ENGLISH VINGLISH: THE CHANGING ETHOS OF INDIANNESS IN INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE

SHAHNAZ MANSINGH

Abstract: During recent decades Indian English literature has proved its richness and flexibility and has evoked widespread interest in India and elsewhere. The Indian Man Booker award winners in particular have taken on the Western literary establishment on its own turf and wrested the Booker Prize from English writers writing in their own language. This paper critically examines howthese Indian English writers are redefining the usage of the English language and with their brilliant new innovations are changing how Indian English Literature is perceived over the world.

Salman Rushdie in particular, with *Midnight's Children* has bent and changed English to the demands of the Indian conditions, and with his sheer exuberance of language, his daring experiments with what was formerly the coloniser's tongue, changed the very way in which Indian English Novels had been written before its advent. Arundhati Roy, following in the wake of Rushdie, with *The God of Small Things*, with her wonderful stylistic innovations wrenched the English Language from its colonial roots to give it an entirely new makeover. Kiran Desai's Booker Prize winning novel, *The Inheritance of Loss*, is proof of her virtuosity with the English Language that she uses adeptly with the proficiency of an *artiste*, in her postcolonial tale of love and loss. And finally Aravinda Adiga, with *The White Tiger*, his epistolary novel, uses an almost chatty and conversational tone to unflinchingly chronicle, many of the harsher truths about the country and the perpetually wary relationship between the privileged and the deprived, his varying accents and idioms, reflecting the divergent peoples and their acutely divergent lives.

These novelists are winning acclaim by breaking previously set boundaries, and their books are a representation of contemporary India in more ways than one. Their daring new experiments with the English Language, or even perhaps their evolution of a new variant kind of English, and irreverent play with words or conventions, will be particularly scrutinised as they write about their India, in their own way , in their own 'Englishes', whether paradoxically through the use of magical realism, or through the use of sheer , stark, dark , inventive, evocative language, exemplifying in their own, inimitable ways, the changing ethos of Indianness in Indian English literature.

Key Words: changing ethos, daring experiments, stylistic innovations, variant English.

Introduction: The twentieth century was witness to the emergence of New Literatures from several colonized countries who hadgained Independence from their colonial rulers.These former colonies along with the United Kingdom later formed the British Commonwealth Association of Nations and continued to be allied bya common colonial past whichspilled over into their political, social, cultural, economic and linguistic arenas.This intense colonial overloadcreated a virtual swathe of writers whose protagonists were irrevocably colored by their postcolonial heritage while their writing displayed an inevitable and distinctive European sensibility and lineage.

Conversely the last three decades or so, particularly in the Indian subcontinent have seen the growth of an entirely new breed of emergent writers who may have been influenced to some degree by the colonial past of their country, but are pushing new boundaries with an innovative, adaptive use of the language of the erstwhile colonizers, to relate contemporary new stories. Their works offer a fresh take on the world they inhabit, of modern economies, altering lifestyles, varying relationships and shifting paradigms within a nascent, fast altering, fickleenvironment. Not only are they breaking predictable boundaries in the way they have adapted English to suit their own purposes, but they are also innovatively and perhaps, even capriciously, serving up an incredible *melange*of the real and the fantastic, the traditional and the modern, the staid and the stirring.

Four Indian writers, (two of them debutant novelists) from a previously colonized country, have taken on the Western literary establishment on its own turf and wrested the Booker Prize from English writers writing in their own language. They are Salman Rushdie, in 1981 with *Midnight's Children*, Arundhati Roy in 1997 with *The God of Small Things*, Kiran Desai with *The Inheritance of Loss* in 2006 and Aravinda Adiga with *The White Tiger* in 2008.

The Booker Prize or the Man Booker Prize, as it has been known since 2002 was created in 1968 and has grown over the years to become the most prestigious prize awarded for literature in the English Language. It is awarded each year for the best full length English novel, by a citizen of the Commonwealth and the Republic of Ireland. In spite of the controversy it engenders with almost monotonous regularity, "it

recognizes contemporary English language fiction in a pluralist manner, and is an acknowledgment that many forms of English writing have merit". The aim has always been to encourage "a new frontier less writing", which actively fosters the writer's attempts to modify "traditional colonial discourse" by adapting or even subverting it.

The Indian Man Booker novelists (as if in tacit approval of these subversive tactics) are winning acclaim by breaking previously set boundaries, as they write about their India, in their own way, in their own 'Englishes'.Their daring new experiments with the English Language, their evolution of a new variant kind of English, the use of postmodern writing techniques such as magical realism and parodic references to cinema, or just intense, inventive and evocative word play quantify their works as paradigmatic postcolonial, postmodern texts. Therefore the novels while seen as representative of contemporary, seminal Indian writing alsoexemplify the changing ethos of Indianness in Indian English literature.

Writing that emerges from this hybridisation of the two tongues, "from the line of contact between colonizer and colonized" [2] is often bold and innovative but linked through an umbilical connect to its mother tongue, quite as the Indian writers of the English language, in spite of their attempts to indigenize the language and make it their own, are bound within an irrevocable relationship with their erstwhile colonial masters. The very fact of their having written in English is fraught as their forays into the unknown take them along clearly defined paths and they seem unable to cleanly slash the apron strings of the past.

Midnight's Children has been Rushdie's most successful novel, getting first a Booker, then the Booker of Bookers in 1993 and finally in 2008, the Best of the Bookers. A great deal has been written and debated on this iconic book but new writers found Rushdie's frank acknowledgement of the English Language's hybridity particularly liberating. No longer did one have to feel apologetic or a traitor to the national cause for having written in an alien tongue because the 'English' was quite unlike that of the Metropolitan Centers. In fact it seems as though Rushdie has sparked a veritable deluge of new Indian writers who are not only writing in English but are appropriating it to meet the exigencies and demands of their stories. As Rushdie himself states, somewhat gleefully, "The Empire was writing back to the centre with a vengeance"[3]

In his essay, "Commonwealth Literature Does Not Exist" Rushdie terms English as a "world language", and describes how the very people who ". . . were once colonised by the language are now rapidly remaking it, domesticating it, becoming more and more relaxed about the way they use it". In a diametric departure from the reverence displayed by the colonized for the coloniser's tongue, he insists that "[T]he children of Independent India do not think of English as being irremediably tinted by its colonial provenance. They use it as an Indian language, as one of the tools they have to hand"

The text of *Midnight's Children* is liberally peppered with Hindi and Urdu words and phrases thrown across its pages in a joyous abundant sprinkling.From short, staccato sentences like, 'Stood. Rolled cheroot. Stared across the lake', to sometimes astonishing compositions like, 'Cyranose,' 'eyes like road-drills', hard and full of ratatat', and 'the chutnification of history', to portmanteau words like 'nearlynine', Rushdie flamboyantly creates a new exuberant lexicon. Inexplicably complex yet, ludicrously facile phrases, such as 'what-comes-nextism,' 'lust for centrality', 'worth-ten babus jawans' and 'being in the world' add a gleeful, freewheeling quality to his text. The words are effortlessly incorporated into the narrative and donot jar but definitely take one by surprise. The references range from religious allusions to colloquialisms and words from popular culture in a seemingly haphazard, helter-skelter fashion but Rushdie knows exactly what he is doing.

For instance the references to epics like the Mahabharata and legends from folk lore and his tongue–in–cheek humour finds place in some of the names he chooses, like the paper thin Lifafa (envelope) Das, The Rani of Cooch Nahin, and the canine unit with the acronym CUTIA. These markers are incorporated into the text flawlessly, do not seemsuperfluous and there is no glossary or explanatory note.

In a clever stratagem however there is sufficient explanatory material within the text to alleviate any discomfort that a Western reader might feel. So ifRushdie frequently uses unglossed words like *biriyani, dahi, talaq* and *takallouf* to give a sense of cultural distinctiveness, he also, often, yokes together indigenous words and their English equivalents as a linguistic strategy. Phrases like 'Muhallas or neighbourhoods', 'dugdugee drum', 'I do not need to tell you that aag means fire', 'janum, life of mine', Duniya dekho, see the world,' 'Allah-tobah, heaven forefend' become self-explanatory, with Rushdie playing the translator to the Western reading public. Other instances of bilingual usage are designed to provide comic relief like 'motherji', 'Cousinji', 'Ladies and Ladahs', a phrase one has never actually heard being used, except perhaps by comically inclined prepubescent boarders in out-moded colonial institutions, in the nineteen-sixties. Startlingly literal translations too like, 'piece-of-the-moon', and 'Donkey from somewhere', 'Okay, starve, starve, who cares two pice' are comic rather than resistive and

Rushdie arbitrarily joins together words to form polysyllabic nonsense words, ‘overandover’, ‘birthanddeath’, ‘talldarkhandsome’, ‘whatsitsname’ and ‘ThreadbareneedleStreet’. He evinces total indifference to grammatical rules to create topsy-turvy speech patterns, for example: “. . . green and black the Widow’s hair and clutching hands and children mmff and little balls and one-by-one torn in half and little balls go flying green and black her hand is green her nails are black as black” [4] and uses onomatopoeic words like ‘dhraaaammm’ and‘Yaaaakh-Thoooo!’ with almost mischievous enjoyment.Experimenting with language and form in a startlingly radical manner, he incorporates, Hindi, Urdu, Gujarati, (‘Su che/ Saru che, Danda Leke maaru che’) and Punjabi, (‘writing shiting’) into thebubbling hot pot of a new, divergent and “chutnified’[5]English.

Another interesting, indeed startling feature of Rushdie’s linguistic strategies is the abundant use of curses, abuse and profanity, or what Bakhtin calls “Billingsgate speech”. Almost all of Rushdie’s characters indulge in scatological liberties, which impart a carnivalesque ribaldry to his works. *Midnight’s Children* abounds in abusers ranging from the cursing, excrement riddled Tai,his grotesque, foul-mouthed wife, to the blackmailing members of the Shiva gang, to the Widow to Koli fisherwomen to Shiva, the most fearsome of the midnight’s children.

The most obvious ‘Indianness ‘that the novel exhibits is the plot where a nation takes on new life, and against whichtremendously exciting backdrop Rushdie’s own narrative comes to life. Rushdie deliberatelysubverts History, makes factual errors, creates mish-mashed events, spin offs and chaos with complete and spectacular disregard for every last ‘writerly’ convention, while leaving literary alarm bells ringing furiously in varying registers and decibels. This is his paean to the India of his birth, a novel astonishingly, garishly replete with every predictable, dazzling Indian cliché, and yet instead of being a tasteless *smorgasbord* of tawdry kitsch, it ends up as “a world novel, with universal application to twentieth century life.”[6]

Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* is the compelling story of two dizygotic twins adrift like lolloping frogs in a dystopian world that presages a deep darkness in the seemingly carefree space that the children inhabit. It progresses at a dizzy pace with a non linear narrative, and Roy’s writing is brilliant, vibrant, inventive and nearly cataclysmic. The small-town story, replete with lyrical intensity and great power unfurls “into an account of the wider nation and indeed of relations with the former colonial power” writes Rana Dasgupta, He calls it, “A linguistic tour de force, the book [that] took Indian speech as a central theme and worked it into a new and dazzling poetry – and convinced many that the new centre of English-language literature had shifted to the subcontinent”[7].

Certainly, the success of *The God of Small Things* must, to a large extent, be attributed to Roy’s use of literary tropes and her intricately wrought prose. The lyricism in Roy’s opening pages is full of an overwrought tropicality so Aymenem is a “hot and brooding” place, where “red bananas ripen” and “jackfruits burst” [8]. The tropes are all present in the ageless, classic scenario in which the novel is set. The sleepy little town where everything is picture perfect conforms impeccably to the flawless image of small-town ‘exotic’ India. It only dawns later on the reader when the plot begins to unravel that this could well be clever Roy’s opening gambit as a possible foil to the imperfection of the lives of those who live in the picture perfect town. And along they come trundling in, the other startling, less obvious, less pleasantbut still exotic markers; the PWD pot holes, the buses with girl’s names, railway crossing divinities, kangaroo-infested airports and lecherous doctor’s waiting rooms.

Infact it seems as though Roy makes the twins’ subvert the English Language as a means of asserting themselves in a world in which their very identity is at stake. Therefore she telescopes words together (furrywhirring, suddenshudder,), exchanges syllables between them (readly dead), read words backwards (nataS in their seye), split them apart (Lay Ter, Bar Nowl) and coins new words (hostling, stoppited, bursty). Using language as a trope for resistance Rahel and Estha coin a new tongue, that is unique to them. It’s like shouting defiantly back at the beleaguering world, but in writing.

Words and adjectives are also strung together in new and unexpected ways such as in Estha’s “green-wavy, thick-watery, lumpy, seaweedy, floaty, bottomless-bottomful feeling”[9], the “Furrywhirring and a Sariflapping” of the bat in Baby Kochamma’s sari [10], or the “rushing, rolling fishswimming sense” of the Ayemenem House [11]. Grammatical rules that bind the English language in an unassailable straitjacket are jettisoned without a trace in phrases like, “Margaret Kochamma told her to Stoppit. So she Stoppited” or “the tall iron railing that separated the Meeters from the Met, and Greeters from the Gret”

Her descriptions of the Kathakali performances are compelling:

The Kathakali Man is the most beautiful of men. Because his body is his soul. His only instrument. From the age of three it has been planned and polished, pared own, harnessed wholly to the task of storytelling. He has magic in him, this man within painted mask and swirling skirts. He becomes a Regional Flavor. In the Heart of Darkness they mock

him with their lolling nakedness and their imported attention spans. . . . . . (13).

Roy's telling portraiture of an endemic and flourishing colonial hegemony is evident throughout the text. It lies inEstha and Rahel's love for Kipling (the paradigmatic colonialist) and "*The Sound of Myoozick*", Baby Kochamma's fondness for Shakespeare and the right "*prer-nun-see-a-shun*", the numerous allusions to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Chacko quoting airily from *The Great Gatsby*, Mammachi blindly playing Handel on the violin, references to the Reader's Digest, Latha's monotonous recitation of Walter Scott's Lochinvar, and Lenin's automaton like rendering of Mark Anthony's speech from *Julius Caesar* are all examples of how deeply entrenched it is. Her (the twins') variant new English, is her chosen weapon of combat against continuing colonial bias in an India that has been Independent for years.

While Roy speaks Malayalam and Hindi, English is despite its contentiousness her primary language. In *The God of Small Things*, her "wrenching" of the English language from its colonial roots through a series of "collaged words, regional aphorisms, and culturally eclipsed meanings" creating in the process what Taisha Abraham has referred to as her "Locusts Stand I ", and has led Aijaz Ahmad to conclude that "Roy is the first Indian writer in English where the marvelous stylistic resource becomes available for provincial vernacular culture without any effect of exoticism or estrangement and without the book reading as translation."(14).

Of Kiran Desai's Booker Prize winning novel, *The Inheritance of Loss*, Salman Rushdie writes, "Welcome proof that India's encounter with the English language continues to give birth to new children, endowed with lavish gifts".

The Inheritance of Loss is to a large extent - a story of migration and the complications that such migration engenders. It is reflective of Desai's own experience of leaving India. Even though she writes with consummate skill about both India and the West, her real artistry lies in the passages on India and Indians. The book moves back and forth between Kalimpong and Manhattan, like the author herself and tells parallel stories of immigration and loss.

Desai uses flashbacks of life in Kalimpong and England to explore the conflicting cultural identities of her protagonists. But for the Judge, Sai, Noni, Lola and even Biju this conflict of cultures is inevitably self diminishing as none of them are ever able to come to terms with their identity. In particular, the judge is irreparably wounded from his brief sojourn in England, and acutely aware of his own inferiority, vis a vis, the ruling class English and consumed by a self loathing, which grows to endemic proportions. It shapes his very existence, and his relationships, whether with his wife, his friends and finally his last surviving relative his granddaughter Sai. As Desai writes in the novel, "The solitude became a habit, the habit became the man, and it crushed him into a shadow" (15).

Several characters in the novel live with these feelings of despair clinging desperately to old traditions, at variance with the realities of their homeland:

. . . Joydeep, with his romantic notions of countryside living; with his Wellington boots, binoculars, and bird-watching book; with his Yeats, his Rilke (in German), his Mandelstam (in Russian); in the purply mountains of Kalimpong with his bloody Talisker and his Burberry socks (memento from Scottish holiday of golf+smoked salmon+distillery[16]).

Desai in the novel conjures up a panoply of characters with peculiar foibles and eccentricities. If there is the Judge in awe of his imperialist masters eating "roast Bastard" with a certain tragic complacency at one end of the spectrum, at the other is, Panna Lal the cook and his absurd attempts at speaking the alien tongue. From the sisters Lola and Noni and their misplaced western pretensions, to Mrs. Sen's mispronunciations and Harish Harry's attempts to rein in his daughter; it would all be funny if it wasn't so tragic and beleaguered.

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, which won the Booker Prize in 2008, uses the metaphor of a chauffeured car and a gigantic chandelier to highlight the gulf between the haves and the have-nots and to navigate the worlds of both. After decades of cashing in on the fascination with a mystical Eternal India, peopled with gurus with fantastically matted hair and drug dilated eyes, the idea of an ostensible Dark India has been acquiring of late a significant exotic cachet in the cultural industries. No longer are the heavy sagas of well-established ancient houses and women in artful *deshabille* acceptable coinage. The stories now demand poverty tourism, a series of horror-scapes as the extremely indigent play out their pathetic lives in front of appropriately appalled gawking tourists in search of yet another funeral pyre. For instance there are two Indias that Adiga refers to in the novel. To quote Balram Halwai, "India is two countries in one: an India of Light and an India of Darkness" (*17*). Throughout the novel Adiga has used a casual, caustic tone as the voice of his narrator, and language as coarse and unattractive as his protagonist and the life he must live. A sense of fatalism pervades the text as the protagonists choose sardonic humour as a means of expressing themselves, because they cannot do anything about their fate or circumstances. Balram again cites the sheer numbers of Gods in the Hindu pantheon ". . . making it a grand total of 56,000,004 divine arses for me to choose from" (18).

In urban and rural India, language is the clearest marker of the difference between the socio-economic

and class status among diverse population groups.One of the weaknesses of Indian English writers, has been how their protagonists, often from severely deprived economic backgrounds speak impeccable English and are privy to more education and information than would be realistically possible for persons in their circumstances. Balram Halwai's situation is a case in point. Having spent his entire childhood in the bleakest of village homes situated in "darkest India", the son of a rickshaw wallah with the barest rudiments of education, employed as an abused menial ın the meanest of tea-stalls, and subsequently as a driver, to a local landlord and his son, it is strange how he discourses volubly and knowledgeably on entrepreneurs and start-ups in Bangalore and writes a series of enlightening letters to Wen Jiabao, the Premier of China. His use of a vocabulary ("oleaginous"and "particulated") beyond the reductionism that one would expect from a "half-bakedIndian" is a little jarring. Besides not only is he aware of world history, and the cultural nuances prevalent in several countries("yellow skull"), but he even evinces a *connoisseur*'s interest in the Urdu poetry of Mir, Iqbal and Mirza Ghalib. This inexplicable erudition and copious general knowledge is much at odd with the socio-economic reality of India where the really poor rarely have access to even primary education.

The book is a severe indictment of the way the rich treat the invisible poor. But above all it captures something newin India, a stirring, a glimmer of the refusal by the poor to passively accept the fate their masters have ordained for them. Adiga's India is like a vast dystopia lumbering about its business while just beneath the surface a sleeping giant, is slowly coming awake primedand ready for battle.

Conclusion: Therefore it is apparent that the above writers, Rushdie, Roy,Desai and Adiga with their iconic texts are fighting the battle against an entrenched western academy by deploying their own writing medium as a weapon of resistance. Through the use of techniques like fragmented plots, non-linear narratives and employing a variant, user friendly, 'english' instead of the standard 'English' they have not only thrown off the metaphorical colonial yoke but have also evolved new standards and added rather than detracted from the English Language. By adapting it to their specific requirements,andremaking it, tearing it up and subverting it completely it seems as though theyare spawning in the whole frenetic process, new truths, a new orderand perhaps a new 'reality'.

References:

1. From the website manbookerprize.com, which is the official site for the annual contemporary fiction award , to writers from the British Commonwealth and Ireland and offers information about the prize, judges, authors along with the expectations from a shortlisted work.
2. Rivkin, Julie and Michael Ryan. Literary Theory: An Anthology.
3. Massachussets. Blackwell Publishing.1998. p.582
4. Rushdie, Salman. Imaginary Homelands, Essays and Criticism 1981-1991.
5. London: Granta Books in collaboration with Penguin, 1992.p.8. All references (IH) are from this book.
6. Rushdie, Salman. Midnight's Children. London. Vintage Books. 2006. Print.
7. All page references (MC 422) are from this book.
8. Salman Rushdie's use of the expression "chutnification' epitomizes his use of the English language in Midnight's Children. Just as Chutney, a mélange of often spicy tangy ingredients adds zest to a meal, chutnification in the novel means, the transformation of bland straightforward English into a spicy hot-pot of mixed Hindi-English.
9. Crane, Ralph.J "The Chutnification of History'. Inventing India: A History
10. of India in English Language Fiction. London. Macmillan. 1992. Pg170-189.
11. Dasgupta, Rana. " A New Bend in The River". The National. 25 Feb. 2010. P.2.
12. Roy, Arundhati. The God of Small Things. New Delhi. Penguin books. 2002.
13. All subsequent references to TGOST are from this book. P.1
14. ibid, 102
15. ibid,8
16. ibid, 30
17. ibid, 135
18. ibid, 230-231
19. Ahmad, Aijaz. "Reading Arundhati Roy Politically".Arundhati Roy Critical
20. Perspectives. Ed Murari Prasad. New Delhi. Pencraft International. 2006. P.22
21. Desai, Kiran. The Inheritance of Loss. New Delhi. Penguin Books. 2006.
22. All subsequent references(TIOL) are taken from the book.p.39
23. ibid, 245
24. Adiga, Aravinda. The White Tiger. Noida, (U.P). Harper Collins.2009 Print.
25. Allpage references are from this work.
26. ibid,8

Shahnaz Mansingh, 126, Civil Lines, Uttar Pradesh