
English language originally the most powerful weapon of Colonialization would prove to be equally powerful weapon of decolonization

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ABSTRACT

It is certainly one of the noted paradoxes of history that the English language, originally the most powerful weapon of colonization would prove to be the equally powerful weapon of decolonisation in the hands of a few Indian litterateurs. It is now a recognized fact that the study of English literature stimulated literary creations in many Indian languages too. Notably in Bengali, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Gujarathi. Even newer literary forms like the novel were incorporated into other regional writings. In a similar manner there was the incorporation of Indian narratives into the English language writings. Most ambitious writers moved from the easily accessible lyrical form into the most complex mahakavyas. Almost every writer of any consequence has attempted a longer narrative in English. This however brought in a paradigm shift. The transition from the first docile phase to one of violent nationalism and self-willed individual identity is certainly a shift in sensibilities. The second discernable phase begins roughly from a point of speculative intersection—a meeting and passing of three phenomenal men of vision— in 1893 Sri Aurobindo set sail for India after his Cambridge exposure,

the same year that Vivekananda set forth to preach his gospel of man-making to the Parliament of World's Religions, and Gandhi set off on his South African journey in pursuit of a career in law. Their vessels might have perhaps crossed. Anyway their destinies most certainly crossed. After the fateful First War of Indian Independence in 1857, Indians were undergoing a period of political and cultural fermentation. And now a new resurgent nationalism came into being. This forms the hallmark of the second phase of Indian writing in English too.

KEY WORDS : Cultural fermentation, Nationalistic, non fictional, Translation, passion

In managing to free themselves from the cultural smokescreen of British colonialism, the Indian writers in English of this period take up a most ferociously defensive stance rooted in Indianness and Nationality. Condemned to be tongue-tied in English, the writer seeks a new voice conceived in the rich heritage and tradition of his motherland.

Me from her lotus heaven Saraswati Has
called to regions of eternal snow And
Ganges pacing to the southern sea,

Ganges upon whose shores the flowers of Eden blow. (Sri Aurobindo, *Envoi*)

Elsewhere Sri Aurobindo remarked that when the educated youth of Bengal bowed their learned heads at the feet of the childlike saint of Dakshineswar, Indian literary renaissance had begun (see *The Renaissance in India*, 1920). Nationalistic fervour gave more than sufficient impetus to a surge of creative activity—Indian poetry in English had started to breathe and come into its own. Non-fictional prose and fictional narratives underwent drastic political fermentation, and Indian drama in English began to make its presence felt. Although Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) would never have made any claims to be a writer in English, the coveted Nobel prize conferred on him in 1913, for his rough translation of *Gitanjali*, accord him a significant place among the writers in English. Tagore's was a vision founded on individual and universal levels at the same time. His ideal of a *viswamanava* was rooted in Indian culture and the Upanishadic tradition. Lines like

Where the mind is without fear and head is held high;
Where knowledge is free;
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;
Where words come out from the depth of truth;
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way in to the dreary desert sand of dead habit;
where the mind is led forward by thee into ever widening thought and action—
Into that heaven of freedom, my father, let my country awake...

ushered in a new sensibility that was at the same time not too foreign to the Celtic mind. No wonder W.B. Yeats showered praises on these fragments:

I have carried the manuscript of these translations with me for days, reading it in railway trains, or on top of omnibuses and in restaurants and I have often had to close it lest some stranger should see how much it moved me. These lyrics... display in their thought a world I have dreamt of all my lifelong... As the generations pass, travelers will hum them on the highway and men rowing upon rivers. Lovers, while they await one another, shall find, in murmuring them, this love of God a magic gulf wherein their own bitter passion may bathe and renew its youth. At every moment the heart of this poet flows outward to these without derogation or condescension, for it has known that they will understand; and it has filled itself with the circumstances of their lives. (W.B. Yeats on Tagore's *Gitanjali*, see Iyengar, p.162)

Tagore identified himself with his bardic role, wrote primarily in Bengali, and remained an aesthete till his death, quite unlike his contemporary Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950), who vanished like a meteor in the politically charged air only to reappear in the isolation of Pondicherry. The turn of the century produced the most disarmingly nationalistic of writings ever in the English language by Indians, while the long shadow of these two giants fill the literary scene. It may not be out of place here to venture to say that the oppressive burden of the English language together with its retinue of imperialistic cultural devices compelled the

Indian psyche to “awaken” and seek total identity with what was considered at best Indian. While Tagore pursued the melodious strain of Baul mysticism, Sri Aurobindo sought the sublime in the Vedic and Tantric sources. Tagore’s was a movement towards the lyrical while the Aurobindian lean was towards the epic. Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol*, that like Goethe’s *Faust* took about fifty years in the making, needs to be seen as the culmination of the nineteenth century spirit of synthesis and spiritual enterprise. *Savitri*, running into 23813 lines in three parts with 12 books and 49 cantos is presumably the longest single poem in the English language. I believe that this stupendous epic of multiple-spiritual dimensions, would characteristically reflect the entire epoch’s psyche. Taking for its central theme the well known tale of Satyavan and Savitri as narrated in the **Mahabharata** (*Vana Parva*) the poem has been transmuted into a modern Indian mahakavya in the line of Vyasa and Valmiki by the poet who made its poetic treatment an integral part of his life. (For a more detailed and an in-depth study of this epic poem see my *The Mantra of Vision: An Overview of Sri Aurobindo’s Poetry*, Delhi: B.R, 1998 and *Sri Aurobindo’s Aesthetics and Poetics: New Directions*. Delhi: Authorspress, 2014). However, it is equally unfortunate that the Indian Renaissance set into movement by the great nationalist awakening and pioneered by the spiritual luminaries, who for the most part, chose to write in the coloniser’s language, should have been curtailed in mid-flight and not allowed to flourish the full

circle towards its natural culmination. The post-Independence condition after 1947 was one rather of exuberance and irony in an equal measure than any soul-searching for individual values or national ethos. In fact after the political withdrawal of the British there was felt scant need for any further nationalizing spirit. What was required was an assessment and a looking back at the immediate past.

My tongue in English chains,

I return, after a generation, to you. I am at the end

Of my Dravidic tether...

(R.Parthasarathy, “*Exile*”)

The force that woke a nation from two hundred years of lethargy and shook it to its very foundation petered into the mere baseless vainglory of the self confronted by the imported European modernist tropes and a new poetics liberally transplanted from the West. Modernism in Indian literatures did not develop out of any historical necessity but was intellectually incorporated as an aesthetic strategy, and hence lacked in natural vigour and creative energy to sustain itself. As for any nativised experience and indigenoussness , the post independence phase was more keen on breaking away barriers of all sorts than on negotiating such vital and crucial questions. For the pressing need for asserting one’s cultural integrity was lost and now what appeared as desirable was to reach across to new cultures and continents in one’s own right.

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