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Foreword

Pegasus has been marking time for a while and is now on wings again.

This edition of *Pegasus* has for its theme Indian English Fiction. We decided to adopt this theme in order to provide our students (and teacher colleagues) with an overview of this branch of writing in English so that they can introduce themselves to what they have to study in the Eighth Paper of the University of Calcutta English Honours syllabus. A number of books are available on the subject, but the approach adopted by teachers teaching in the undergraduate colleges has a lot of relevance as far as students' understanding of the subject is concerned. Also, it is difficult for the teachers to adopt attitudes based on personal and scholarly understanding of the subject as there are no specified norms as regards questions to be set in the coming examinations. A purist would snigger at this statement, but the fact remains that it is virtually impossible for anyone to inculcate a proper appreciation of the subject in the given conditions and we have no alternative to preparing students for what they will have to write in answer to questions. Ideally, we would all like to take our students through the gamut of the works by the Indian writers writing in English, acquainting them with the intricacies of the post-colonial and diasporic mindset. That would, I am afraid, remain a pipe dream as long as the purveyors of education maintain their distance from learning. Meanwhile, the student – pinned and wriggling on the wall – would continue to suffer from 'probophobia' and we would continue our jargon mongering while setting questions that follow cliched patterns of pedagogy.

We have to thank Dr. Sudeshna Kar Barua and Dr. Somdatta Mondal for their commendable patience and Dr. Sanjukta Das for her celerity in composition.

Our website has been shifted. We have to thank Swasti Ganguly, our former student, now in Seattle, for her devoted work in cyberspace for *Pegasus*. Our original site is still functional. If any reader is aware of any relevant website, we would request them to supply the addresses. We would link them to our website.

Test examinations for B.A. Part One completed, students must be busy preparing for the coming ordeal. The third year students are also getting ready for their finals. We wish them all success. May the gel in their pens never dry up.

Teachers and students from other institutions are invited to send us articles properly typed and not longer than 1600 words. Articles not selected will be returned if accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelopes. Send us notices and news of literary activity. Send us books and journals for review. You can send articles by e-mail at: pegasusHCC@caltiger.com or biswas4@cal3.vsnl.net.in

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Reading *The Guide*

Sanjukta Das

A few things need to be borne in mind by a student when approaching R. K. Narayan's novel *The Guide*.

A) That this is a novel, written by an Indian, about Indians, and set in India but in the English Language. Therefore, the readers of this novel will be English speaking/reading persons, in India and all over the world. This novel is not being written in the author's mother tongue. This holds true for all Indian writers in English except perhaps those of Anglo-Indian descent. In the case of R. K. Narayan it is in place to be aware that his books were first published from England, and *The Guide* was actually written over a few weeks which Narayan was spending in Berkeley, USA. The student has to therefore be familiar with the discourse on Indian-English writing – the questions of legitimacy, authenticity, alienation and elitism. The student could also imagine the novel as being translated into his/her mother tongue and judge whether the story would be tenable.

B) In the fifties when *The Guide* came out Narayan's primary readership was in the West.

C) The humorous element in his writing developed after *The Guide*. Until now, he had written about persons caught up in pain and loneliness. *The Bachelor of Arts*, *The Dark Room* and *The English Teacher* belong to this category. Later the tongue-in-cheek humour would mock the solitary man as a Quixotic figure in novels such as *The World of Nagaraj*. *The Guide* marks a kind of watershed in his Fiction.

D) In the *oeuvre* of Narayan's work, until *The Guide*, women had appeared in the traditional roles of mother, wife and daughter. After *The Guide*, women with jobs/careers and ideas of their own are portrayed. In *The Dark Room* such a woman had appeared but in a negative way as a home-wrecker. In addition, with the exception of this novel, all his works centre on male protagonists.

In *The Guide*, the canvas enlarges to include a bigger world than just Malgudi, to a macrocosmic India. The town too is no longer the simple network of streets of his earlier novels, but undergoing an upheaval with the building of railway tracks. It is marked on the one side by bustling crowds of outsiders and on the other side by forests, caves, and wild animals. In Narayan's hands the exotic elements, the temple dancer, the King Cobra, the animal cries, the guide or swami figure are opened to demystification but would nevertheless, retain their exotic appeal, especially to a white readership.

For the first time in Narayan's fiction the central characters are outside the ambit of the middle class Malgudian – a railway guide, a temple dancer and a scholar by the foreign name of Marco. Later Narayan would deal with a whole array of such persons, ordinarily invisible to the middle class eye. Marginalized beings – the painter of signs, the vendor of sweets and so on. These lives would take

centre stage like Charlie Chaplin's Tramp. And along with his brother R. K. Laxman's 'Common Man' figure and cartoons of Indian life, Narayan's fictional world would attain a kind of ironic humour.

Daisy and Raju are developed in terms of character like a set of twins. Both are trapped in family bonds that restrain their somewhat unorthodox ambitions – Daisy wants to become a dancer and Raju wants to use her to make his fortune outside Malgudi. Raju is already a performer. As a tourist guide and as a railway platform-kiosk-owner he is adept at handling crowds.

They can team up only by breaking their ties with their respective families; in Daisy's case with her husband, in Raju's case with his mother. There is a difference however. Daisy has the approach of a student to her art, Raju is the quintessential 'seller of wares' with shades of the con man. It is this that makes him go along with the Swami escapade even though the price to be paid is his life. And if Raju ends up becoming a Swami, Daisy ends up as a recluse.

Their mutual need is based on this footing and the transactional nature of the alliance is made prominent after the familial obstacles are gone. The gloss of desire and romance had remained as long as Marco and Raju's mother had remained.

From then on, it is business. That Narayan seems to disapprove of this alliance is conveyed by its collapse from within. Yet Daisy's lifeline to Raju in trouble, and Raju's ordeal as guide to a teeming throng caught in desperate faith, elevate their stature to larger than life proportions.

The title of the novel is significant at various levels. Swamis, sadhus, fortune tellers, ascetics, and guides are an integral part of R.K. Narayan's fictional landscape. In an earlier novel, *The Bachelor of Arts*, the protagonist had left home after losing the girl of his dreams to a mismatch in horoscopes. He had drifted around for months and, with matted hair and beard had taken to ochre robes. Then one fine day, he had shaved himself clean and returned home.

In *The Guide* however the motif is central to the novel. And although the portrayal is sympathetic, it demystifies the figure of the Indian Guide. Raju is a tourist guide and also unwillingly and unwittingly a mystic guide. Yet as his role as guide expands his personal condition plummets. Raju's career as guide moves in three phases. As tourist guide he is emotionally distanced from the place and can objectify it efficiently, Through the tourist encounter Raju meets Daisy and moves to the next stage of his Guide avatar. He now guides Daisy to her goal. As his needs soar like Gaffur the driver earlier, Daisy falls into a reluctant compliance. His tourist-guide phase had come to an end with his recklessness over Daisy; now his reckless scheduling of her dances and his need for power brings him down a second

time.

After the nadir of imprisonment, he finds himself thrust into the role of spiritual guide. It is significant that despite his dishonesty, others always seek him out for guidance. The story is as much about the world's emotional and moral turmoil that makes it seek guides as it is about a person who makes use of this situation. The tourists had flocked to him. Daisy had sought him out. And now the person to whom he unburdens his life story sees him as a saviour. His starvation and suffering has echoes of Christ's ordeal, and the last glimpse we have of Raju's sagging body propped up on the shoulders of two believers in the posture of crucifixion, seem to redeem him. The matter of his death too is left ambiguous. Narayan's story achieves greatness through its compassionate exploration of the human individual and the human community, and the slow and subtle changes that interactions between the two produce in the human soul. Yet this is achieved without using emotional language. The guide motif however also has moorings in certain historical specificities of that period. Today with Jhumpa Lahiri's story of another Indian tourist guide as "an interpreter of maladies" to whom a lady confides the deepest secret of her life, the guide motif touches yet another chord. Stories about guides are popular even today — from Gibran's *Prophet* to Bach's *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*. In 1958 when Narayan's novel first came out, American tourists were visiting India as a land of spiritualism, The West's affair with things Indian – yogis, sitarists and classical dancers, was waxing strong. The sixties with their beatnik cult and India-centric spiritual seeking was about to happen. The Nehruvian era was consciously packaging Indian art and culture for tourists. And in India and America this was the age of masses congregating around *gurus* and pop stars. *The Guide* draws upon these things, but Narayan's astute eye also deconstructs the notion of the guide even as it tells the story of a particular guide with human sympathy.

In terms of plot, Narayan makes a shift from his earlier linear narratives. Here the story moves back and forth in time and uses two narrative voices. The present is recorded by the authorial voice, and the past is rendered by Raju. This double perspective situates reader response on an ambivalent ground. Empathy is tempered by critical Judgement. This structure helps us read Daisy between the lines of Raju's narrative. There is also a juxtaposition of spaces. There is a private space of the mind — of Raju's ambitions, of Daisy's life — contrasted to sets of crowds, where feeling is not private, individual and attempting to understand things, but blind and unthinking, The mass hysteria of the devotees, the novelty seeking euphoria of tourists, the adulatory and demanding fans of Daisy the dancer, offset the deliberately non-committal authorial voice and the regretful, hindsightful, yet unrepentant narrative voice of Raju. This setting off against each other of the individual and the crowd, construct the characters of Daisy and Raju. For the 'guide' is determined by patterns of Follower-behaviour. The ambiguous ending only highlights this irony about the guide- Is it neatly naming up in the hills as he says on is it merely the cry of a starvation crazed? If it is really raining and Raju not dead, the adulation will magnify and after the rains settle down to Raju's advantage. If it is not raining and Raju not dead, he will hold out for long. If it rains and Raju dies, there will be a permanent temple built in his memory. There is also a flickering wonder over whether Raju has through his sufferings acquired mystic powers and can really feel the rain creeping up his feet. Whatever the possibility, it does not really matter for the real story has already been told. The story of a little boy in a sleepy place called Malgudi, who was jerked to life and leadership by the building of a railway track near his home. It is in this beginning and in the course of the guide's life that a piece of universal human history unfolds.

R. K. Narayan: A Short Bibliography

Works

Swami and his Friends (1935); *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937); *The Dark Room* (1938); *The English Teacher* (1945); *Mr. Sampath* (1949); *The Financial Expert* (1952); *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955); *The Guide* (1959); *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* (1961); *Gods, Demons and Others* (1965); *The Sweet-Vendor* (1967); *Malgudi Days* (1943); *An Astrologer's Day and Other Stories* (1947); *Lawley Road: Thirty-two Short Stories* (1956); *Sunday Morning: Sketches and Essays* (1960); *My Dateless Diary* (1960); *A Horse and Two Goats* (1970)

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Reading to Know Other Realities

Sudeshna Kar Barua

'India, a withered trunk ... suddenly shot out with foreign foliage'; the Indians began writing in English. Nearly ninety three years back in his preface to *An Incarnation of the Snow* (1908)¹, F. W. Bain drew this analogy, implying that the Indo-British contact had injected life into a 'withered trunk', sapped of all substance, and thereafter it just managed to thrive on borrowed nourishment. Not quite. The Indians did learn a foreign language from the English. Yet, Indian English writing, to this day, may be best described as writing by Indians predominantly about Indians in a language that by virtue of being foreign, helps the writers to reach out even to the west and make their readers actually learn about other realities by bringing them close to a society that has always existed, away from England, and existed not just with its problems and pains but with a rich and enviable heritage and culture as well.

If we go by dates, Indians have been writing in English for nearly two hundred years² and different terms ranging from Indo-Anglian literature, Indo-English literature to Anglo-Indian literature have been used to define and describe the literary achievements of Raja Rammohan Roy, Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Swami Vivekananda and many others including M.K. Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Subash Chandra Bose. Much later in 1962 K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar found 'Indian Writing in English' a very suitable and serviceable term³ but that too was ultimately replaced by 'Indian English Literature' and accepted by the Sahitya Akademi.

It is a critical commonplace that Indian English fiction is the best known component of Indian English literature and that it has been a 'graphic chronicle' taking up 'some major socio-cultural concerns'.⁴ But the fact remains that fiction in English took some time to arrive and the beginning was rather modest with the endeavours of Shoshee Chunder Dutt, Ram Krishna Punt, A.Madhaviah, and T.Ramakrishna Pillai not quite succeeding in creating much impression. But now works of Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya, R.K.Narayan, Raja Rao, Khuswant Singh, V.S. Naipaul, Vikram Seth, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy and Jhumpa Lahiri, to name a few, will far outnumber those of other genres.

For years novels and stories, mainly Eurocentric, written in English by the English have been leading their readers mainly into regions seen and known. It is *our* fiction that is actually satisfying the western readers' curiosity about the sub-continent and its people. And as first-hand information is always desired, Forster and Kipling have stepped aside to make room for Indian novelists writing in English primarily about the people of India who, despite oppression and subjugation, have retained their *own-ness* and *difference* quite successfully. And

this Indianness, served for the western palate, is being accepted and appreciated.

Now for a look at two novels that arrested attention long before prestigious prizes for fiction in English started coming India's way from the west. The writers are Mulk Raj Anand (one of the pioneers) and R.K.Narayan (one of the most popular novelists) and the novels, *Coolie* (1935) and *The Guide* (1935), focusing on the eventful lives of an unskilled Indian worker and an unprincipled tourist guide respectively.

It may be of interest to note that in spite of his many years abroad and in spite of carrying on his Indian shoulders, what he calls, the burden of 'the Alps of the European tradition'⁵ many of Anand's novels document, as it were, the misery and the agony of the Indian poor. He 'is not able to hide his proletarian sympathies'.⁶ *Coolie*, like his first novel *Untouchable* (which his English publishers found revolting) is uncomfortably close to life. The story of the orphan Munoo, out in search of a living and forced by circumstances to be a servant, a coolie and finally a rickshaw puller who dies of tuberculosis, is actually a record of social injustice and the exploitation of the downtrodden by unfeeling human beings and a heartless system.

R.K.Narayan's *The Guide* is a journey through one man's life in the small Indian town of Malgudi, not to be found on the map of India. Railway Raju, the protagonist, by turn a shop assistant, a shop-owner, a professional guide, a lover, a forger, a jail-bird, a *mahatma* by accident and an unwilling martyr to a cause, is a rebel who cares little for the typically Indian social values and ethics but ironically falls a victim to Indian circumstances, conventions and Faith. Raju 's love affair with Rosie, the neglected wife of a man more interested in stones than in her, calls into question, among other things, the Indian idea of marriage and its sanctity and durability. And the theme of marriage has recurred in Narayan's novels beginning with *The Bachelor of Arts* and thereafter running through *The Dark Room* into *The Vendor of Sweets* and *The Painter of Signs*. However, Narayan's Rosie is unconventional and for a picture of the truly Indian wife we need to turn to *The Dark Room*.⁷

Both *Coolie* and *The Guide* are pre-independence novels and were written at a time when Gandhi was a Presence and writers felt the urge of including him and his ideas in their works. But unlike Anand's own *Untouchable*, R.K. Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma* and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, these two do not take much interest in either the Mahatma or politics and concentrate more on our people, our customs, conventions, values, ideas, attitudes, spirituality, poverty, depression and frustrations. But Narayan's canvas is somewhat larger than Anand's and the

colours are more varied and eye-catching. The consumptive Munoo, for instance, is hardly a match for the confident Raju (played by the flamboyant Dev Anand on screen) and while the former seems to move from sorrow to deeper sorrow till death claims him, Raju, a master of the game who designs his own life and perhaps his death as well, remains head and shoulders above others even when his luck runs out on him.

What makes *Coolie*, *The Guide* and also novels like *Kanthapura* different from, say, Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* or Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*, is the authors' decision not to move away from India and Indians. Narayan's Raju and Rosie tour widely but their engagements take them only 'to all corners of South India' and 'from coast to coast'. Munoo hailing from the Kangra hills travels to Indian cities and Raja Rao's Moorthy brings Gandhian ideas into *Kanthapura*. The local touches in these novels are quite interesting. Think of the vivid description of busy Indian cities and the use of Indian swear words in *Coolie*, think of Rosie's Indian dances, of Raju's transformation into a bearded *swami* and his craving for *bonda* made of 'flour potato, a slice of onion, a coriander leaf and green chili' in *The Guide* and remember the incantation to the goddess Kenchamma and the use of South Indian names like Venkamma, Ramakrishnayya, Chinnamma in *Kanthapura*. Reading these novels is like settling down for a rendezvous with Indian men and women, so different from the western readers not only in their looks, habits and manners, but in their entire mental make up and outlook.

The characters in *Coolie* and *The Guide* do not stare at the west like 'a third-world tapioca farmer' (I quote from Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*) or feel bewildered and lost like Anita Desai's Arun in *Massachusetts*. Instead Anand, in particular, makes

no attempt to conceal his hostility towards foreigners and in *Coolie* his portrayal of Mrs. Mainwaring is definitely biased. No wonder some would like to see him as an answer to Ruth Jhabvala who delighted in focusing only on Indian heat and dust, robbery and dysentery.

Mulk Raj Anand and R.K.Narayan are storytellers with a mission, presenting what is typically, naturally and really Indian through an 'alien language', and writing easily 'as Indians',⁸ sprinkling their English with Punjabi, Hindi and Tamil as and when required. The highly acclaimed *Coolie* and *The Guide* are simple, emotional novels, neither as chilling as Khuswant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* nor as spicy as Manohar Malgonkar's *The Princes*, yet to the writers of these two we may give the credit for popularising Indian English novels and encouraging Indian writers to write in English about our dreams and our heartbreaks and in the process attempt the opening up, as it were, of the Self by focusing on all that goes into the making of the Self.

Notes

¹ F. W. Bain, *An Incarnation of Snow* (London, 1908) p.xv.

² C.V. Boriah's *Account of the Jains*, written in 1803 is taken to be the earliest published work in English.

³ See K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Indian Writing in English* (Bombay, 1973)

⁴ ed. Manmohan K. Bhatnagar, *Indian Writings in English Vol. II* (New Delhi, 1998) pp. 3-5.

⁵ Mulk Raj Anand, *Apology for Heroism* (Bombay, 1946) p.67.

⁶ Chetan Karnani, *Indian Writing in English*, (New Delhi, 1995) p.34.

⁷ Narayan's Savitri is willing to be the proverbial doormat in her husband's house.

⁸ See the Foreword in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*

Indian Writing in English: Heralding a New Genre

Somdatta Mandal

The historical background of Indian Writing in English is unique in the sense that though it is at least a century and a half old, its establishment as a separate literary genre is still debated. The earliest known novel in English entitled *A Journal of Forty Eight Hours of the Year 1945* was written by Kylash Chunder Dutt way back in 1835, and the earliest instance of poetry take us back to eighteen twenties – the genres having been of roughly the same age as their counterparts in different Indian languages. In the early decades of the twentieth century, and especially before independence, Indian writers were heirs to a culture in which British and Indian elements were interfused and hence sounded a bit false. For instance, Mahatma Gandhi, to whom Mulk Raj Anand sent the draft of his novel

Untouchable, said that the language was not the language of the untouchables in India but the voice of the West. (Anand had to revise his manuscript before publication). When Macaulay's *Minutes* (1835), aimed at turning Indians into 'brown Englishmen', came into force, Indian Writing in English had already started voicing a mixed reaction to foreign domination. The heyday of Indian Writing in English actually began after Independence in 1947 when the Indian empire became the Indian nation with 'integration' as an ideal. Switching over to more recent times, it is a common belief that the big shift in Indian writing in English, post-Independence era, came with Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) because he established what had remained since then 'the most distinctive pattern for the Indian

novel, the family chronicle that is also a history of the nation, a distorted autobiography that embodies in an equally distorted form, the political life of India.

By now Rushdie's Macaulayan judgement on Indian literature in 1997 and his declaration that 'the prose writing – both fiction and non-fiction – created in that period by Indian writers working in English is proving to be a stronger and more important body of work than most of what has been produced in the eighteen 'recognized' languages in India, the so-called 'vernacular languages' has come under serious criticism. So the question naturally arises – at what point could we say that the Indian literature in the vernaculars and in English became a separate identity, distinguished from the general run-of-the mill novels of the West? First, when the novelist also became a social historian: the key word here is 'also'. Second, when Indian writers asserted a plural identity, to define oneself not by birth, ethnicity or geographical location alone, but by the confluence of all these with the 'facts of migration, transculturation and multiple identities.' 'Rushdie's use of language, the way he appropriated Indian themes and settings, offered routes to post-colonial writers everywhere in the world, specially so in India,' says Githa Hariharan whose *The Thousand Faces of Night* won the Commonwealth Prize for the best first novel a few years ago. The author of *Butter Chicken in Ludhiana* Pankaj Mishra adds, '*Midnight's Children* not only inspired many Indians to start writing fiction in English, but also to write in a brave new way.'

Going by these criteria, where could we begin? Well, we could go back to Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's *Rajmohan's Wife*, R.K. Narayan's *The Guide*, or *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937) or Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) or Khuswant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) or even Nirad C. Chaudhuri's *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*. (1951). But after *Midnight's Children*, the first of the new crop of novels appeared with Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason* in 1985 and the onrush is till date unlimited. The following year came Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate*, that incredible verse-novel which, a fellow writer says, "can only appear once in a century." The year 1988 was perhaps the most bountiful, yielding three near masterpieces: *The Trotternama* by I. Allan Sealy, *The Shadow Lines* by Amitav Ghosh, and *English August: An Indian Story* by Upamanyu Chatterjee (not to speak of *The Satanic Verses* by Rushdie). Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* made 1990 memorable and Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* arrived two years later, accompanied by an aggressive marketing drive never seen before in India. This was followed by several acclaimed works like *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Kiran Nagarkar's *Ravan and Eddie*, Chatterjee's *The Last Burden*, and Shama Fatehally's *Tara Lane*. 1995 saw at least three strikingly original works in the form of Mukul Kesavan's *Looking Through Glass*, Githa

Hariharan's *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* and Ashok Banker's *Byculla Boy*. Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* and Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome* made 1996 memorable and since then there has been a host of promising debuts, and the list grows alarmingly long year after year. This boom is also an outcome of the growth of a post-Independence generation that thinks, speaks, and writes primarily in English. "It was thought that with the departure of the British, the English language was finished in India," says Ruskin Bond, who has been writing in English for the last forty years. "In fact, just the opposite has happened. English has flowered in India to an extent it had never done in British times."

Though Vikram Seth's magnum opus *A Suitable Boy* (1993) is an "unmatched portrait of India" set in India and about India, yet what is confusing is that anthologists of Indo-American writing and Asian-American writing also lay equal claim on him. This confusion of technical nomenclature could well extend to the 'other Vikram' – Vikram Chandra whose *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* and *Love and Longing in Bombay* won prizes. Like his namesake, and like Gita Mehta, Amitav Ghosh and others, he too straddles between the two worlds of the U.S. and India. This brings us to the more complicated issue of diasporic writing which is the in-word or talking point in post-colonial cultural and literary discourses. The formation of an Indian diaspora is one of the most significant demographic dislocations of modern times and writers like Bharati Mukherjee, Sunetra Gupta, Meera Syal, Bidisha Bandopadhyay, (who incidentally never writes her surname), Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, and Amal Chatterjee all display different and quite complicated problems that critics face in calling them 'Indian Writers in English. The question also remains whether writers living outside India forfeit the right to comment on behalf of an entire nation or not.

One possible solution of grouping or labelling Indian writers in English could be writers who live in India but write about the West or have the Western audience as their target. Right from the inception of this genre, inevitably, Indian novels had to explore the relations between East and West. Nirad C. Chaudhuri started off with a *Passage to England* (1959) and this was followed by semi-autobiographical pieces like Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason* (1986). The relationship between East and West, both used for metaphors for different ways of life, have also been explored in Boman Desai's *The Memory of Elephants*, Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August* (1988), Amit Chaudhuri's *A Strange and Sublime Address* (1989) and *Afternoon Raag*. Indian writers in English have often been criticized of writing for the Western audience in mind and with an eye towards bagging a Booker or a Commonwealth writer's award – along with their astronomical advance amounts they all seem to try out their luck in this Cinderella syndrome. As Bill Buford wryly

comments:

...it showed publishers in the West that books by an Indian writer could sell. (In understanding what motivates the makers of literature, as Dr. Johnson knew, it pays to think about pay.)

Closely associated with this phenomenon is media hype. Aggressive marketing blitz, huge advances, book launch parties, rave reviews and other frills have no doubt helped Indian writing in English to hit the market. This hype and media blitzkrieg created by publishers for an Indian writer making it big in the West is rarely witnessed in the case of Indian translations. Here I am also reminded of the media hype that accompanied *The God of Small Things*. When Vikram Seth received more than Rs.3.1 crore in advance for the U.S. British and Indian rights of *A Suitable Boy*, it trumpeted the arrival of a literary cult – the idolization of writers who gained recognition in the West. In terms of public idolization and financial rewards, this number has increased over the last decade. India has always encouraged a healthy tradition of writing in English in its post-colonial period, nurtured by the likes of R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Rudyard Kipling, and Kamala Das. However, the last decade has witnessed the emergence and widespread acceptance of a class of writers belonging to the anglicized upper middle class whose success stands in contrast to those peddling to the Western demand for enticing glimpses of Indian life injected with local flavour. Thematically their writing reflects very little of the Indian middle class ethos, unlike writing in regional languages which are firmly entrenched in ground realities of Indian social life. 'They are misappropriating the English language, creating and marketing imaginary homelands. Moreover, their jargon is tailored to the elite pseudo-culture in India,' endorses a critic. Nilanjana S. Roy calls Indo-Anglian literature 'a Doon School-St. Stephen's conspiracy'. It is really interesting to note that many of the young writers like Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Tharoor, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Allan Sealy, Anurag Mathur, Rukun Advani, Mukul Kesavan and Makarand Paranjape are all from St. Stephen's College, Delhi. Thus it has to be accepted that the Indian Novel in English is at cross roads today and also seems to be a product of distinct culture. The writers are not only English speaking, but for most of

them, English is their first language. What we perhaps miss in them is that we might not be able to locate a distinct regional or ethnic identity, for majority of these writers are part of a pan-Indian community.

After such mind-boggling diversity, I might as well add here that Indian writing in English has suffered for a long time the unjust destiny of being somewhat unimportant among post-colonial literatures. Only in recent times has it found its real place, its 'locusts-stand-I' in the consideration of critics at an international level: as a consequence, there has been a considerable, sometimes immodest, interest and re-evaluation of themes and authors so far unnoticed. We might stick to novels that are rooted in the Indian reality and which help us grapple with the multifarious problems confronting our society. We need not go by 'bestseller' novelists who are becoming 'bestsellers' even before their novels hit the stands. And there is reason to believe that as we go deeper into the millennium, this trend will only take more firm roots. There seems to be no other way out except letting reasonable time to lapse for the initial hype to subside. Way back in 1968, Professor C.D. Narasimhaiah had defined Indian writing in English as 'primarily part of the literature of India in the same way as the literatures written in various regional languages are or ought to be.' The noted Kannada writer U. R. Ananthamurthy expresses dislike for Indian writers who write in English 'for export.'

Looking at the present day scenario, one can conclude by stating that Indian writing in English is in a state of good health and flourishing as never before but it still requires an expert's eye to judiciously segregate the wheat from the chaff. Also, though it is impossible to predict how Indian writing in English will be defined just ten years from now it can be certainly stated that canonical Anglo Saxon literature is already threatened with this onrush and literary flowering of India and the harbingers of twenty-first century literature will be a new breed of writers from this part of the decolonised world. No wonder Routledge put in an advertisement in the *Times Literary Supplement* to this effect: 'God help the English Novel! Send in serious manuscripts on fiction!'

Shake's Spare Omelette

Experiment in a new genre: The Incoherent Bathroom Play

Shamik Chakravarty

Omelette (Extremely emotional and overacting): To be or not to be, that is the question, whether 'tis nobler in the mind...

Horatio: Halt! What are you talking about?

Omelette: My dad's ghost came to me and instead of me getting scared, I scared him off. That's why I am wondering: To be scared or to scare, that is the

question.

Horatio: What happened to your dad?

Omelette: He got murdered.

Horatio (In high-pitched interrogation): Murder?

Omelette (Clearly and proudly): Yes, murder.

Horatio (Surprised and in a voice pitched even higher): Murder?

Omelette (More assertively): Yes. Murder. (Begins to weep) Boo Hoo Hoo!!! (Frantically clinging to each other.)

Both Together: Boo Hoo Hoo!!!

Omelette (Leaving the embrace abruptly): Friends, Romans, Countrymen! Lend me your ears!

Horatio: Cannibal! (Contemptuously) You are out of context.

Omelette: If music be the food of love, play on!

Horatio: Hey, love is foolish!

Omelette: Of course! It's not wise.

Horatio: You are getting philosophical.

Omelette: No, I am getting hungry.

Horatio: For the ear keya? Go eat yourself.

(Pausing) I see a lily on thy brow.

Omelette: Don't be silly.

Horatio (Stares and examines *Omelette*. Slowly):

Although by fools bamboozled you have been,
And nonsense have played havoc with your brain,
No one, noble *Omelette*, ever dares maintain,
That your deeds were ever vile or mean.

Omelette (Jumps and reacts): Who said my deeds

were ever vile or mean? Bamboozled, eh! I just saw my dad's ghost and happened to scare him off.

Horatio: There is a craftiness in your madness.

Omelette (Cheerily): No, there is a handloom in it.

Horatio: Thy madness is feigned.

Omelette: No, it is Aristophaned.

(Exchanging glances, staring at each other, making funny faces in the process.)

Horatio: You're not *Omelette*! You are Hamlet.

Omelette: You are not *Horatio*. You are Horsefacio! ...Heh! Heh! I am *Omelette Schwarznegger*.

(Takes out a shotgun and shoots.)

Horatio: Thy bullets are like daggers unto my heart. Thou hast cleft my heart in twain. I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed! (Accusingly) Fatso! Scum!

Omelette (Sarcastic): I see black spots ingrained within my soul. Ha! Ha!

Horatio: Et tu Brut!!

Omelette: Ate three omlettes!

(Blows into the muzzle of the gun.)

I'll be back.

(Exeunt)

From the Perspective of an Indian Writer in Diaspora — A Summary

Talk delivered by Dr. Ketaki Kusari Dyson on 15.2.2002 at the Asutosh Memorial Hall. *Protiva Sen Memorial Lecture*, under the auspices of Jogmaya Devi College

In this lecture Dr. Dyson pointed out that Bangla was becoming invisible all over Kolkata. Only in parts of North Kolkata could one see Bangla letters. Billboards were now using Romanized script to express Bangla or Hindi words. *Phone karo, Hello bolo* is a typical example. This leads to distortion and death of the vernacular. This happens when a link language becomes dominant. Careless translations of English terms were entering Bangla critical discourse in a confusing way. The translation of the word *deconstruction* into Bangla word *binirman* is a case in point.

When the vernacular languages are under attack, the bilingualism needed for translation into English is also affected. MBAs who could market English translations of vernacular texts (excellent ones from *Katha* and some others) cannot do so because they lack the knowledge, care and love for their mother tongue. Marketing books is not similar to selling

ice-cream or mobile phones. English remains the most translated language *from*, and least translated *into*. This is also reflected in the neo-colonialism displayed by the Indian press. English books are reviewed in vernacular papers, but never ever are vernacular books reviewed in English papers. This affects biculturalism. At the international level, translations need to be reader friendly. The trend of not providing glossaries to establish the legitimacy of vernacular terms, only baffles the foreign reader.

Globalization, market culture has tended to 'dumb down' cultural levels worldwide but it was still possible to see good plays, or, listen to poetry readings or concert on the radio and TV abroad. In India the television is glutted with soaps and commercial films. The other things are almost completely absent. Dr. Dyson gave information on an internet magazine run by writers in diaspora – 'Parabas'.

Some Books on Indian Fiction in English

Cowasjee, S: *So Many Freedoms: A Study of the Major Fiction of Mulk Raj Anand* (1977); Harrex, S.C. *The Fire and the Offering: The English Language Novel of India: 1935-1970* (1977,1978); Murti, K.V.S.: *The Sword and the Sickle: A Study of Mulk Raj Anand's Novels* (1983); Narasimhan,

Raji. *Sensibility under Stress: Aspects of Indo-Anglian Fiction* (1970); Parameswaran, Uma. *A Study of Representative Indo-Anglian Novelists* (1976); Singh, R.S.: *Indian Novel in English: A Critical Study* (1977); Pandeya, Shiva M.: *Studies in Modern Fiction* (1983)