



## JOURNAL OF INDIAN LANGUAGES AND INDIAN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Journal of Indian languages and Indian literature in English, 02(04), 41-46; 2024

---

### INDIANNESS IN INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE - AN ANALYSIS

**Dr.M. JOHNSON SANGEETHARAJ**

Associate Professor of English,  
Tranquebar Bishop Manikam Lutheran College,  
Mayiladuthurai ,Tamilnadu,India,  
[jsangeetharaj@gmail.com](mailto:jsangeetharaj@gmail.com)  
7904631043

India APA Citation:

JOHNSON SANGEETHARAJ .M (2024). INDIANNESS IN INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE - AN ANALYSIS, Journal of Indian Languages and Indian literature in English, 02(04),41-46; 2024

Submission Date: 15.10.2024

Acceptance Date: 20.11.2024

---

#### ABSTRACT

Indianness of Indian English literature is a much debated issue. Doubts have been raised about its Indianness primarily because it is written in "another tongue" (Devy, 1993). Indian writers themselves in their creative endeavors are too conscious of their Indianness. Meenakshi Mukerjee terms it as "anxiety of Indianness". In the present paper, the issue of Indianness of Indian writing in English and Mahapatra's poetry have been approached from the socio-cultural and linguistic points of view. According to Gokak "It is easy to slip into thinking that Indianness consists in adopting an angle of vision which is recognizably vedantic" (Gokak in Mohan, 1978, p. 23). However, he counters this view by pointing out that Indian literature presents to us Marxist, socialist, existentialist or otherworld-views through which life is seen and reflected upon. These are also genuinely Indian perspectives. In addition, he also regards mysticism as the core of Indianness of Indian writing, at the same time also maintains that Indian literature cannot be distinguished from the other literatures of the world merely on the basis of this single feature.

---

**Key words:** Indianness, Mahapatra, poetry, literature, Indian English literature, Marxist etc

---

Indianness of an individual cannot be defined solely through a consideration of geography, race, religion or language but the main determining factor is - an awareness of Indian history in its totality - an Indian is a person who has an awareness of the entire Indian heritage and possesses an integral cultural awareness. "Indianness of Indian writing consists in the writer's intense awareness of his entire culture" (Gokak, 1978, p. 24). He further adds that this cultural awareness has to be vertical as well as horizontal. The writer should have a vivid awareness of his "situatedness in time and space". The panorama of life from Kashmir to Cape Comorin and the continuity of life and culture through three to five thousand years should form part of his consciousness. Indian poetry in English carries the epithet 'Indian' but is accused of being only sometimes 'Indian' and occasionally 'poetry'. As to the charge of being 'occasionally poetry' (Naik, 1982, p. 207), one cannot deny that a large number of poetry written in English does not surely automatically qualify as genuine poetry. As Gokak has conceded "Publication in the field of Indo Anglian poetry has been ample and indiscriminate. For every recognizable book of Indo-Anglian poems I have read, I have probably read ten that need not have been read at all" (Gokak, 1970, p. xii). Naik's contention in this regard is that "conventional sentiment couched in conventional diction and imagery can hardly rise to the level of genuine poetry" (Naik in Prasad, 1983, p. 29).

Another factor with regard to Indianness relates to the conventions in sentiment, diction and imagery that are being followed. When the Indian first started writing in English numbers in the early nineteenth century, the numbers came from lyres strung mostly to romantic tune" (Naik, 1983, p. 30). After romanticism, the fashion changed to Tennysonian melodies and Arnoldian musings, the trend (with a time lag of one generation) in Indian poetry in English also changed. Gordon Bottomley's well-known indictment of Indian poetry in English as "Matthew Arnold in a sari" needs some modification as after Independence, Indian poets in English aped modernism of Eliot-Yeats Auden. As Naik maintains "As the western master's voice has changed in its tones and registers, the Indian poet's echo of the original has dutifully reproduced the changes, of course, with inevitable distortions" (Naik, 1983, p. 30). A poetry which is so imitative of the fashions of tones of British or American poetry cannot be termed as Indian.

At this juncture, the following questions can be raised in order to further unravel the notion of 'Indian' and 'Indianness': a) Why should there be a demand of being 'Indian' upon Indian poetry in English? b) Why should the Indian poet writing in English be asked to produce his passport and establish his nationality? c) Why should there be an insistence that an Indian English poet must talk of banyan and the champak and not of cedars and wisterias, of parrots and water-buffaloes and not of redbreasts and unicorns, of mangoes and guavas and not of pears and peaches? One who poses questions as have been mentioned above needs to be reminded that no great work of art can be produced unless it is rooted in

its soil. An Indian turned into a brown Englishman cannot be authentic and is bound to be condemned to superficiality and artificiality" (Naik, 1983, p. 31). However, if an Indian poet chooses an Indian theme or makes use of an Indian setting, it in itself will not result in good writing. If the poet uses. ....- a local colour purely as an external device, it is not enough. He is not influenced merely by one culture. Rather, he carries the burden of diversity of cultural strands, Indianness in his works may also take several forms. In this context Naik remarks, "The poet's consciousness may be steeped in an awareness of synthesis of many cull currents" (Naik, 1983, p. 31). An awareness of the entire cultural heritage thus constitutes Indianness. Animals enumerates elements of this synthesis, "Among the most prominent elements in this synthesis are a quest for the eternal verities, a passion for assimilation and acceptance and an agility and elasticity of mind which is capable of at once rigorous intellectual scrutiny and unquestioning faith as the mood dictates" (Naik, 1983, p. 33). The attitude of the creative writer to the synthesis should be characterized by intellectual vigour suggested by terms as 'quest', 'passion' and 'agility'.

A parallel of the demand for Indianness can be drawn between the black writers' notion of Negritude and Franz Fanon's view of national culture. It is interesting to note that the demand of forging a national consciousness and culture is not exclusively made from Indian writers in English. Black writers were also called upon to shape national consciousness and culture during the colonial period. Celebration of 'blackness' is the core principle of Negritude. For the African writers, the term denoted a whole way of life grounded in perception of unique African qualities. It is an effort to return a sense of dignity and value to black people and their cultures. Its ultimate goal is the emancipation of its people from oppressive colonialism, but it also seeks the dynamic synthesis of cultures. The concept of Indianness also implies synthesis but Negritude is much wider and more comprehensive concept. It admits an unquestioning faith in conceiving past, history, but it also has a lot of scope for a rigorous intellectual scrutiny. Fanon in a chapter entitled 'On National Culture' in *The Wretched of the Earth* urges the black artists and writers to contribute to the making of national consciousness. Instead of championing of the 'pan-African' culture of Negritude, he is in favour of constructing a national consciousness, dependent upon cultural activities.

According to Fanon, creation of national culture moves through three phases: 1. unqualified assimilation of cultural fashions of the colonizing power; ii. Uncritical championing of indigenous cultural past and traditions; and iii. Seeking a more dynamic relationship between the cultural inheritance of the past and concrete realities and necessities of the present. Fanon perceives culture not as an essential category but a vital, unstable activity that is always in the process of being made and remade. In Fanon's understanding of national culture what is important is the rendering of culture as an activity, dynamic and responsive to historical circumstances. There is no validity or scope for a

repetition of pre-existing cultural forms. Each cultural form is unique to the moment of its production. Gokak also refers to an awareness of history, cultural inheritance in his conceptualization of Indianness but he fails to perceive vital and dynamic interaction of cultural inheritance of the past with the concrete realities of the present, his concept of Indianness is an essentialist category, a fixed entity. Indianness is a dynamic notion which changes in response to the historical forces operative at the moment of its production.

The issue of defining Indianness is complex. Critics often take a simplistic view of a complex issue. The concept of Indianness is an aspect of a larger problem both in terms of literature and art and also in terms of socio-cultural issues (de Souza, 1989, p. 29). Historians, sociologists draw our attention to some crucial aspects of the problem in defining Indianness. History and cultural tradition have been interpreted differently in the light of contemporary ideologies. What may appear to be the essentials of a culture may in fact be what the ideologue may seek to project as the essentials of that culture (Thapar, Mukhia, Chandra, 1984, p. 61). Indian history has been interpreted differently by orientalist, nationalists and communalists posing as nationalists. Some looking for a panacea outside European culture have glorified ancient Indian spirituality or non-modern aspects of Indians heritage. Others have equated Indian tradition with the Hindu tradition. Aspects of Indian tradition such as spirituality are taken as an essential component and also considered as point of departure between European and Indian traditions. "Their list of essential features of Indian culture includes quality of tolerance, a capacity for synthesis, a universal outlook, a strong social sense, and so on" (de Souza, 1989, p. 29).

Then there are those who hold the opposite view and see the majority religion as essentially authoritarian discounting individuality and free enquiry (Shah and Rao, 1957, pp. 110-112). Dharendra Narain in his study Hindu character emphasizes the serious differences among scholars in their attempt to put together a series of considerations as bases for assessing national character (Narain, 1957, pp. 3-34). The different views regarding the essential features of national character as noted above make us aware that our ideas of national character (as such of Indianness) are constricts rather than essences. To apply them in a normative way - this is authentically Indian, this is not, is not just. One needs to exercise restraint and caution in passing such value judgments.

Eunice de Souza in "Indianness and the Critic in a Post-Colonial Culture" expresses her apprehensions about critics who demand conformity to essentialist concept of Indianness, instead she demands that openness, flexibility and caution are required to view and evaluate Indian poets writing in English. She quotes from Sri Aurobindo's *The Future Poet*; to seek freedom from a facile view of Indianness. Aurobindo acknowledges the role of cultural environment in moulding of a character but he also allows much scope for the individuality. "It is not to be understood by this that he (the writer) is to consider himself only as a voice of the national mind or bound by the past national tradition and

debarred from striking out a road of his own" (de Souza, 1989, p. 31).4.4. Individual Identity and Nationality an artist in his quest for identity and individuality grapples with larger and more complex issues. Balchandra Rajan contemplates on the matter cogently in an essay titled "Identity and Nationality". He defines identity as "the process of creative self-realization" and nationality as "the establishing of a collective myth or image" (Rajan in Mukherjee, 1977, p. 1).

Identity is a major concern for an artist. The issue of nationality is not necessarily relevant to his concern and may even infringe on the honesty of those concerns. But A sense of nationality can grow out of the discovery of identity and it is important that this should happen frequently, if one is to establish a tradition that is both distinctive and rooted. But while identities may cohere into a nationality, that emerging myth or image should not be used as a framework within which the artist is obliged to discover himself or by which the value of his discovery is to be judged" (Rajan, 1977, p. 2).The quest for identity and nationality in the case of modern Indian poets writing in English is complicated by their special kind of positioning among Indian creative writers. Most of them belong to urban middle-class and have received English education. Some are members of the minority communities. Since they write in English, they form a part of an elite group. Their dilemma is that they are distanced and displaced, because of their upbringing and education from a large section of society. To overcome this displacement and distance, they have to make a deliberate attempt to construct their identity in the context of larger "imagined community" i.e. nation. "Having chosen to write in a language not native nor strongly rooted in any region of their country, Indian English poetry has always been the poetry of the displaced, a poetry born of the education imparted to the urban middle and upper classes in a largely illiterate and poor and mainly rural country. And because of the very fact of writing in English and of their need to stress their Indianness, Indian English poets have had to confront this displacement, have had to try and situate themselves in the cultures and traditions of their country" (Prasad, 1999,p. 15)

#### **REFERENCES:**

- Anderson, Wallace L. and Norman C. Stageberg, eds. *Introductory Readings on Language*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962.
- Baker, William E. *Syntax in English Poetry*. Berkley and Los Angles: University of California Press, 1967.
- Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theon*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995.
- Bateson, F.W. "Literature and Linguistics". *The Language of Literature*. Roger Fowler. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971.
- Bhat, Luxminarayan P. Jayanta Mahapatra. Jaipur: Mangaldeep Publications, 2000.

- KARTHIK, S. "EXPLORING CULTURAL AND MIDDLE-CLASS MENTALITY IN CHETAN BHAGAT'S 2 STATES: THE STORY OF MY MARRIAGE." *Journal of Indian languages and Indian literature in English* 2.3 (2024): 56-62.
- Suresh, D. "Effect Of Specific Yogic Practice And Resistance Training On Selected Physical And Psychological Variables Among Male Kabaddi Players." (2017).
- Balaganapathy, M. "Investigating L2 Proficiency among Government College Students in the Districts of Thanjavur." *Journal of English Language and Literature (joell)* 11 (2024): 105-107.
- Shanmugasundaram, S., M. Balaganapathy, and Mrs JS Kavitha. "DEVELOPING TASKS THROUGH YOUTUBE VIDEOS: POINTS TO PONDER."
- Kavitha, Mrs JS, and M. Balaganapathy. "Designing tasks for a Heterogeneous Group of Students: Implications." *Journal of English Language and Literature* (2017).