneity, as a result cultural pluralism and diversity are being threatened. A recent issue of India today talks about an entire generation of Indian English novelists including Rohindie, roy, Vikram Chandra, Allen Seally Rohinton Mistry among many others, titled 'the luckies' – an anagram for 'labeled, urban, chilled, kicked with life Indian' who think of and use English as their first language, and seem to have a culture that one may easily term global. Visibility money, recognition comes easily to writers of Indian diaspora and writers writing in English in India.

- 2) Rey Chow has rightly drawn out attention to the status of literature in the age of globalization. She says literature becomes information and literature from other cultures stand in greater danger of being commodified as reflections of other worlds. Indian English fiction is at times promoted as specimen of exotica. Within a global cultural economy some texts become a bazaar for non western artifacts. This category panders to the needs of that global market, producing more reified versions of the 'other' worlds.

An author scripted and canonized in the west is Bharati Mukherjee. Her fictions reiterate the discourse of freedom from (Eastern) oppressions so essential for the consolidation of Euro American feminist liberatory agendas. Mukherjee's work is typically taught as immigrant literature. Asian literature and women's literature. Her narrative of escape from India, a place of tradition and backwardness, find reverberations in the American rhetoric of citizenship and the new world. The back cover of *Jasmine* includes a blurb from the Baltimore Sun bears witness to the text's popularity: "poignant...heartrending...this is the story of the transmission of an Indian village girl, whose grandmother wants to marry her off at 11, into an American woman who finally thinks for herself". The spurious connections between euro-American feminism and colonial modernity makes it possible for such a text, argues Grewal, to gain "literary value" over texts such as Meena Alexander's *Nampally Road*, a work trenchant in its criticism of the nightmare of immigrant existence.

We are also often guilty of colluding with the western representations, uncritically orienting ourselves in the media. When Arundhati Roy won the Booker award for her novel *The God of Small Things* a blurb in 'India Today', Oct. 27<sup>th</sup>, 1997, summed up things well: "Arundhati Roy opens up global market for Indian writing in English writing in English". This was followed by a description: "slim hippped Roy, her carelessly curled hair cascading over her face, her nose ring



twinkling with naughtiness, and her language flapping with originality, excited the stodgy English establishment'. this loaded sentence echoes gestures of exoticization extended to south asian women in the West (94:45-74).

A market for postcolonial texts provides a sampling of a world honed to the fashionable emphasizes on postmodern hybrids and on global cultures. *White Tiger* received the prestigious Booker, with the head of the jury, Michel Portillo, calling it a work that shows 'the dark side of India' - a new territory. For most Indians there is nothing new about this territory. For them there is nothing novel about western tourists looking at India as a dustbowl, where death hangs in the air like a stale smell. Indian writers are familiar with the works of western writers who travelled through India and saw nothing but the broken bodies of beggars, buzzing flies, dirty drians and famished faces. What one a suspect is that the west is holding up the *White Tiger* as a mirror to us? it is telling us that India is not shining and despite its claims of a booming economy it is still 'the near heart of darkness' which it has been since time immemorial. Critics have dubbed *White Tiger* as a tourist's account of India they have appropriately raised questions about the intentions of Arvind Adiga who grew up in Australia and went to elite university in England and the US.

3) Literature as metaphor for the contemporary global world:

Hari Kunzru's *Transmission* the novels title is itself a metaphor for the transmission of people, disease, and informaiton. Linked to this are metaphors of - the haunting by alienation of the kinds of globhal interconnection that are an effect of the new technologies. Kunzru locates his text against a background of global economy and subaltern and dominant cultures. Everyone and everything is on the move in this text, transmitted across borders from one cyber space to another. Borders are increasingly political but they are selectively porous, allowing skilled cheap replaceable workers to cross while keeping out elemkents considered dangerous to the body corporate such as refugees. The computer viruses Kunzru's central progagonist works to keep from crossing border in cyberspace becomes a metaphor for people like him, Ajrun Mehta, a highly talented young immigrant computer programmer who enters into the US on a restricted Visa enabled by a company named 'Data Bodies'. It is a post industrial form of indentured labor and, the portagoinst, Ajrun, who is transmittied from New Delhi to Silican valley, brimming with peomise of the American dream, joints the giant pool that is the new class of dehumanized ill paid immigrants' workers. When he has work, most of his

pay goes to pay the rent in a shared house in the shadow of the humming transformer of an electricity substation. He has no job security, but in his naivety he believes that if he proves his worth he will be valued, when he is laid off from his job as a virus tracker as a result of the collapse of the dot com bubble, he creates a brilliantly complex virus in order to prove his worth by destroying it and in the process, restoring Virugenix's failing fortunes, the viruses he releases into the world is a swarm, a horde that continuously, uncontrollably mutates to invade and infect every organ of the world body, wreaking havoc on a global economy, but also of course on individuals. The metaphor is that the repression of the subaltern is like a virus that whether with malign intent or not undermines the dominant culture.

Another text that exposes the dark underbelly of the global culture is Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* which questions 'can globalisation become a route to prosperity for the downtrodden. The novel along with other characters tracks the life of Biju, Biju, the son of the cook who worked in the house of Jemu Patel, a retired judge aspires to go to America. For Biju and his father, the cook, America *angrez* symbolically represent the centre towards which they want to advance. Biju goes to America to be in the position of power, to reach the land of dreams he will be fulfilled and get rid of a "feeling of nonexistence" (ibid 139). Whiteness gets equated with power and he aspires to be "*angrez ke tarah*" (Desai: 2006:105). At the visa counter in the US embassy Biju dusted himself with exquisite manners of a cat: "I'm civilized, sir, ready for the US, I'm civilized man", he demands recognition from the other. America is a land of dreams and opportunities; "the green card, the green card" (99). Biju found that he is possessed of an awe of white people (77). But once he is in America he realizes the snag of being in an alien culture which is not too kindly to him.

In America Biju has to eke out an existence as an undocumented worker. Stumbling from one low paid restaurant job to another, living in seedy squalor with groups of other immigrant men. Spurred by his father, Biju had come to America to realize the American dream, but the actuality had something else in store for him. he recognizes that "it's a whole world of basement kitchens" and in exasperation dubs it "they call this first world???" *Ek dum bekaar!* (300).

Poor and lonely in New York Biju remembers his village. Lying on the basement shelf in sordid squalor he thought of his village where he had lived with his grandmother (102-3). His dream of America as a land of plenty is rudely ruptured by what he experiences-the crass commercialism, rampant racism and rapacious ruin perpetuated by the neocolonial exploitation. Biju comes back to

India in the climatic scene of the novel robbed of his belongings (316), all his NRI dreams of 'holding green cards and passports... *dollars ma kamaenge pum pum pum*' (298) comes to naught. Desai doesn't present any easy answers to the problems for those who are left behind by the unstoppable economic growth – in fact her world view is quite cynical – “where one side travels to be a servant and the other side travels to be treated like a king”. The same asymmetry in power relations in a global capital system gets reiterated in these two texts.

### Conclusion

Languages and literature are important for human beings for two reasons: one, it gives them a sense of identity; two its utility. Naturally, a global language – multinational language is more useful than Indian languages. If knowledge of English and writing in English becomes a passport of high position in life, why take the trouble to learn language and write in it, only for the sake of identity. A thoughtless journey towards a state of being free from the markers of identity, language and literature being one of them, is the greatest danger faced by all the Indian languages and literature.

However there are many of us worldwide who are working to maintain diversity, working to confirm the wisdom of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o dictum; “real unity of cultures and species is found in their diversity”. This version is diametrically opposed to a monolingual world view.

My tale is over, but it is embedded in a mass of agendas that need addressing and disentangling, we need action, we need political will. I need hardly remind you that Hamlet is a tragedy and the tragedy occurs because Hamlet defers action. If we are to avoid ending with the linguistic and literary stage in India cluttered with linguistic and literary corpses, we need to leave the realm of fantasy, and act decisively.

In a hierarchical linguistic and literary world order, the oppressed will always sense the injustice, like Caliban, the island slave in Shakespeare's *Tempest* who responds to his oppressor, Prospero:

Thou taught me language: and my profit on't  
Is, I know how to curse; the real plague rid you.  
For learning me your language. (Shakespeare: *Tempest*: 363)

The alternative working to resolve conflicts between groups and building understanding is expressed by Juliet to Romeo. Their families were involved in

what might in contemporary journalism be dubbed as ethnic conflict. Juliet stresses how we all need to be able to define the world, to name it; she reveals great awareness of linguistic diversity: what's in a name? That wick we call a rose.

By any other name would smell as sweet;  
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd,  
(Shakespeare: *Romeo and Juliet*: Act II scene ii, 43)

And on this more optimistic note I shall bring down the curtain on my tale. In Hamlet's dying words, "the rest is silence".... unless there is some action, our task as academicians is lucidly caputres by Edward Said, the Palestinian American, in his BBC Reith Lectures, in which he describes the role people in academics as "raising embarrassing questions.... being unwilling to accept easy formulas or ready made cliches or smooth ever "so accommodating confirmations of what the powerful or conventional have to say and what to do" (Said: 1994:9'17). We need to ask what language policies are in place, overt and covert ones and whose interest they serve, globally and locally. At a practical level this means:

- 1) Exploring whether English can be appropriated locally, for instance in India in ways that strengthen the sustainability of the local cultural and linguistic ecology.
- 2) Language policy as a scientific activity must be based on critical analysis of the contemporary scene, underpinned by multi-disciplinary theory and inspired by a vision of how more equitable language policies can permit all language and literatures to flourish.

I close with the worlds written on the tombstone of a Danish linguist "learn many languages but do not forget your own".

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