CHAPTER 2

“POLITICS OF LANGUAGE”:
ENGLISH IN POSTCOLONIAL WRITING WITH
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE INDIAN CONTEXT
You taught me language and my profit on’t
Is, I know how to curse: the red plague rid you,
For learning me your language! (Tmp. 1.2. 363-365)

One wonders whether Caliban had no language at all earlier, for communication; or is it that, he had no language “intelligible” to Prospero? However, Caliban can only curse even after being aware of Prospero’s imperial duplicity, and yet cannot revolt outright. Now that Caliban has “been learnt” Prospero’s language, has started writing literatures in it (winning the Neustadt and the Booker) and teaching these literatures has become even institutionalized in the postcolonial countries, the power of the intelligible language remains unquestioned. The power and status of the colonizer’s language, in the once-colonized country, works in complex and subtle ways that permeate the post-colony’s social and economic structures and restructures. The terms “once-colonized” and “restructures” have been used deliberately since independent India has only institutionalized the “imported” structures of the colonizer and the concept of independence itself remains colonially defined to a great extent. Indeed, the politics of language and its playing out in the interstices of daily life may well be said to
characterize the descriptive term “postcolonial”, a reality that cannot but inflect the work of academics located in these areas.

While exploring the process of production of literatures in the colonizer’s language in the colonized societies, certain speculations on the communities of reception that these processes interpellate and position shoot up and we are ineluctably caught up in the fact that, in all the colonized societies, oral and/written traditions of verbal art existed before the colonizers arrived with “their” language. As Gauri Viswanathan observes:

> The Anglicists might have found themselves on sturdier ground had the indigenous tradition already been reduced to irrelevance in Indian cultural life. But as long as the traditional learning continued to flourish in other types of institutions and was indelibly woven into the fabric of Indian society, barring Indians from knowledge of it merely encouraged two independent, parallel systems. (103)

There existed specific structures of socialization based on their own language as well as particular hierarchies derived from it. The term “restructures” was earlier mentioned to point out this contrast specifically. In other words, “colonialism did not inscribe itself on a clean slate” (Loomba 17); on the other hand, “colonialist knowledges were produced also via negotiation with or an incorporation of indigenous ideas” (67). In an attempt to analyze these negotiations represented in the texts between the language-
world constructed through colonial policy (obviously continued by postcolonial educational policies) and the vernacular world that existed before the coming of these “civilizing agents”, we are inevitably confronted with the question of their status in their societies of origin and in the global community. Such an enquiry is attempted in this introductory chapter that may help us to discern the effects of each upon the other.

While “the fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile” (Tmp. 1.2. 337) of the “native isle” (339) were “discovered” by the dynamic donors, their own landscapes were penetrated, mapped and annexed to the indigenous. Retaining their imperial structure on alien scaffolding, they were appropriating local knowledge. It is the very malfunctioning or failure to “reproduce” itself, which catalyzed the subversion. Such a subversive enterprise, re-aligned from the victim’s point of view, not only tries to find space for the other but also to rework, rewrite and often “re-right” the very sense of history, culture, society and even language that silenced and excluded the other as ex-centric, to use Hutcheon’s term (57).

But, let us look at the issue through another angle. The use of English in postcolonial writing is a political manoeuvre that must be recognized—to abstract English from its socio-historical specificity into the realm of the “universal” that literature so easily becomes would be naive obfuscation. In the postcolonial nation or in the diaspora, national “identity” becomes a site for return to a nostalgic invocation of the past. In that sense, the diasporic
literature can be examined as a literature of inner exile and the feeling of being a colonial subject of a European power had its corollary in the idea that “real” culture was elsewhere. H.M. Williams remarks in this connection:

Exile is a kind of un-assuaged nostalgia, a *sehnsucht* for a lost childhood or ancestral paradise. Meanwhile, the culture of the transplanted exiles is threatened by a multiracial post-colonial *mélange* of transplanted African ‘Blacks’, Indians and Europeans and the survivors of the original conquered aboriginal indigenes. (26)

The exile’s pursuit of the lost childhood-land has a peculiar pathos mingled with anger that the ancestral past is almost irrecoverable or irredeemable. Yet the pain of a failed quest remains, all the more visible as a kind of love betrayed. In *An Area of Darkness*, that records Naipaul’s re-discovery of India, this attempt to confront the ancestral country is highly perceptible.

The repossession of the cultural past is vital for the recovery of an identity for the “othered” culture of the silent recipient. As the Italian-born Canadian writer Frank Paci opines: “We should approach the past with great anticipation and with great foreboding— but approach it we must” (qtd. in Loomba 232). The inherited past should be re-visited and related with the present for adequate self-perception and self-assertion. But, in the process of “unlearning” the “worlding” (18) of the third world created by colonial
powers and violated by the subjects, caution is necessary to avoid eulogizing
the pre-colonial past or romanticizing native culture. This does not mean that
postcolonial discourses and practices are to be defined entirely by their
relation to colonialism, which would, then, be a reverse simplification. In
fact, these discourses should challenge the canon-forming power structures.
In other words, to leave the colonized to drown in “anonymous collectivity”
will be a gross misrepresentation, a strong misreading.

This leads us to another aspect in the delineation of the dynamics of
the literary process in the colonizer’s language. It is the fallacy of
homogeneity in the label--Commonwealth, or the slightly offensive title--
Third world literature. (Since the seamless singularity of an "English
literature" may not be adequate to study the varieties of English available
across the globe). Initial and persisting confusion arises from general labels
which have served well up to now. Suddenly we are aware of emergent
literatures in English all over the world, and it is considered a “convenience”
for literary purposes, though we know it is vaguely political to group them in
the new category of Commonwealth literature. The political connotation of
this label can be explained with its exclusion of non-Commonwealth countries
like the United States and the Philippines that are also producing literature in
English. The institutionalized production, circulation and also criticism of
Third world literature is an attempt to study the subject through the
application of recent developments in literary criticism and critical theory that
are ostensibly pitted against bourgeois, patriarchal, colonial and “enlightenment” value systems. As Lloyd Fernando observes:

There is no harm in carrying the flag for a sort of united-nations organization of writers and scholars in English if we do not mistake a convenience for an actual entity. Similar reservations apply to that other proposed hold-all, ‘World literature in English’, in which there appears to be even less provision so far for examining the degree of conflict and confluence in various traditions, particularly the non-Anglo-Saxon ones. (58)

The Third World always presupposes the more privileged First and Second Worlds. With respect to critical analysis, western theories continued to be used for analyzing even eastern texts. In the cultural sphere too, monocentrism and homogeneity were legitimized with an aim of marring the diversity and disparity among the newly independent nations. Rushdie dismisses the concept of commonwealth literature and gives the name of “English literature” to all literature written in English (Imaginary Homelands 61-70). The critic Aijaz Ahmad rejects the term “Third World” and regarding the divisions like First, Second, and Third World, he writes: “Ideologically, this classification divides the world between those make history and those who are mere objects of it” (99-100).

In fact, all subordinating discourses and practices are not the same either over time or across the globe. Although minority peoples living in the West and the peoples living in Third world countries share a history of
colonial exploitation, and may share cultural roots, and may also share an
opposition to the legacy of colonial domination, their histories and present
concerns cannot simply be merged. Thus, tradition is difficult enough to piece
together in a reasonably homogenous country, but the task becomes more
distracting in countries like Malaysia and Singapore, where four great
traditions have intermingled. Malay is the sole national language of
Malaysia and Indonesia, though English is also used in government and
education. Singapore’s national language is also Malay, but it recognizes four
official languages, among them, Malay and English whereas in India, the
accessibility of education and literacy in Sanskrit existed long before the
coming of the colonizer. The colonial language (as well as the colonial
religion in some cases) was used to escape the entrenched indigenous
divisions and in others to further accentuate these “slippages”. Let us look at
the major divergences in the patterns of colonialism that the British exercised
in various colonies which have now started producing literature in English. It
deployed diverse strategies and methods of control and of “representation”.
G. N. Devy remarked in his book--*In Another Tongue*:

In the White Commonwealth, the pattern was developed by
and through a settler’s economy. In the Black Commonwealth,
it was dominated by a more romantic missionary
exploitativeness. In India, the situation was much more
complex…Had the British found India without its linguistic
diversity and cultural heritage, without its sophisticated system of administration, without its polytheism and multiculturalism, the British rule in India would have become more comparable with that in the other British colonies. (43)

That is why the attempt to homogenize from the vantage point of a particular place or time tends to overlook the ways in which the colonial discourses deploy strategies of exaggeration among diverse “others”.

The politicization of the colonizer’s language can further be explained by examining the sociological structures based on this language in two geographical contexts, in two different literary systems—say, that of India and Africa. Both are underpinned by a colonial past that bequeathed not only a common educational and cultural policy that included a tradition of language and literature, but also social hierarchies of opportunity and access structured by these policies. One comes across a crucial difference between the two colonized societies as Chanda points out:

…the difference predicated upon literacy. At the time of colonial contact, most of the Sub-Saharan Africa did not possess script culture. India, however, had a tradition of documented literature that predated Christianity and, as the nineteenth century Indologists discovered, had participated in exchanges with ‘classical’ Greek world from which European civilization claimed descent. (4)
Macaulay’s dream of a “surrogate” Englishman who would awaken the “potentially unruly” native masses to “emulate” the “enlightened”, seemed to act as a facilitating mechanism for the theory of Indirect Rule that the British exercised both in Indian and African colonies--but with a seminal difference--the shorter period of colonial rule in Africa did not really give English a chance to settle and become internalized in large parts of British-ruled Africa. Consequently, the role played by English literacy in the class hierarchy and textual hierarchy in the Indian context is more prominent than in the South African context.

The English usage, or at least the version of it that Indian writers use, consciously highlights the distance between ‘bad’ and ‘good’ English. In the case of Indian writers in English, this translates into the degree of competence the character exhibits in using the English language, which in turn shows her position in the textual hierarchy. (64)

There is no hierarchy based on “correct” and “incorrect” usage of the colonizer’s language in South African English writings. It is because pidgin acts as a middle space there—pidgin is, in fact, almost a lingua franca in many of their literary texts. But, “What is correct and what is not correct is ultimately only a matter of conventions within societies” (qtd. in Kulshrestha 10).

However, both countries got adapted easily to the Christianizing influences of the missionaries as well as to the language itself.
Thus the politicization of English in various post-colonies being brought into purview, the study may be focussed on the Indian context. The status-value attached to English literature diminished considerably during the war years as various political and literary movements kindled the Indian imagination and challenged the hierarchical cultural relationships established by the colonial ruler. But, the status of English as a language of power in the days of the Raj remained the same even after its political independence. The policies and ideals of progress and development put in place by the colonizers and espoused by succeeding political parties who came to power through the democratic system, patronized English and consequently generated a largely English-literate modern India. (Whether these power-structures based on their rural and agricultural electorate were given the mandate to pursue these ideals and policies is another matter of debate.) Anyway, the writers of this post-independent era were products of this developing, modernizing and increasingly global India. And this historical context is expected to resonate in the literary texts of this period both explicitly and implicitly. This point links us to the earlier observation that independent India almost “copied” the structures made by the colonizer in the name of democracy without ensuring whether they could “function” in the present context.

The history of the language-issue in India roughly starts from the Constituent Assembly Debates of 1949. Under the leadership of Gandhiji, Hindi was obviously chosen as the national language of Independent India,
but there came a further proposal for considering the national language as the official language also. The question of an official language for independent India was undoubtedly a complex issue which generated a great deal of heat in the Constituent Assembly and the debates clearly brought out the divide between the votaries of Hindi and Hindustani from the North and the members from the South who advised moderation. The long and bitter debate in the 1950s and early 1960s as to whether English or Hindi should be the national language of administration continued as the people from the Southern regions of India were especially resentful towards the imposition of Hindi. On the one hand, English was used all over the country and had paradoxically been one of the factors in fostering national identity. But, the choice of English smacked of a perpetuation of colonialism and it seemed reasonable that a country should have its own distinct national language. And, Hindi was a regional language far removed from the Dravidian languages of the South, which resisted the northern tongue. As Varma remarks:

As early as 1925, the Congress had adopted a Resolution that its proceedings shall be conducted as far as possible in Hindustani. But given the predilections of the pan-Indian middle-class leadership of the freedom movement, little progress was made in the implementation of the Resolution and the English remained the official language of the Congress. (58)
Even in the pre-colonial times, this linguistic divide between the North and South existed. But Indians were more pre-occupied with the larger task of the struggle for freedom at that time. The emergence of Gandhi in the forefront of the nationalist movement was a real fillip to the Indian masses. With the freedom movement soaring at such a high pitch, liberation from the imperial yoke became the prominent issue overshadowing all others. But the formative years after Independence saw the mushrooming growth of English medium schools. These schools varied considerably in their competence and in the varieties of Indian English taught, while more obvious variations arose in different regions of the country from contact with the dominant regional languages. There evolved differences as per individuals, classes and regions and also depending upon necessity, viz. a predominant use, a limited use, a supporting role etc. Thus, in fact, there are a number of Indian English varieties throughout the nation.

This led English literacy to play a crucial part in the class hierarchy of the existing social milieu of post-independent, semi-urban India. To put it otherwise, there existed class differences between the English-educated and the common masses. Those who “inherited the usage of a certain kind of English” (Varma 58) as part of their social background could acquire effortless social standing, access to the best educational institutions and the best jobs since competence in English language usage was one of the important yardsticks for obtaining higher posts. Subsequently, these educated
middle class people--the so-called middle class in India is itself a spectrum of different positions, varying across language, region, religion and caste--proficient in English, were forced to move away from the joint family in search of better job opportunities. Often, only their immediate family--wife and children--accompanied them. Thus, these English-educated middle class men were getting initiated into the modern institution of nuclear family, with its greater sense of freedom and autonomy in decision-making, in accordance with the social pattern in the West. Here, the stronghold of the joint family system was getting corroded. Besides, they couldn’t help getting into the pursuit of modernity. “Modernity was interpreted in the Nehruvian sense of shedding the shackles of the past and adopting a rationalist and scientific outlook” (Varma 42), that would mean getting liberated from sentimentalism, emotionalism etc. But this again, one should note, is, as per Western liberal ideology.

However, despite suspicion within a section of the society that English education was being introduced to create a class of clerks and sycophants, “native in blood and color but English in taste, in opinion, moral and intellect”, for an average educated Indian, the traditional loyalties to family, kin, community and caste were still strong enough to pull him back into his fundamental base of belonging--his roots. Thus, by becoming modern, he was, but, getting standardized in the tradition itself. For example, this dichotomy between the ideal of modernity and the hold of tradition was
brought out more vividly in the field of religious beliefs. While Nehru was a professed agnostic and believed that the secular temperament and secular state were an intrinsic part of the modern man, Gandhi was quintessentially religious in preaching communal harmony.

P. Lal is of the opinion that English in India deserved a better fate than to serve as a graveyard of flowery-bowery-showery sentiments while analyzing “the role and contribution of English in this mad country” (“On Second Thoughts” 15). Numerous confusions continue to boil around the question of how the English language can be used for Indian experience. For example, Latika Basu had expressed her opinion in 1933: “English is not alive in India, and that is why the few writers who were genuinely gifted were hampered in writing English poetry” (qtd. in Parameswaran 17). The question is whether English as used in India for purely functional purposes could ever be a living language, the way it was in England and subsequently used for creative endeavours. David McCutchion ostensibly remarks, “I am more and more inclined to agree with those who affirm that English as a medium of expression works as a barrier against real insight into the Indian mind and circumstances” (11). Originally, English developed in another geographical setting and culture, and therefore embodied another set of “truths”. Then, in an attempt to adequately comprehend the mixed and multicultural Indian “truths”, the English language will have to reflect its own alienation from the dominant cultural and linguistic context of India. Here,
the question of “sensibility” arises and the emphasis in contemporary Indian English writing on themes of cultural and linguistic alienation further necessitates a discussion on the difference in sensibilities, viz. Indian as well as English.

The Indian English writer’s sensibility is not a “Westernized Indian sensibility” as often been accused, but only that her Indian sensibility has been nurtured within a Western intellectual scaffolding. It simply means that, with her Indian roots and urban living, her view of contemporary Indian reality is that of an “insider alien”. The term is coined to shift the emphasis in the direction of language. The term alien insider is not used intentionally since they are quite different semantically. The Indian who writes in English feels as an alien to his country and its ethos not due to the fact that s/he writes in English, but her/his physical absence in India makes her/him feel so. As Vrinda Nabar trenchantly remarks: “Identity refers to the fact of being born in India, living amid its multiple economic and cultural complexities, identifying with them and making them the direct and indirect concerns of his work” (1-2).

Geographically rooting oneself somewhere abroad and coming back to India once in a while with a fundamental poverty of experience in India, its politics, social life, civic problems, education, economic difficulties and cultural dilemmas, would yield only a slender output. For, Indian-ness is not
mere substitution game—it does not simply mean substituting “hibiscus” for “daffodils” or “champak” for “buttercups”.

Indian writers like Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya and R. K. Narayan do not purposefully permeate their works with any special Indian color. But, the conception of the Indian through Indian eyes is as natural and inalienable for them as the traditional lavaboes. Certainly, sensibility is conditioned by language to a certain extent, and evolving a distinct literary language does not escape the pressures of sensibility as George Steiner maintains: “Where consciousness communicates with itself and outward in a thoroughly different linguistic context, a different psychology may be in order” (qtd. in Kulshrestha 13).

But, there are certain culture-specific structures like the bull fight of Spain, a familiarity with which alone would yield an authentic vision of the cultural ambience. The mind of the British artist usually “reflects” only objective Indian reality, while that reality in the Indian writer’s mind is also seemingly “refracted” when passing through the prism of national conception and form of expression. It is precisely the adherence to the traditional, to the ethical and aesthetic norms that have undergone the test of time and become rooted in the mind of the contemporary Indian that is the unqualified evidence of his national essence.

A distinguishing feature of the Indian English writers is that, though tutored in British schools during their childhood, they were brought up in the spirit of Indian tradition and their creative work is inextricably bound up with
it. Every one of them in one way or another, experiences the influence of oral literary tradition, be it through mother’s stories (Anand), grandmother’s fairy tales (Narayan), or the recitation of wandering minstrels (Bhattacharya). It is therefore not surprising that we later repeatedly come across the roving singer, wandering sannyasi, yogi, sadhu, or bard in the works of Anand, Bhattacharya and Narayan. The Indian English writers do not restrict themselves to the pure reflection of Indian folklore but also “over-give” a new meaning to legends and tales of antiquity in their works. It is not simply “adding” meaning, but an “over-giving” since certain images drawn from these legends contain elements of their present cultural milieu and may not be translated into an Indian language. This may be considered a positive quality rather than a limitation.

The Indians writing in English also try to subvert, to counteract the false picture of India painted by Kipling and his disciples. This affirms the fact that Indian literature in English is linked with the peculiarities of historical development, with the national culture of the country, and is developing within Indian literature’s general current.

But we cannot miss the other side of the coin. The neo-imperialism of the West is too powerful to be dislodged, and in the diasporic context, the writers are being accused of presenting negative Indian stereotypes that western readers “want” to hear about. There is a strong school of thought that writers are directly or indirectly being influenced into writing what the
western world wants to hear about India and about Indians elsewhere. Earlier, Sarojini Naidu’s poetry was severely criticised for being full of the landscapes of England and she was advised by Edmund Gosse to use Indian imagery. She did, in her subsequent poems, but was again criticised for painting the picture of India as the English writers had done, as a land full of wandering minstrels and snake charmers. Similarly, though there have been so many appreciative reviews on Raja Rao’s novels, he is often condemned for writing for the non-Indians that would make his Indian-ness self-conscious. There is an interesting review on Rao’s great classic, *The Serpent and the Rope*, by M. S. Prabhakar (qtd. in Parameswaran):

> Anybody with some awareness of contemporary India will recognize ‘The Serpent and the Rope’ for what it is: a cleverly contrived sham, making the best use of myth and hoary Past…It is all slightly sickening and yet it is these Pseudo-Lawrencian metaphysical attitudinisations, based on bogus mysticism, that are apparently admired. (44)

It is true that Indians writing in English have gained international reputations as well as royalties that are unthinkable for most Indian writers. Apparently, there exists an antagonism between those who write in English and those who write, or believe they “should” write, in an Indian vernacular. This is best exemplified by Rushdie’s statement (which initiated a conflagration of protest) in *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing 1947-1997*,
edited by Rushdie and Elizabeth West in 1997 on the occasion of the fiftieth year of India’s Independence, that writing created in these fifty years “by Indians working in English is proving to be a stronger and more important body of work than most of what has been produced in the ‘16 official languages’ of India, the so-called ‘vernacular languages’” (8). One side accuses the other of pandering to the western reader with clichés and stereotypes of pseudo-Indian-ness while the other accuses the second of jealousy and fundamentalism. Since these criticisms have been expressed over decades, by many reviewers, the issue needs to be explored carefully.

This carries us to another significant point-to the peculiar predicament of the identity of Indian English Writing being explored in relation to several “regional languages”. Regarding the tendency to view Indian Writing in English as an adversarial counterpart of our regional literatures, K.C. Belliappa’s remark seems quite relevant: “In the heat of this debate, the obvious fact that English is recognized as one of the Indian languages in the eighth schedule of our constitution and that it enjoys both power and privilege more than ever in the present time are either conveniently forgotten or overlooked” (1).

To regard English as an Indian language is perhaps, unjustified etymologically. But, as Tilottama Rajan expressed: “It is unfortunate that so many people, with misplaced nationalism, tend to regard it merely as a relic of colonialism” (qtd. in Lal Modern Indian Poetry 421). However, most books published by Indian writers in the first century of Indo-English
literature had a foreword or preface written by an Englishman. “It seems that Indian writers have always needed a white godfather” (Parameswaran 7). Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu had their English godfathers. Even Tagore needed Yeats to give him a hand.

There are questions like, do the Indians write in English with an eye on winning over a western audience? Do these “Indo-Anglians” have a real public in India, where literature is defined in terms of the different native languages? And, is it true that their claim can be justified only by appreciation in England or the United States? Gauri Deshpande makes a pertinent remark in this connection that she has primarily an Indian audience in mind (qtd.in Chindhade):

I do not expect readers not born Indians to derive the total meaning from my poems; however, they are not obscure and are capable of being judged on the same grounds as any other poems are, without any special pleading. But their full appreciation, I am afraid, is reserved for Indians. (11)

These factors question not only the quality but also the very raison d’être and the viability of Indian writing in English. David McCutchion comments plainly: “If they were fluent enough to absorb the vernacular tradition, it is unlikely they would write in English” (22).

The impact of the alien language, with its accompanying cultural factors on the indigenous is bound to seep into the consciousness of the Indian
writer in English. However, such an impingement of the alien on the inherited is not an imitation and the product is not a “hybrid” but only a synthetic formation—a mixture. So, it should be noted that the Indian writers in English have completely domiciled and naturalized the English language in which they could feel deeply, create and convey the experiences and responses which are typically “pan-Indian”. P.Lal’s rather polemical declaration in Modern Indian Poetry can be cited in this regard:

Without trying to be facetious I should like to suggest that only in English can the real Indian poetry be written; any other poetry is likely to be Bengali-slanted or Gujrati-biased, and so on. Only Indian Writing in English can hope to attain the ‘Indian’ flavour, which is a cosmopolitan flavour. (12)

Now that English has become a potential language of intercommunication between the people from different regions of India itself, and circumstantially used for all creative purposes, the Indian writers in English could: “transcribe the specific content of their imaginative perceptions into the so-called ‘alien’ language without being disingenuous, and the question of ‘echo-interference’ doesn’t arise in their case, since they think and feel in English” (Amga 223).

However, it is necessary here to remind ourselves that English has a far greater power (say, in comparison to Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic) to de-historicize and to abstract language from its actual speech act, a power endowed on it by the printing technology. So, while much of the otherness
brought to India by the English language has been assimilated by most Indian
languages, “the English language in India still remains largely an abstraction”
(Devy *In Another Tongue* 39), albeit the claim of thinking and feeling in that
language. This is, in no way, a contradictory statement or an attempt to rob
Indian writing in English of its authenticity. On the contrary, the purpose is to
highlight the transition and sometimes the “translation” of Indian sensibility,
into the other tongue. Chirantan Kulshreshta has made an observation on the
writer’s choice of language for creative purposes (qtd. in Amga):

> But what is disconcerting is that English, to its defenders, is no
> longer important as a reservoir of creativity; it is politicized and
> turned into a cause…The creative writer’s adoption of a
> language is, alas, not a matter of polemics. A.K. Ramanujan is
> right in asserting that the choices are never deliberate, meaning
> that one is sentenced to a language as one is sentenced to a
> relationship. (10)

The development of a consciously marginalized literature, or more
appropriately, sub-literature, can be viewed as an act of defiance of the empire
of the English language in the understanding of Australian or Canadian
(Anglophone) literature, where English is the only choice of language
available to the writers. However, in India, as G. N. Devy observes in his
book, *In Another Tongue*: 
… the decolonizing of the mind and sensibility is more easily possible through the use of Indian languages…whether one likes to accept it or not, it is a fact that Indian English literature seems greatly Indianized when looked at from outside India, but appears highly Anglicized when looked at from the Indian languages perspective. It has a dual personality, it is conscious of being so, and tries to play up both at once. (38)

In fact, Indians had to meet two conditions while writing in the English language—first, the English language had to be sufficiently Indianized to be able to express the reality of the Indian situation; secondly, Indians had to be sufficiently Anglicized to use the English language to express themselves. With the landing of Vasco de Gama in Kerala in 1498, and the resultant opening up of trade, several Indian words found their way into Portuguese, and when the British East India Company was launched in 1599, they got assimilated into English. Such lexical borrowing got accelerated with the increasing British presence in India. Thus, the Indianization of the English language began much before the Anglicization of the Indians, “because the functional and pragmatic contexts began to adapt itself to its new environment” (Paranjpe 2).

It was not until the British had changed from traders to rulers that the large-scale Anglicization of Indians began. In 1757 the British won the historic Battle of Plassey, which gave them control of Bengal. In 1772 they
assumed the revenue administration, and in 1790, the administration of criminal justice in Bengal. Since Calcutta was the capital of British India from 1773 to 1911, Bengali intelligentsia got exposed longest to the West.

The cultural colonization of India was marked by several crucial events. In 1780 India’s first newspaper, Hicky’s “Bengal Gazette” was published in English. In 1817, the Hindu College (which later became Presidency College), the premier educational institution of Bengal was founded. More significantly, in 1835, Macaulay in his famous “Minutes” laid the foundations of the modern Indian educational system, with his decision to promote European science and literatures among Indians through the medium of the English language. We have pointed out the political angle of Macaulay’s decision whereby English was transformed into a passport to privilege in India; but it had the unmistakable cultural repercussions on Indian sensibility and regional literatures. Consequently the educated Indians of the nineteenth century responded to Western thought and literature and started critically examining the foundations of their own society and culture, and formulated proposals for social and religious reform. But the creative effort in English in India got registered as a distinctive literature and started achieving a rather steady growth and a somewhat high degree of sophistication only after the dawn of Independence. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar had been quite influential in this regard and his *Indo-Anglian Literature* was
the first lengthy discussion of this literature as a distinct, independent field of study. As he observes:

And this mass of writing called variously ‘Indo-Anglian’, ‘Indo-English’, ‘Indian English’, ‘Indian Writing in English (IWE)’—is being increasingly recognized as one of the dozen or more authentic voices of India. What was at one time a tool for the leaders of the Indian Renaissance (Ram Mohan Roy, Rajnarain Bose and those that followed them) to rouse the prostrate nation to register its awakening self-respect and presently to protest against the evil of foreign domination has now grown, after a series of vicissitudes in our national history, into a creative

akshay patra, amuda surabhi, chalice of nourishment,
generating literature in all its richness and manifoldness. (135)

There persists a dispute regarding the nomenclature of this distinctive corpus and the subsequent equivocal situation the present Indian English writer finds herself in. The confusion over the nomenclature of this literature continues today, illustrating its shifting identity. But, the so-called nomenclatures, in actuality, acquire specific meanings and values with reference to the Foucauldian questions of who is writing? For whom? From what position within the hierarchical order? etc., some of which we have answered. Anyway, one thing is clear. They are inexorably linked to the question of power and one’s location in it.
The term *Indo-Anglian* itself was invented as early as 1883 in a volume printed in Calcutta containing “Specimen compositions from Native Students” (Iyengar 3). The term *Indian English* has been in use since the 1960s in a sense similar to African-American or French-Canadian literature. Despite the Sahitya Academi’s official endorsement of it in the early 1980s, as evidenced in M.K. Naik’s *History of Indian English Literature* and the Akademi’s use of it since, “Indian English” is “yet to be universally accepted” (Paranjpe 4). One argument against using the term *Indian English* or *Indo-English* is that it is too language-oriented, suggesting literature written in Indian English more than Indian literature written in the English language. Anyway, to consider the Indian English writers as operating entirely within the English tradition is to deny them their genuine instinct for inventiveness in form and their natural ability to trans-create experience.

It is nearly one hundred and seventy years since Indian poets gathered under the common umbrella of the English language. In fact, by the end of the eighteenth century, Englishmen in India had started to write poetry on local Indian subjects. For example, one of the early “Anglo-Indians”, an accomplished linguist and translator, Sir William Jones (1746-1794) had attempted his eight hymns to Hindu deities, which reflected his familiarity with Indian traditions. In writing them, Jones demonstrated for future Indian poets that the English language could be a fit vehicle for Indian subject matter. So, the prospective Indian poet in English not only inherited a
language whose expressive range had been enlarged by a substantial lexical
borrowing, but also which was richly amenable to Indian topics.

The early efforts of the “Indo-Anglians” were considered only
tributaries to the mainstream English literature since India was still a part of
the British Empire, and Indian poets in English were not given a separate
national identity. Moreover, this poetry was largely an urban phenomenon,
centred in Calcutta, the province in which the British gained a stronghold. In
fact, for the first fifty years, it was entirely confined to a few Bengali families
who were residents of the city. “Poets from Bengal, whether they write in
Bengali or English, or both, have had a more or less unique, obsessive
relationship with the French language and its literature for almost a hundred
and fifty years now…” (Dharwadker 193).

Tracing the origin of this genre of Indian Poetry in English actually
brings forth a cross-fire between two ideologies and schools of thought.
While the older school of thought declares the movement to have begun in the
early nineteenth century with the poems of Kashiprasad Ghose, Henry
Derozio and Toru Dutt, the comparatively modern school of thought
denounces and casts aspersions on these earlier poets as poets to be merely
glossed over. R. Parthasarathy’s much-quoted remark bears evidence: “In
examining the phenomenon of Indian verse in English, one comes up, first of
all, against the paradox that it did not seriously begin to exist till after the
withdrawal of the British from India” (2).
The first substantial scholarly work on Anglo-Indian literature was Edward Farley Oaten’s *A Sketch of Anglo-Indian Literature*, “with its greater stress on “Anglo-Indians” like William Jones, Edwin Arnold, and Rudyard Kipling” (qtd. in Parthasarathy 2). Only passing references are made to Indian poets in English. Although poems by Manmohan Ghose, to name one among these poets, might be of historical interest only, we cannot endorse Oaten’s selection.

Anyway, with the dawn of Independence, other frontiers opened up as India established cultural contacts with other Commonwealth countries. Therefore, nullifying all prognostications that, with the withdrawal of British from India, regional literatures would flourish and creative writing in English in India would die out, “Indian Writing in English” turned out to be a genre in itself. The contention that the creative experiments in the foreign tongue would only be freakish and un-Indian also proved conjectural. The post-independent creative attempts in English witnessed a thorough reorientation in perspectives and ethos, and the general temper itself was very much different from that of the previous epoch. According to Nilufer. E. Bharucha, the sphere of Indian English fiction in the 1980s, “witnessed the emergence of a new generation of Indian English writers who were born under an Indian sun and speak with a confident, individualistic voice which is no more imitative of the British model or apologetic about writing in English” (Bharucha and Sarang 355). Bharucha further says that it was the time when
Indian English literature really came of age by shaking off the imperial baggage, nationalist guilt and linguistic complex.

Yet Indian poetry in English remained the most vital and productive genre in Indo-English literature. To this end, the Calcutta Writers Workshop founded in 1958 by P. Lal has done a major service. As he remarks, “Society changes, feelings change, milieus change. So, why not a change in language? Why so much thee-ing and thou-ing? Why so much meandering in syntactical archaeology?” (“On Second Thoughts” 15) Lal’s anthology Indo-Anglian Poetry, published in 1959, soon received recognition as a widely respected manifesto. The members of the “Workshop” shunned political propaganda as much as mystical obscurantism-(like the bombastic style of Aurobindo). Lal, through his bi-monthly journal called The Miscellany, published the greater part of young Indo-English poetry during the sixties and seventies with unconventional courage. He can be considered as the mentor and leader of the earlier “new age” of Indian Poetry in English. Lal opines: “It is a sorry thing to have to gang up in order to get somewhere” (16), and he foresees the danger if each poet continues to move permanently in his own tight little private world. Since they “practice the same craft; suffer similar ridicules and receive similar doses of light applause” (16), they have every reason to gang up; otherwise, there is a strong likelihood, “that the blurred and rubbery sentiments of a Sri Aurobindo will slowly clog our own poetry” (17).
Thus, it was Indian English poetry, in particular, which was subjected to the acid tests of various critical formulae set by “Oriental” as well as “Occidental” standards. It has, unreasonably been put to allegations like “tied to the apron strings of English poetry”, “a wagon hitched to the Engine of English Poetry”, and “graft on a foreign stock”, “ramshackle outhouse of English Poetry” etc. (Chindhade 6). It might be true to some extent as far as the early efforts were considered as I have tried to exemplify earlier, but that too only in form, and not fundamentally in content. Sarojini Naidu’s earlier poems have been criticised for their overdose of cultivated proficiency. But the poetic attempts of the next generation were not mere “Aurobindo Industry” (Lal “On Second…” 17). They have “left the fireflies to dance through the neem” and have taken their vocation more seriously. Unlike its predecessors, there is neither the servile genuflexion to British or American poets, nor the backlash of tradition.

It is true that all these poets were either educated or settled abroad and consequently they lack the “lived experience” in India. It is but an extreme criticism by McCutchion that while these urban poets tried to transplant the rural and suburban India into the English soil, for the supposed authenticity, a “comic effect detracted from the authenticity” (14). In fact, this acquired language opens a “second window on the landscape of [their] being” (Kulshrestha 13) and the poets having identified themselves with the Indian milieu, its cultural and social patterns, prove every claim to be Indian in
response to life. The so-called sophistication does not limit their plundering the archetypal patterns embedded in our culture.

But while it remains debatable whether Indian English Poetry has ever had a "past" or a past that is “best forgotten” (Parthasarathy 4), it is equally polemical whether it “needs” a “tradition” as such. As Ezekiel puts it: “For us to speak about its tradition is wrong. We are trying to write instant history” (qtd. in Parthasarathy 4).

If at all a tradition is required, what tradition they should be classified under? That of the colonial sahibs or that of the brown sahibs? Both these seem to be inadequate. Poets would heavily tend to be self-conscious if they are aware of the double burden on their shoulders, the Alps of the European tradition and the Himalaya of their Indian past that Mulk Raj Anand refers to (qtd. in Chindhade 2). They should be free from all sorts of platitudes of past and write with “individual talent” in “anonymity”. In this context, what William Walsh has observed about the emerging literatures of the Commonwealth countries seems to be relevant: “Cut yourself off from your own past. Unbolt your fierce identity. Dismantle your driving national force, and become something altogether quieter, more passive, a faithful recording instrument” (qtd. in Amga 12).

Besides, modern India is a synthesis of many cultural cross currents and the Indian English poet employs her poetry as a protest against all forms of established traditions and she moves more towards cultural cosmopolitanism. She has understood that there is no point in staying back on
the claptrap of conventions and that her perspectives should be proximate with the cultural mainstream, her poems vibrate with a contemporary spirit. They, no longer write for themselves, a select audience, or a particular country. Their audience is the entire world. For this, English is obviously the language best suited. And language is not merely a means of simple communication:

It functions to fulfil man’s desire for ever greater expressiveness-a conflict between informing on the one hand, and, on the other, trying through language to put something new or personal in the world, to use words in unaccustomed ways (Parthasarathy 3).

Even with all this, almost all the Indian English poets still geographically root themselves somewhere abroad, and coming to their homeland every year would not provide them the fundamental experience of the changing social realities of Kerala. Only Ezekiel showed the courage to admit and assert:

I have made my commitments now.

This is one: to stay where I am,

As others choose to give themselves

In some remote and backward place.

My backward place is where I am. ("Background, Casually"; Ten Twentieth Century... 1-5)
This humorous autobiographical poem draws the development of an Indian who is no longer an insider-alien that we have talked about in the preceding paragraphs. “Through his descent from the Bene-Israel community, the author-protagonist is provided with a deep-rooted ethnic sensitivity to hybrid phenomena and a remarkable readiness to accept and even enjoy them as creative options” (Stilz 15). After his education in India, he went to London for higher studies and returned to India confronting a lot of disorientations. Finally, he decided upon a wise and ironically resigned provincial self-assertion. “The dogged survival of the speaker at the end of the poem, who cashes in on playing the fool to others in a “backward place” while knowing full well and proclaiming that, after all, there are only backward places in this world, is decidedly a postcolonial stance” (16).

In reputation, only Kamala Das has received her due among the women poets in the Indian English poetic scene, there is a galaxy of women poets such as Gauri Deshpande, Eunice de Souza, Mamta Kalia, Monika Verma, Suniti Jain, Meena Alexander, Lakhsmi Kannan, Sujata Bhatt, Rukmini Bhaya Nair, Melanie Silgado, Uma Parameswaran, Tara Patel, Imtiaz Dharker and Charmayne D’Souza who share a sharp feminine sensibility in encompassing a panoramic chain of visions and revisions of man-woman, love-hate relationships. It is not fair to group all these poets under the category of “fair voices” denying their individual touch as they have carved out a peculiar niche for themselves. For example, Eunice De Souza’s
Goan background projects the distinct Goan social milieu with all the sanctities and profanities of love and marriage and personal relationships. Similarly, Mamta Kalia offers a totally subversive reading of the patriarchal value system ironically and laconically as in the lines:

Who cares for you, Papa?
Who cares for your clean thoughts, clean words, clean teeth?
Who wants to be an angel like you?
Who wants it? (“Tribute to Papa”; Nine Indian women… 1-4)

The truly feminist discourse is couched in a colloquial idiom in sharp contrast to the earlier women-poets like Sarojini Naidu. They only romanticize, idealize the patriarchal mode of the subordination of woman in the love relationship between man and woman, and mourn like:

You held a wine-cup in your fingertips,
Lightly you raised it to indifferent lips,
Lightly you drank and flung away the bowl…
Alas! It was my soul. (Caprice 4-8)

The difference is that Kalia subverts the phallocentric language, with all claims to be a feminine text, being “volcanic”, bringing about “an upheaval of the old property crust, carrier of masculine investments”, in Cixous’ terms (17).

“These days I am seriously thinking of disowning you, Papa.”
Everything about you clashes with nearly everything about me” (“A Tribute to Papa” 15-16).

Kalia celebrates the feminist power even with an extent of negating her relationship with her father, and the roles are turned topsy-turvy as it is only Papa, the male, being “too shy to have [his daughter’s] love affair confirmed” (19), will “at once think” of “suicide” (20).

Tara Patel, through her significantly titled “Single Woman” is no different in her articulation of the feminist discourse, perhaps with rather limited tonalities, with the employment of irony and wit. The subordinated woman is suddenly eclipsed and the New woman- “to shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law” (Cixous 51) is placed in the “active” role, who is essentially the “single woman” too.

A woman’s life is a reaction

to the crack of a whip.

She learns to dodge it as it whistles
around her

but sometimes it lands on the thick,

distorted welt of her memory,

reminding her of lessons learned

in the past.

Then in rebellion she turned her face
to the whip,
till pain became a river in flood
wreaking vengeance. ("Woman", Nineteen Indian Women…

1-12)

Almost all the contemporary Indian English poets “employ cliché and slang in incongruous contexts to achieve unexpected effects” (Parthasarathy 9). Moreover, one can decipher the pattern of images through which they seem to think. The usage of an image is quite seminal which functions as the kernel and triggers off the poem.

Contrast is deployed almost as a mode of perception of cultural interaction in Shiv. K. Kumar’s poems. Many a poem often abhors the life in New York and responds to a familiar situation in India. The disheartening heat in India has been vividly portrayed in Jayanta Mahapatra’s “Indian Summer”. Equally vibrant with startling images and economy of phrasing is the poem “The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street”. One cannot help brooding over the oppression and destitution.

Keki.N. Daruwalla is another distinct voice of this cult with his bitter, satiric tone rather exceptional in Indian verse in English. The landscape of northern rural India is evoked in many poems, the gloss of sophistication being completely shunned, and Daruwalla is a glaring exception to the cult of Indian English Poetry with such a different "sense and sensibility". The language is pared to the bone of the poems. But one shouldn’t mistake him for a "nature-poet" for he clarifies his stand: “The landscape is not merely
there to set the scene but to lead to an illumination…For me a riot-stricken town is landscape” (qtd. in Parthasarathy 21).

In spite of his long residence in the United States, Ramanujan’s Indian experience repeatedly features in his verse, and is often precisely repeated in its original setting. “He has an eye for the specific physiognomy of an object or situation which he then reveals with telling detail, as in the “luminous evocation” of his family life in the poems collected in “Relations” (95). The cultural reverberation in his poems as exemplified through the following lines astonish us “like the patterns in a kaleidoscope” (Parthasarathy 96), every time with new readings. Poems with scathing sarcasm inherent in the lines are a class by itself. His first thirty years in India, his frequent visits and fieldtrips, his personal and professional preoccupations with Kannada, Tamil, the classics and folklore provide him with the substance, the inner forms, images and symbols.

The list can be elongated ad infinitum with outstanding lines from various poems of the poets cited. But it is not fair to conclude without citing some lines from Arun Kolatkar, a true bilingual poet, writing in Marathi and English with equal competence. He stands as an exception to many of the Indian poets in English who, after having written for a considerable time in English, return to their mother-tongues being “exiles”. He does not mourn like Parthasarathy, that his “tongue” is “in English Chains”. Neither does he
forsake the vernacular which he employs for creative endeavour rather enviably.

Martin Heidegger underlines the necessity of translating oneself into the thought of the other language, when he states: “Language speaks, but he can’t hear everything” (qtd. in Chanda 129). In the postcolonial situation, however, the other language is often the Other’s language too. The West has an investment in the metaphor of language as carrier of culture and culture texted like a language.

The literary texts in the colonizer’s language have to deal with recalcitrant realities that cannot be contained by the conceptual worlds of that language yet must somehow be expressed in it. It is a slippery path that writers must tread, and their negotiations reveal the compromises that are inherent in their own positions. The variety of the locations in which the English language is used must be considered in their cultural and historical specificity, even while acknowledging that the language is English. It is the duty of the post colonial writer in the colonizer’s language to employ this medium of language to connect their “personal struggles” with the larger world, in order to keep a nation alive.

Along with the tyranny of the western publisher, authors’ psychological hang-ups about their original homelands should also be read between the lines of diaspora writings. The “anglomania” which Buddhadeva Bose refers to, “which seized some upper-class Indians in the early years of
the British rule” (qtd. in Parameswaran 7), in this connection, has two aspects--the linguistic, which is no more relevant since English is wholeheartedly received by Indians today, and the cultural; which is highly relevant in any theoretical constructs related to diaspora writing. The second aspect is what this study tries to explore.