

Postcolonial Indian Literature Word-War: A Reaction to the Imposed Western Aesthetics

Sonu Lohat

Asst. Professor of English Govt. College Bhiwani Haryana, India

Abstract

Postcolonial literature is nothing but a word-war; a war being fought through novel style and aesthetics in literary writing by the writers representing the third world countries which once used to be the colonies of European imperial powers. Postcolonial writing, thus, implies a rebellion, counter attack, retaliation—a movement by such writers with novel form of writing discarding stipulated colonial norms which had established the Western imperial hegemony in literature. Indian authors such as Salman Rushdie, V. S. Naipaul, Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai etc. are the harbinger in this movement with their Indianized and indigenized desi English; the novel form of postcolonial English or Hinglish which is accepted worldwide today. The form, style and aesthetics of their writing are characterized with use of pidgin and hybrid words with flavor of Hindi and Indian vernaculars signifying the defiance of so-called chaste English and deviating from prescriptive approach in grammarology, syntax, phonology, diction etc. These representative writers have waged a word-war against the literary and cultural hegemony of the colonial West which had projected the colonized countries like India as helpless naked female body to be used by European male. Latest form of feminism is the outcry of this word-war against such politics of male-Europe-oriented aesthetics.

KEYWORDS: postcolonial, Indianized, English, aesthetics, word, war, writing, colonial

Although the history of human world can be seen as a saga of the ever moving cycle of human clash, plunder, subjugation, invasion and colonization in different forms. However, the beginning and practice of world-wide colonization owes to European colonizers, the imperial powers led by England. They not only focused on economic slavery of the native countries such as India but also started attacking the very moorings of their culture. Therefore, English came to stride as the harbinger language of the world; the medium of global communication ensuring the hegemony of the West now represented by America. Certain styles of writing were made standards of writing and thus the world was made follow those stipulated norms in writing. Edward Said in his revolutionary seminal book *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (1978) dig out this reality of colonization through language and literature:

It is rather a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetics, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical and philosophical texts; it is an elaboration not only of basic geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, orient and occident) but also of a whole series of ‘interests’ which, by such means as scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description, it not only creates but also maintains; it is rather than expresses, a certain will or intention to understand, in some cases to

control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world...(Said, 1978: p. 12)

It was through language and literature that the image of orient, as Said's argument goes, or the third world created as denoting otherness, a world which is subordinate. The colonial literary writing had been under the all powerful sway of the Western colonial diction and stylistics; the Indian authors were given a standard of style in writing and made imitate the stipulated style and aesthetics of the 'centre', the West, within the framework of imperial requirements. Observance of proper syntax, grammar, technique of narration and style of expression, therefore, had been prescriptive necessity for the creative writers over the years. And this necessity became blind imitation of Western stylistics in Indian English literature and in the other countries of the third world. This, gradually, came to be known as the colonial style; the writers of the commonwealth countries almost took it mandatory to follow Western aesthetics which implied the cultural hegemony of West over rest. It was the politics of language, aesthetics, rhetoric, grammatology and philology that helped the colonial empire evolve. Ania Loomba supports Said's views on the hegemony of the West through language and literature, "Language and literature are together implicated in constructing the binary of European self and non-European other, which, as Said's Orientalism suggested, is a part of the creation of colonial authority." (Loomba: 1998, p. 66)

Although by and large the colonies were politically evacuated by the settlers by the mid-twentieth century, yet there sways the influence of the colonizers in third world countries; economic and even cultural dependency of the latter on the West continues. That is why the streak of postcolonial literature has a special streak of 'anti', retaliation, reply--- an assertion of the third world countries writers of their self-dependency, capabilities and nativeism. The words of Pramod K. Nayar clearly addresses this stance:

Postcolonial writers take recourse to their native narratives forms and traditions in order to counter, oppose, or re-write canonical Euro-American literature. The attempt is often to provide an alternative view of their culture. While such an attempt is frequently articulated in genres borrowed from the former colonizer culture, the genre is adapted and injected with native traditions. Postcolonial writers are, therefore, clearly concerned with questions of form, style, genre and language.(Nayar: 2008, 221)

In order the counter the politics of colonial language and literature the writers from colonies, such as Indians, took resort to form, style, genre and novel aesthetics; thus asserting their own identity and dismissing the influence of the West. It, the Postcolonial literature, therefore, is the more a stylistic counter-reply than the ideological a, eye ball to an eye ball attitude of these postcolonial writers that truly characterizes this literary movement. This deterrent New Literature basically sought the ways of transgression from typical colonial diction, aesthetics, stylistics, grammatology, specific usages, allusions etc. But this assertive cult does not opts out English, the language of colonizers, but uses it in different forms; and such forms are known as the brands of English such African English, Australian English and above all Indian English or Hinglish or Chinglish, in the case of China. Indian English fiction, poetry, drama and even short story embody the extensive usages of new English called Hinglish. In fact the postcolonial writing in

India presents the echo of freedom with the flavour of typical India in thematic exploration and in form as well. When talking of postmodern poets writing in English is there in discussion the first name that strike is Nissim Ezekiel; the Indian poet with all Indianness just defying the codes of colonial English. The following poem is the typical epitome of Indianized poetry:

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.
Other day I'm reading newspaper
(Every day I'm reading Times of India
To improve my English Language)
How one goonda fellow
Threw stone at Indirabehn.
Must be student unrest fellow, I am thinking.
Friends, Romans, Countrymen, I am saying (to myself)
Lend me the ears.
Everything is coming.....
(Ezekiel, quoted in *Chronicles of Time*: 2004, p. 94-95)

Though the basic intention in the poem is the expose the ridiculous use of English by an average Indian who strongly believes in the status quo with this prestigious language, yet this poem has form of typical Indian brand of English. It goes to the counter politics of the postcolonial writers like Ezekiel that they deliberately deploys the diction and language of disfigured English to assert the independence of the Indian aesthetics. The poet significantly parodies the violation of the syntactical and grammatical structures of what they call Babsu Angrezi. This is the typical Indian English i. e. desi Angreji than the colonial English. Whereas the poems of the older Indian poets writing in English such as Henry Derozio, Toru Dutt give the impression of being burdened under the stipulated aesthetics of the colonial English. Toru Dutt in the poem 'Our Casuarina Tree reflects the imitation of English Romanticists:

But not because of its magnificence
Dear is the Casuarina to my soul:
 Beneath it we have played; though years may roll,
O sweet companions, loved with loved intense,
For your sakes shall the tree be ever dear!
Blent with your images, it shall arise
In memory, till the hot tears blind mine eyes!

(Dutt, quoted at: *Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets*: 1976p. 2)

The beginning of this word-war in the genre of English Indian fiction is marked with the advent of the famous trilogy or what we indigenously call, trimurthy viz. Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R K Narayan. These novelist started the novel vogue in the fiction writing by adapting English to cater the Indian needs rather than slavishly following the patterns of colonial English. They, particularly Narayan, adopted the new way of narrative with its simplicity, tone with irony but implying everything Indian. If any passage is taken in isolation from the vast treasures of Narayan's novels it would speak of India; not only in subject typical of India but in the form. The following passage his novel *The Vendor of Sweets* has typical form:

He wore a loose jibba over his dhoti, both made of material spun with his own hand; every day he spun for an hour, he retained enough yarn for his sartorial requirements (He never possessed more than two sets of clothes at a time) and delivered all the excess in neat bundles to the local hand-loom committee in exchange of cash. (Narayan: 1967, p. 9)

However, these novelist could not get full freedom from colonial discourses and aesthetics and were not fully open challenging the colonial English diction. There came the band of postcolonial writers, particularly fiction-writers, who openly show the rebellion in their style of writing; yearning for no nativeism yet, but writing in care free, inhibitive style. Salman Rusdhie, V. S Naipual, Vikaram Seth, Shashi Throor, Manju Kapoor, Amitav Ghosh, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai etc. are the prominent names who have been taking this movement of counter-stylistic-attack to the heights. A few of them have been conferred with the prestigious literary awards such as Booker. It is the recognition of the novel type of English, carefree style of narration with no architectonic disciple, experimentation in plot and diction etc.

Salman Rusdie is the representative case as in his novels what he extensively explores is the typical Indian (Pakistani; related to subcontinent) reality with the typical form of hi narrative. He is the writer who can be credited to have truly begun the use of Indian vernaculars in English to add the Indian flavour in the writing. His ease of expression in Indianized English, narrative style to explore the shades of history in the representative novels such as *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*—everything brings out the fact of his freedom from the colonial aesthetics. Moon Moon Mazumdar's views relate this stance, "Therefore, Rusdie refrains from adopting the monologic voice favoured by the colonizer and interspersed his narrative with motifs from cinema, parodies of sacred texts, legends, and voices of the marginalized people which also articulate some of his deepest feelings...." (Mazumdar: 2010, p. 95)

Similarly, V. S. Naipaul is the writer of the great prominence who has brought the typical writing of India and concerning India on the world scenario. Though, he is known for being indulged in finding the shades of the darker side of India, yet what he writes is typical Indian with typical Indian English. Like that of Rusdhie, his ease of expression in English carries the hint of his style being free from the burden of colonial style. Likewise Kushwant Singh is also a writer who is found engaged in exploring the contemporary history of India with his unique Indian English:

‘That, Sir, is the ashram of Ma Durgeshwari. She is a powerful tantric. People say she was born in a cave in high Himalayas. She owns a tiger called Sheroo who I’ve been told is a strict vegetarian. He follows her everywhere like a pet dog. She takes him to the Ganga every day and they bathe in the river together. People are scared of going anywhere near them. They call her Sheron wali ma--- mother of tigers. For her darshan you have to approach her chief disciple who is an Englishwoman’ (Burial at Sea, p. 128-29)

Indigenized use of English thus came to be a potent tool to liberate the form and stylistics from colonial prescriptions and conventional norms. The indigenization and Indianization of English with constant and deliberate use of hybrid, pidgin words, localized expressions typical of local culture, simplified but unusual diction etc. Upamanyu Chatterjee English, August: An Indian Story is at best with such usages and expressions in narrative. Being the typical postcolonial Indian literary output the novel has frequency of the Indian usages in English--- pidgin, hybrid, khchari, certain Indianized words. The word like, ‘saab’ adds emphasis on the idea influence of bureaucracy that Chatterjee wants to bring at home. It also adds Indian flavour with servility in attitude to the officer in higher rank. The term mostly refers to such officers at higher position yet it is also used to address to powerful and elite in Indian society. Other words with touch of Hindi and Indian vernaculars are like--- ‘bhai’, ‘arrey’, ‘hayn’, ‘bazzar’, ‘rickshaw-wala’, ‘puja’, ‘maya’ etc. are studded in the texture of the novel every here and there. Even the words such as ‘Tonic Da’ signify the intermingling of Bengali, denoting the sense of Indianness as ‘Da’ is the words to address older brother.

The expression, ‘arrey’ is also a form of expression for the juniors and younger people. But ‘hayn’ is typical reaction forming no specific word but a funny surprise if something odd happens. Agastya Sen is odd, unusual being for the small-town hooligans, rustics of Madna. This reactive expression of surprise is given by a servicer urchin, “An urchin handed Agastya a plate. On it were laddus, smosas, and green chutney. He could almost hear the chutney say, Hi, my name is cholera, what’s yours? ‘No, not for me.’ The urchin said, ‘Hayn?’ (English, August: 1988, p. 24) If this extract is taken as the representative of the text of the narrative the novel is, thus, a typical Indian one with typical Indian aesthetics, expressions, usages, etc. away from the influence of colonial aesthetics of Queen English.

The use of the particular terms like—‘rickshaw-wala’ signifies the indigenized form of English uses as the writer could have used, ‘rickshaw-puller’ instead. But the suffix in this phrase signifies the more sense of Indianness and thus typical postcolonial stance of writing. Such simplified narrative style, use of desi words and easy readability implies the fact of liberation from heavy norms of politicized colonial aesthetics in English., G.J.V. Prasad observes this transformation in the use of English over the years “...that earlier Indian English writers wrote in what many still consider awful English. They create an English which resists easy reading by the monolingual English reader...” (Prasad: 1996, p. 192)

Chatterjee even goes to the extreme in toying with the diction of English and utterly defying, discarding the syntactic and semantic sanctity of this language. The new episode begins at once to further the plot of Agastya but with syntactically faulty sentence though semantically

acceptable, “Agastya on his way to the office of the Superintendent of Police, to pay Kumar for his train ticket to Delhi.” (English, August, p. 217) In the construct of this sentence there is a very tangible syntactic error that there is no main verb here. In this construct there is only one verb i. e. ‘to pay’ but it is verb with infinitive; such verb is added to the sentence when there is already a main verb referring the tense. Probable use of the verb of present indefinite tense ‘is’ for third person and the form of ‘be’ is missing and however the novelist seems not bothered of such lacuna in sentence which begins an episode.

Such usages of indigenized, desi words with flavour of Hindi and Indian vernacular is the common stance in the novels of many contemporary writers. Arundhati Roy is at her best in *The God of Small Things* with her unique poetry of expressions but in an English with the tang of Malayalam and Hindi. The deliberate deployment of such diction, usages, expressions, grammatology, weird syntax etc. all signify the efforts of these postcolonial Indian writers to decolonize the aesthetics from the colonial influence. In an interview, quoted by Meenakshi Mukherjee, Salman Rushdie, the representative writer, throws ample light on this phenomenon:

But, I think, that Indian writers will become much freer with the English language, you know, as the memory of the English fades, and English just becomes domesticated Indian tool, which I think more or less it now is, really. I think that people who use English, use it more and more, kind of unproblematically and without that kind of echo of the colony. So that means that English is growing into becoming an Indian language, and as it does, I think, people will use it with more verve, more confidence, more ease and with more Indianness. (Rushdie, quoted by Mukherjee: 2003, p. 223)

The postcolonial movement is not restricted to the boundaries of India only but this is the phenomenon world-wide; the writers writing in their own styles from the third world which once used to be the part of European empire. The postcolonial movement has been held in critical analyses by Bill Ashcroft which reveals the characteristics of this movement signifying the engineering the new words of assertion to manage the new war:

Post-colonial studies developed as a way of addressing the cultural production of those societies affected by the historical phenomenon of colonialism. In this respect, it was not conceived as a grand theory but as a methodology: first for analyzing the complex strategies by which colonized societies have engaged imperial discourse; and second, for studying the ways in which many of those strategies are shared by the colonized societies, re-emerging the very different political and cultural circumstances. (Ashcroft, quoted at *Indian English Fiction: A Reader*: 2009, p. 1)

Works Cited:

Ashcroft, Bill. “Post-Colonial Transformation and Global Culture”. *Indian English Fiction: A Reader*. Ed. Sarbojit Biswas. Kolkatta: Books Way, 2009.

Chatterjee, Upamanyu. *English, August: An Indian Story*. London: Faber & Faber, 1988.

(All subsequent references are to this edition only. The page nos. are given in parentheses.)

- Dutt, Toru. "Our Casuarina Tree". Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets. Ed. R. Parthasarathy. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1976.
- Ezekiel, Nissim. "The Patriot". Chronicles of Time: An Anthology of Poems. Ed. Asha kadyan. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Loomba, Ania. Colonialism/Postcolonialism: the New Critical Idiom. reprint, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013.
- Mazumdar, Moon, Moon. "Rushdie, Aijaz Ahmed and The Question of Postcolonial Legitimacy". Understanding India: Studies In Indian English Fiction. Ed. Arnab Bhattacharya. Kolkatta: Books Way, 2010.
- Mukherjee, Meenakshi. Ed. Rushdie in Midnight's Children: A Book of Readings. Delhi: Pencraft International, 2003.
- Narayan, R. K. The Vendor of Sweets. Chennai: Indian Thought Publication, 1967.
- Nayar, Pramod, K. Postcolonial Literature: An Introduction. New Delhi: Pearson, 2008.
- Prasad, G.J.V. "Reply Paid Post-colonialism: The Language of Indian English Fiction." Interrogating Post-Colonialism: Theory, Text and Context. Ed. Harish Tivedi & Meenakshi Mukherjee. Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, 1996.
- Said, W. Edward. Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2001.
- Singh, Khushwant. The Burial at Sea. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2004.