

## TELESCOPING THE NATION'S SELF: A FANONIAN STUDY OF INDIAN COLONIALISM AND THE IDENTITY OF INDIAN WRITINGS IN ENGLISH

**Dr. Samir Kumar Panigrahi**

Assistant Professor in English

Black Diamond College of Engineering & Technology  
Jharsuguda, Odisha, India

### Abstract

In this paper I propose to outline the factors for the origin and growth of Indian Writing in English and to look at the interrelationship between English literature and Indian Writing in English. The impact of colonialism on Indian society and Indian literature can be studied faithfully by taking Fanon's theory of colonialism as a model. The analysis is mainly focused on the issue of origin, development and identity of Indian Writing in English. I strive to look at the interrelationship between English literature and Indian literature, mainly on the basis of the evolving critical discourse produced in India in recent times. The first observation to make here is that while during the colonial period it is mostly "influence" that the Indian writers and critics talk about, Indian Writing in English produced in the last few decades has often been discussed in terms of "intertextuality" or "pastiche" or that of "postcolonial" or "hybridity". This shift in terms of critical discourse has come about as a result of the persisting influence of the western critical practice upon the Indian practitioners striving to evolve Indian Writing in English as an independent discipline.

**Keywords:** Colonialism, Post-Colonial, Fanonian, Indian Writing in English,

### INTRODUCTION

Indian writing in English, as an autonomous literature, reflects the whole process of absorption, assimilation, synthesis and creative tempering of language. It is a literature which is combination of Indian literature and Indian literature written in English. M.K. Naik says:

The term 'Indian English Literature' emphasizes two significant ideas: first that this literature constitutes one of the many streams that join the great ocean called Indian literature, which though written in different languages, has unmistakably unity; and secondly, that it is an inevitable product of nativization of the English language to express Indian sensibility" (35).

Indian Writing in English is a synthesized version between medium (English language) and content (Indian mind). It refers to the body of work by writers in India who write in English and whose native or co-native language belong to one of the numerous Indian vernacular languages. This literature that comes into being as a result of the British presence in India holds the imprints of colonialism. Tracing the birth of this literature Srinivas Iyengar observes:

‘Anglo-Indian’ literature has no racial significance at all; it means merely that this literature is a product of Indo-English literary relations, England and India has come together, or have been accidentally thrown together; and out of their intimacy - whether legitimate or illegitimate had come this singular offspring, that is, Anglo-Indian Literature” (2).

### **INDIAN COLONIALISM: A FANONIAN INTERPRETATION**

The impact of colonialism on Indian society and Indian literature can be studied faithfully by taking Fanon’s theory of colonialism as a model. In *The Wretched of Earth*, Fanon projects three phases to show the process of colonialism. Fanon projects that the “Phase One” in a culture that emerges after confronting with colonialism is always marked by the adherence and assimilation of the natives with the foreign counterparts (122-23). “Phase Two” is marked by an ardent enhancement of nationalism (176). Fanon’s “Phase Three” envisages a new national culture where the intellectuals become the voice of the new reality in action (180-183).

### **INDIAN COLONIALISM AND FANON’S ‘PHASE ONE’ ANALYSIS**

As colonialism struck roots in Indian soil in the first half of the 19th century, the traditional Indian society was shaken and the colonial rulers through their efforts to impose their cultural and ideological structure set in motion a process of some kind of social transformation. Fanon argues that the function of racism is to convince both the colonizer and the colonized, more to the latter than the former, that colonial domination is a necessary evil (169). Disgusted with gaudy culture, superstitious-ridden religion, primitive feudal exploitation, the natives were, by their very nature deprived and incapable of living a normal life. So for them the British presence in India was a blessing in disguise. The Indian Intelligentsia who preferred the presence of the British was doubly challenged - both at public level and personal level. At the public level they plunged into the reform of religious ideologies, customs and rituals with zeal to social transformation and progress. But at the personal level they dislike the idea of colonial subjugation. The emergence of two seemingly contradictory cultural phenomena occurred, where the progressive elements of Indian society accepted modernity in principle, but vociferously rejected the idea of imperial subjugation. It is against this historical background that one would structure the Indian imagination. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the pioneer of modernity, also happens to be the first great master of English prose. “The renaissance in modern Indian literature” maintains Iyengar, “begins with Raja Ram Mohan Roy”, who is also known as the founder of the Brahma Samaj (30).

Before the arrival of the British India had already experienced the impact of many foreign cultures, but the difference with the British rule lied in the nature of the socio-cultural-linguistic and economic system. The age-old feudal economic system and the closed Indian society with its unique socio-cultural systems like caste system, *Varna* system and *Jajmani* system and so on had been challenged. British rule in India, first of all, resulted in breaking the barrier of the closed Indian society and showed a way towards modernity. However, the greatest cultural impact came with the introduction of English language in India. Though literature in Sanskrit and two closely

related ancient languages, *Prakrit* and *Pali*, had flourished in India since about 1500 B.C. (and also, since about 50 B.C., in a Dravidian language in South India – Tamil), and though both ancient and modern Indian languages had been constantly interacting with some Central Asian languages and cultures such as Turkish, Arabic and Persian since about 900 A.D., it is undeniable that Indian literature even in its already hybridized condition had never before felt an impact as hard and powerful as that caused by our discovery of English literature. The introduction of English language provided the natives with a way to the rich treasure of English literature and to the western culture, of course. It resulted in creating a class of native ‘bourgeoisie’, (“a class of persons, Indians in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect” (Minute of Macaulay), the majority of which turned to their mother-tongue while giving birth to a native literature, applying the western aesthetic norms. But a few among them tried to give expressions to their feelings and thoughts in English. Kachru describes this situation of the language of the colonizers developing roots besides the vernaculars as “essentially bilingualism in India” (67). Commenting on the use of English by the Indians as the medium of writing and expression, James H. Cousins says, “- - - If they (Indians) are compelled as an alternative to writing in their own mother-tongue, let it be not Anglo-Indian, but Indo-Anglian, Indian in spirit, Indian in thought, Indian in emotion, Indian in imagery and English only in words” (179). Thus, the synthesized body of Indian English Literature was created – while its contents were to the Indian, its medium of expressions was English.

Sisir Kumar Das, in his magisterial *History of Indian Literature*, speaks (in the sub-title of the volume covering the crucial colonial period 1800– 1910 & 1991- 1956) not only of “Western Impact” and English literature but also of the recoil to the old Sanskrit sources of traditional sustenance:

What makes this period unique in our literary history is its continuous conflict between the indigenous and the alien ideals, values and sensibilities. It was not a contact between two authors or two texts; it was a contact between two civilizations in an unfortunate historical circumstance. - - - This love and hate relationship with the West made the literary contact tortuous and complex (331).

Though the Indian writers borrowed from English literature several new literary genres and forms such as tragedy, the novel, and the essay, they still resisted, according to Das, “the values expressed” through such works in English. The attraction for the new was “at times hesitant and cautious, at times impetuous and uninhibited” (332). Even where the novelty of what came from the west was blinding, as in the case of the novel, the Indian exponents of this new form did not “lose their links with the *katha* and *akhyan* and *dastan*” – the older forms of narrative available from the Sanskrit as well as the Perso-Arabic literary traditions. Similarly, the induction of tragedy – inconsistent with the invariably restorative and harmonizing happy endings of Sanskrit drama – brought with it “a new vision which could not be easily reconciled with a world-order regulated by the doctrine of *karma*” (332) and again required a tough balancing act. Indeed, a direct consequence of our encounter with the West was that we went back to look again at what we already had and to reassess its worth and value. “Never in our literary history,” observes Das, “were there so many obsessions with the past, such glorification and defence, such criticism and introspection” (336). It was as if, on being confronted with the alien novel, the Indian writer instinctively reached for his *katha* and his *dastan*, and on coming across tragedy, for his *karma*. A true measure of the depth of the western impact on India seems to have been what may be called the nearly equal and opposite reaction that it caused, of taking

the Indian writer back to his traditional sources which had regulated Indian literature in an uninterrupted (if constantly modified) continuum right to the point of the arrival of the British, without the hiatus of any “medieval” or “dark” ages. Unlike in some other parts of the colonized world, such as Africa and West Indies and, in a different way, also the white settler colonies, we in India had something traditional, substantial and no less rich of our own into which, and against which, to receive the western impact and to cushion and even foil it. The western influence on Indian literature was nothing if not dialectical and dialogic, which makes it perhaps as vast and complex an example as one could find anywhere in world literature not only of influence but also of synthesis.

### **INDIAN COLONIALISM AND FANON’S ‘PHASE TWO’ ANALYSIS**

If Phase One, in the growth of a national culture, is characterized by assimilation and imitation, “Phase Two”, as Fanon argues that, is marked by an ardent enhancement of nationalism (176). An urge for independence started germinating. Its now for the literary artists to look for a tradition that suit to Indian identity. Writers like Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand were the representative figures of the Gandhian era projecting the authentic Indian sensibilities in their works-of-art. The constant exposure to the rich treasure of English literature, the educated Indians foster their sensibilities for a resurgent modern India and try a revolutionary re-orientation of Hindu tradition with the scientific modernism assimilated from the west. The classical Sanskrit literature lost its relevance as it was quite irrelevant to express the new dynamic socialism. The rise of the novel in India is to some extent a consequence of this cultural situation and the novelist came to be valued as a liberating voice of modern realism, humanism and nationalism. On the other hand, literary modernism crystallized the divorce between the religious and secular traditions that signaled the decay of the ancient Hindu order. Thus, the growth of novel, with the emphasis on social criticism and political emancipation, was a secular movement; it produced Mulk Raj Anand and numerous novelists dedicated to India’s quest for freedom from occidental imperialism and authoritarian Hinduism. On the other hand, however, the new literary culture also attempted to modernize and thereby rejuvenate the old synthesis of religions and secular impulses.

### **INDIAN COLONIALISM AND FANON’S ‘PHASE THREE’ ANALYSIS**

Fanon’s “Phase Three” envisages a new national culture where the intellectuals become the voice of the new reality in action (180-183). British India was a historical configuration of the European fantasy of colonialism and imperialism, the fantasy that finally dissolved in the first half of 20th century but only to be reinstated by another fantasy of a restructuring of socio-historical reality of an independent India, a sovereign nation-state. In this Phase, 1950 onwards, English in India started liberating from the colonial yoke and began to be used imaginatively and confidently by a new generation of postcolonial writers like Nissim Ezekiel, A.K.Ramanujam, Khuswant Singh, Anita Desai, Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Jhumpa Lahari, Chaman Nahal, Ruskin Bond, Manoj Das and many more.

Indian colonial experience shook the traditional conceptual paradigms and institutions bringing into question the Indian cultural foundation. Despite the conflict, there tends to be a synthesis between the Indian and European traditions. Indeed, contemporary Indian in most of its social domains is to a large extent a combination of the European and Indian cultural dynamics. In fact, what is happening in the socio-cultural sphere of contemporary Indian society is a manifestation of the convergence of European ethics and Indian Vedic traditions and,

subsequently, a synthesis between the two emerges. The aesthetic and moral richness of human relationships in the Indian culture would be some of the elements contributed by the traditional Indian ethics. From European ethics, the emphasis of the autonomy and freedom of the individual, subsequently forces a person's critical inclination would be of significant elements. The cultural confrontation here is not the usual East versus West, rather it is between tradition and modernity. By modernity means a new kind of subjectivity and society that emerged in India out of the complex struggle between colonialism and nationalism. Both western modernity and Indian traditions have multiple possibilities and processes. The self-constitution of India's modernity becomes a plural and diverse adventure rather than any simplistic supplanting of tradition with modernity or the revival of tradition at the expense of modernity. Indian modernity is thus neither anti-traditional nor necessarily pro-western. It is, instead a complex interplay of multitudinous forces which is sometimes complimentary and at times contradictory. Reform, revival, resistance, conflict, collusion, collaboration, capitulation, compromise, adoption, adaption, synthesis, encapsulation, hybridity and multiculturalism are all a part of the India's experiment in modernity.

Presently Indian Writing in English is an important branch of world literature being read, taught, researched and discussed in India and abroad. It has been particularly enriched and strengthened by the new crop of postmodern writers. The growing popularity of Indian Writing in English in the post-independent era can be expressed in the words of N.A. Karim:

It is a little surprising that the number of Indian writers in English both creative and otherwise has increased phenomenally after the English left the country. During the colonial period, English was being nurtured as a potted plant with no freedom for this tongue to take roots in the socio-cultural soil of the country. Speakers and writers of the language generally tried to conform to the standard of English spoken and written by their masters in England in matters of grammar, vocabulary and even pronunciation. This imposed constraint made the medium inflexible for any meaningful creative effort. But after the British left, Indians began to take greater freedom with the language and began shaping it into an effective instrument to give expression to their native experience (Quoted by Talib 110-111)

Today in India, "English language publications exceed the publication in any other Indian language and India has the third largest publication in English in the world, ranking only after USA and UK" (Urvashi 2).

## CONCLUSION

Presently Indian Writing in English has acquired a respectable autonomous position holding a high literary status. It has come to such a stage now that we have our own poets and story writers among the best in the world, our own novelists valued in the west and a host of critics of outstanding merit, judging from all aspects, it is no wonder that Kenriya Sahitya Akademin has declared English as an Indian language, and it publishes its own monthly news-letter in English language, equating its literature with other branches of Indian literature.

**WORKS CITED**

- Cousins, James H. *The Renaissance in India*. Madras : Orient Longman, 1918.
- Das, Sisir Kumar. *A History of Indian Literature*. Part One – 1911 -1956. New Delhi: SahityaAkademi. 1995.
- Fanon, F. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967.
- Iyengar, Srinivas K. *Indian Writing in English*, 5th ed. New Delhi: Sterling, 1990.
- Kachru, Braj B. *The Indianization of English*. Delhi: Oxford U P, 1983.
- Naik, M.K. *Critical Essays on Indian Writing in English*. Madras: Macmillan, 1977.
- Talib, Ismail S. “Decolonisation and the Survival of English”. *The Language of Postcolonial Literatures*. London: Routledge, 2002. PP 104-117.
- Urvashi, Butalia. “English Text book, Indian Publisher”, *Rethinking English*. Ed. Svati Joshi, New Delhi: Trianka, 1991.