

Need and Importance of English Literature in Indian Societies

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Abstract: *Literature has always been a significant part in preserving, remembering and promoting the past of a culture of any society. It keeps the record of events, memories of people as well as places. The largest as well as minutest of details could be found in the little anecdotes that might be recorded in the literature surrounding an individual, place, or period. Through literature, one also gets to know the prevalent consciousness among the people of a respective region. It can, therefore, be deduced that literature is an important historical document which acts as a mirror reflecting the cultural, social, and political dynamics of its time, preserving the voices, struggles, and aspirations of people across generations.*

When one looks at the history of India, the freedom struggle stands as an essential part of its past. From fighting against the British, to gaining independence, India's demography, polity, economics, as well as linguistic opportunities have undergone a significant change. And Literature too, is impacted by it. This paper tries to look at the origin of English literature in India and its need and importance in Indian society. It focuses on the needs, demands and opportunities that emerge in the present or have emerged in the past as well as those that will continue in future, so as to ascertain the significance of English literature in Indian geography.

Keywords: Colonial impacts, English Literature, Needs, Importance, Indian English Authors

I. INTRODUCTION

India has had a long history of colonial dominion. It survived on exploitation, poverty, hunger and underdevelopment at the hands of its colonial rulers. The British came and saw what India had to offer and then went on to conquer the lands of India for its potential offerings. What began as a sweet business association between East Indian Company and many rulers of Indian provincial states, turned into a cruel saga of rule, power and exploitation. Throughout the colonial period, there occurred a massive exchange between the native and the British assets, be it, food, textiles, resources and even language. The English language is officially documented to be brought to India with the arrival of East Indian Company in India in 17th Century. It is also argued at some instances that it might have arrived in India before the British, with other European countries like Portugal and France. But the argument remains disputed, so we shall give the official credit to the British for it. English in India saw multitude of attitudes towards it. The natives treated it with hostility and ignorance initially, but later came acceptance and promotion.

The inclusion of English in India, in its linguistic range, in its people's psyche, and also in academics, was initiated by British officials such as Charles Grant, Macaulay, William Bentinck and Charles Wood. Grant believed that introducing English in Indian education system could help subdue the many social evils prevalent in Indian society. Macaulay, on the other hand, had his different reasons to include English in Indian academics or demographics. He wanted Indian skin to be representative of British, however, being servile to them. He, in his famous, *Minutes*, boldly stated that he wanted a class of persons *Indian in blood and color, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and intellect*. Whatever interests served in the past, it can be seen that the present doesn't seem to follow the same order. Today, English is seen as a fellow language in India, and is given the due regard for its global reach and the many opportunities it offers to its speakers.

The earliest English work by an Indian author is recorded to be “The Travels of Dean Mahomet”, by Dean Mahomed. It is an autobiographical travel narrative, which came in 1793-94. It is written in epistolary form consisting of 38 letters. Dean, in his book, describes the travels during 1770 to 1775. He describes the culture of India, trade, military conflicts and much more in his record. It is also noted that when he recounts Indian anecdotes, he records them with sympathy and counts himself along with his European counterparts, as he uses the pronoun ‘we’ to describe the European perspective.

Indian English Literature can be denoted to the part of literature coming from writers from India who are the speakers of native or co-native languages indigenous to India. The literature also draws its roots from the writers constituting Indian diaspora. The notable native Indian writers constitute, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan, Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and many more. (Meena, 2021) Indian English Literature emerged in 1930s. Writers like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan are said to be the flagbearers of Indian English Literature. Their works describe Indian issues, culture, and ethos, and they provide a critical lens to look at prevalent issues in India.

Need and Importance

When Charles Wood in his official document, popularly known as *Woods Despatch* suggested to include English in the high-school education and also in the university level education, the intent behind it was purely colonial; initially as well as in the longer run. The motive was to familiarize Indian natives with English language and literature so that it becomes easier for the colonizer to sustain here. The inclusion of English followed in Modern Education system too, as it was noticed that through the knowledge of English and English literature, the native Indian mind would be exposed to a knowledge beyond its borders. It would know about the knowledge system, people, culture, tradition and prevalent consciousness in the terms of philosophy, society and much more and this way it would also help building a critical thinking character amidst the Indian folk. In fact, the education policy NEP 2020, puts extra emphasis on teaching English in school for enhancing skills that would enable the students in facing the global world. The policy understands the urgency of learning English in a globalized world where the most common medium of exchange remains English itself. (Rakshit, 2023)

English became a significant way of expression during the colonial period. The social reformers took the aid of English to present the evils present in Indian society back then. Reformers like Raja Rammohun Roy talked about Sati and widow remarriage which also helped Indian mind to understand the shortcomings in their own society. Works like *Kanthapura* and *Untouchable* presented the Indian society in its authentic taste to the native audience. This also helped building a critical perspective towards the issues depicted in these works, which further pushed the Indian population towards a revolutionary change.

The pioneers of English literature in India like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Salman Rushdie, Kiran Desai, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, and many more, through their notable works, have placed Indian English literature in front of the world. Therefore, it becomes essential for it to be representative of India at the world literature level. Through their works, these authors have built a national identity which gets a global audience when it reaches beyond the native borders. Also, one must not ignore the fact that, despite all kinds of exchanges happening through use of English among the natives and the world outside, the writers too get a far reach. They build an audience beyond the national border and this way India also gets a recognition at the world front. The 2022 International Booker prize winner, *Tomb of Sand*, by Geetanjali Shree, and translated by U.S. Translator, Daisy Rockwell, also points to the same that through English, a work gets more and varied audience and a wider recognition. So, this could be a reason why English literature stands important and as a need in Indian Society.

Another aspect that emphasizes the need of English literature is the amount of opportunities it opens before the people based upon their proficiency in it. Sectors like, IT, Business, Media, International Relations, prosper on the knowledge of English. Through the knowledge of English, one can have options to choose from as well as one can excel in career prospects. It also helps in building skills such as communication and critical thinking.

In the introduction to his book, “Modern Indian Thought: An Introduction”, Anand Prakash gives the credit to English for its educative purpose. He says that for a third world country as India, it becomes necessary to see English as a carrier of historical insights for us. The language marks the making of paradigms, canons and perspectives. Also,

according to him, the middle class society flourishing in India has an inherent notion that through this language, they can have access to quality, efficacy and skill in the socio-cultural scenario.(Prakash, 2011)

Conclusion

Indian literature in English, has a very short history; it dates back to the 17th century. The Travels of Dean Mahomet, written by Sake Dean Mahomet in 1793 and published in England, is the most important work of Indian English literature in the English-speaking world. England's Parliament had backed the Charter Act, which gave England control over education in India, in an effort to correct some of the East India Company's policies that were based on materialism and greed. As a result the English Education Act was passed, making English the language of instruction in Indian schools and the study of English literature a mandatory requirement. Indian English literature has progressed from a sprouting branch into a mighty trunk, and it now bears fruit befitting its stature even as it anticipates its own transformation.

English literature holds a dual significance in Indian society: as a legacy of colonial history and as a tool for modern expression and global integration. It is not merely a medium of communication but a means of self-expression, cultural exchange, and societal transformation, making it a cornerstone of contemporary Indian life. The need for English literature in Indian society is rooted in its ability to act as a cultural bridge and a medium of education. Beyond its practical benefits, English literature enriches India's intellectual and artistic legacy, making it an indispensable part of the nation's social and cultural fabric.

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