

## **INDIA WRITES IN ENGLISH: A QUEST FOR LOCAL AND LOCALISATION IN LITERATURE**

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### **Abstract**

*Literature and literary discourses are located in essential ways to place. Myriad opinions and theoretically updated notions too seem determined to state the same. However textual explorations carrying place specific connotations and denotations have found an interactive relation between place and literature. The co-opted mutual dependency procures space to creative quests yearning to conceptualise to cater to innovative ideas in literature. It further strengthens nostalgic resonances identifiable through literary discourses streamlining the relation of place/local with literature. If literature invokes place, the signifiers embedded in textual representations in relation to place/local supply ample voice/to voice for the place/local. India writes in English to announce its articulating abilities in a medium, initially exported to its territory to be experimented upon. India laboured/s through its literary quests to acknowledge the significance of English not only for Britain but for all. The requisite signifiers signifying prominence to local are primarily the cultural dynamics aligned to identify a particular culture assigning relevance to primary quests and concerns otherwise secondary to global. As a result writers are continuously multiplying their range to represent their legitimacy through localisation in literature from periphery to core of academia.*

**Key words:** *English, India writes, Local, Localisation, Literature, Place, Narratives, and Discourse*

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### **Introduction**

‘Literature does belong in essential ways to place,  
and always invokes place to speak its fullest voice.’

(Eudora Welty 547)

Literature is essentially woven foregrounding the sense of place/local. The tradition further continues via narratives ascribing literary cognizance to sense of place. Their viability to fascinate readers proves inspirational for writers who opt to write about poignant images/moments/memories as reminiscences recuperating to relive/revive local. The core concern of the paper aims to assign literary recognition to localisation in literature as new area of research and study in literature. Local narratives vocalising local as a discourse in literature are conceptualised to blur the hegemonies of metanarratives. Local remains ingrained during the inception of ideas and conception of narratives. India writes in English to identify with it as medium and to acknowledge its role as an assimilative performer. The adaptive role of English promotes the role of Indian communicators as writers through mutual mediations for efficacy/competency similar and natural as first language.

### **India Writes in English**

‘In recent days there has been a great deal of debate on the significance of the two words “Indian” and “literature”. Taken separately, neither “Indian” nor “literature” would elicit uniform response even from the common reader.’ (Raveendran 2558)

The research paper primarily aims to bring the relevance of place/ local in writings from a segment of intellectuals in India, who even though write in English but are yet to be recognised under the discipline, ‘Indian Writing in English emerged as a sub-discipline of English Literature’. (Saibaba 61) Since the period from ‘1857 to 1900 English education took rapid stride, and the climate was favourable for a new flowering of the creative.’ (Iyengar 10) It must be proclaimed as verified fact that English in India had been transported as a medium of instruction and later got adopted as a discipline quite early before it took root in Britain.

'English was first offered as a *subject of study* in England only in 1828 as an English language. In 1831 the English literature was first offered as a subject of study at King's College, London. English was only a vernacular. Oxford allowed English as a subject of study only in 1894 and Cambridge in 1911, but in the three universities started in India in 1857, English was both a medium of instruction and a subject of study right from the beginning. British colonialism used its colonial territories, particularly India, to devise teaching methods (Pennycook, 1998) and testing techniques (Spolsky, 1995) as well as to establish its literary canons (Viswanathan 1989); all of which were then not only exported to other colonial territories but were imported to Britain as well.' (Krishnaswamy and Krishnaswamy 53)

The early history of English as a language in India proved beneficial for a comprehensive literary account for India writing in English. India now understands the role of English as 'a tool, a cementing force, a key and a channel.' (Iyengar 13) It supports the building of 'intelligentsia scattered all over who knows English... English, then, is one of our national languages'. (Iyengar 14) Therefore the privileged Indian intelligentsia with their knowledge of English are now acknowledged as 'the human mind of the future progressively acquiring an international sweep... achieving a global comprehension, thereby ending the half-real half-mythical east-west dichotomy once and for all.' (Iyengar 7) While addressing a large gathering of people at an open forum C. Rajagopalachari had admitted, 'English is the gift of Saraswati to us... we shall reject this light from the West only at peril to our sanity and security.' (Iyengar 12) The Indian renaissance no doubt is the direct result of the introduction of English education which is responding to 'accomplish creative self-expression through the English medium.' (Saibaba 64) And the renaissance promises to live forever and long in textual explorations of confident contributors. Academia gains to groom one and more where 'Indian Writing in English is now one of the subjects taught to post-graduate students' (Nandakumar 46) along with graduating students in almost all the universities across India.

The reawakened India writes in English belong to diverse places/locales. However place specific localisms become secondary in concern to India in quest to write in English as unified voice for local. Thus English unites India to support Nehruvian nationalist slogan like 'India's unity lies in its diversity.' (Raveendran 2562) Their association and affiliation as writers simultaneously addresses the 'local' within local on micro level and 'local' within global on macro level. Taking account of the context 'the discourse with its projects and agendas...determines what writers can do and will do.' (Bartholomae 139) Their textual explorations engages them to 'write not as individuals but as members of communities whose beliefs, concerns and practices' (Harris 12) are becoming 'yet more strongly established by defending itself against internal attacks, or it will be revised according to the outsider's knowledge.' (Killingsworth 115-116) A growing number of India writes in English as an attempt to proclaim their adequacy for the 'language in which they could feel and fantasize creatively.' (Amanuddin 23-24)

Amongst all the prolific Indian writers R.K. Narayan stands admirable with critics and readers alike. His Indianness negotiated with English to frame narratives embedded with signifiers to recreate a sense of place/local identified across borders as Malgudi.

‘This was the background to the life of the people in whose camp Gandhi had elected to stay during his visit to Malgudi... the biggest and best furnished house in Malgudi, and we as people of Malgudi have a responsibility to give him our best, so how can we house him in any lesser place? When Gandhi arrived he was ceremoniously received, all the big-wigs of Malgudi...where the chairman compared Malgudi to Switzerland’. (Narayan 38-41)

He won acclaim and literary accolades for Malgudi as locale similar to the Wessex of Hardy. Hardy’s Wessex a fictional place synonymous with local and Englishness to the world bestows additional charm to his fiction. Thomas Hardy had stated in his preface to the 1895 Wessex edition of *Far from the Madding Crowd* that ‘The series of novels I projected being mainly of the kind called local, they seemed to require a territorial definition of sort to lend unity to their scenes.’ (Abravanel 98) The prominence for place/local of R.K. Narayan’s Malgudi and Thomas Hardy’s Wessex ‘has come to serve as a model for the very concepts of localism’ (Abravanel 98) and localisation in literature. As one of the pillars within the trio R. K. Narayan along with Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao have opted to address the very notion of localisation in literature as relevant within and outside Indian Writing in English as a sub-discipline of English Literature.

R. K. Narayan quite candidly ‘admits that English has enough flexibility, resilience and mobility to yield itself to the process of Indianization...as a very adaptable language. And it is so transparent it can take on the tint of any country.’ (Gupta 175) Raja Rao claims to write ‘not as the Englishmen do...What is necessary is a reorientation of the English language, a shaping of it to suit the purpose of their creative expression.’ (Gupta 175). Manohar Malgonkar during 1960’s wrote novels in English being ‘fully aware of the responsibilities of the Indian writer who shoulders the task of interpreting his country to the whole world.’ (Singh 123) His novels like *The Princes* which became ‘the literary choice of the U.S.A... along with *A Bend in the Ganges* found to be one of the three best novels of 1964 by E.M. Forster, and was compared with *War and Peace* by Richard Church in his review of the novel in *The Bookman*.’ (Singh 123) It’s no more a myth that ‘one can write better in one’s mother tongue. Even in other parts of the world we have enough examples of people writing well in languages other than their mother tongues: Conrad, Yeats, Becket and several others.’ (Gupta 175) According to Aurobindo ‘It is not true in all cases that one can’t write first class things in a learnt language.’ (454)

‘In the same note, Bose argues that... it no longer matters whether the Indian English poet learnt his English, not from the British or Scottish or Irish or American or Australian or New Zealander or South African teachers but from fellow Indians. This is because English today can no longer be regarded as a non-native language in India.’ (Naik 169)

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The need based strategies adopted by Indians for Indian as learners of English has gradually decolonised English. Decolonisation keeps the language open to modifications both in form and content. Its flexibility favours English to be regarded as native language in India.

India writes in English from diverse local often remains preoccupied with their 'focus of nostalgia and a privileged site of geographical feeling.' (Hsu 36) They write for the local assimilating the essence from local through localisation in their literature mostly targeting to charm the local readers/consumers. Thus the writing adopting the cultural, regional and lingual correlatives define and describe one's working-day experiences, one's private and public life negotiations along with various urbanisation issues as mutual concerns to local as whole.

The high roads of literature, as paved by the Leavities have today bifurcated into by-lanes and alleys, and into "desisadak" and "gullies"...it is the familiarity of the locale and the hurly-burly of... daily routine that, like its local Hinglish jargon, delight the reader, particularly the local reader.' (Shahani 1251)

Narratives from local focussing on local habitation rooted in physical and geographical realities associate local with local and promote local at global. Literature must have wide promotional outlook to cater to creative energies.

The idea of plurality has gained ground...the writer, we have come to think, needs plural kinds of representations to convey the larger experience... with a relatively greater sense of ease and confidence for they are dealing with a sphere familiar to them, and working within the modalities they understand best...entrenched the use of English not only as cultural tool, but as an everyday functional means of communication. But the attempt is more complex one: the writers need to "dig their own soil" in order to help them tread more firmly on alien soil. (Shahani 1250-1252)

The India budding as literary talents are being noticed for promotion by various publishing houses. The Sunday Express through its news magazine 'Eye' brings the debut of HansdaSowvendraShekhar's *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupibiskeyin* news as 'the first in English to be written by a Jharkhandi and published by a major publishing firm.' (Edmond 6)

India writes in English to secure/safeguard/succeed as literary figures on the world map of literature. Either segmented as literary or populous India wrote/writes in English with confidence. ChetanBhagat, ArvindAdiga, Pankaj Mishra, AltafTyrewala may be young and recent, along with literary legends and some still hidden or forgotten. These writers negotiate to voice local with a 'pressing need to bring cultural and postcolonial studies to a new level of theorization that is "retooled to fit the changing cultural and political-economic circumstances" of these "new times".' (Pinnell 206)



Their narratives become reasons for masses to opt-out from the tradition advocating to the sheepish adherence to reading lists prescribed by literati. The tradition must discontinue with its colonial hangover favouring the occident over the oriental.

The local proceeds to penetrate from periphery to core through the localisation in literature especially within the frame called the India Writes in English. These new areas of research/study of the local for the local and by the local are striving to get rid of literary colonisation.

### **Local, Localisation and Literature**

“The discourse of the “local” is not limited to emotional appeals to place-based identity and quality-of-life issues. Rather, considerable levels of expert and professional knowledge are being marshalled from an epistemic perspective; there is an interesting convergence of both local knowledge and expert knowledge.” (Hess 161)

In contemporary scenario the relevance and existence of local has strengthen its stand to win over negations to become the prerequisite for global. On the other hand in the post-colonial/ post-modern era the power of local literature and culture have to determine their own internal development. As the postmodern theory discards the grand narrative/metanarrative theory, the role of local itself becomes vital. The literary pursuits proclaiming cosmopolitan heterogeneities are moving away from local to favour global. They consciously abide by colonising tendencies of global in metanarratives hindering and interrupting the development of local discourse.

The incorporation of the localist ‘aesthetics into larger contexts, these texts demonstrate that affect originates not only in isolated local communities but also in the broader spaces of transnational capitalism.’ (Hsu 37) The need of the hour is to focus on the local from different regions of the world which is not only accessible to the local populace but relates to interact with the global. Therefore the hegemony of global must be replaced through positive discrimination in favour of the local in literary pursuits. The mirage of global must succumb to say ‘back to local’.

Nowadays, in practise that the adherence to local in any form relates to taking a kind of u turn away from global. The local has been understood to play the role of the primary root to all that now have grown to become global. One can never afford to neglect the root to groom the soot, as the root is the responsible source to nurture the soot.

‘After my Gitanjali poems had been written in Bengali I translated those poems into English, without having any desire to have them published, being diffident of my mastery of that language, but I had the manuscript with me when I came out to the West. And you know that the British public, when these poems were put before them, and those who had the opportunity of reading them in manuscript before, approved of them. I was accepted and the heart of the West opened without delay’. (Tagore 84- 91)

The Nobel Prize acceptance speech of Rabindranath Tagore delivered on 26<sup>th</sup> May, 1921, in Stockholm echoed/echoes the quest of the local for global acceptance across inter-regional/national/lingual borders. Indeed literature has no boundaries and no hegemonic power/authority can control its reach, relevance and recognition.

The localisation in literature in the contexts of India writes in English focuses on the Indianness of India. The Indianness of India writes in English consists in the writer's intense awareness of his entire culture. 'He sounds like a pluralist who celebrates the plurality of Indian traditions and cultures to define the Indianness... as style, a diction, a theme' (Saibaba 64) in place/local specific view. The essence of localisation assimilated in their literature simply resembles the cultural alignments, demographic challenges coupled with the daily chores in the journey of life.

Their writings are vibrant with variety in themes in narratives imbibed through experiences or seen in context of other co-community members in and around the place/local. Such fictions correlate common concerns, issues and quests of the local which evoke nostalgia with an additional familiarity quite absorbing to their psyches. 'All these features create for the reader a sense of something within his experience: indeed localisation is part of the rhetoric a writer employs to induce our participation.' (Ramchand 48) Thus in a number of novels like *The Games Were Coming* (Michael Anthony), *A House for Mr. Biswas* (V. S. Naipaul), *Black Midas* (Jan Crew), *A Quality of Violence* (Andrew Salkey), *Things Fall Apart* (Chinua Achebe), *Untouchable* (Mulk Raj Anand), *Guide* (R.K. Narayan) we do get the impression of a deliberate localisation to invest the coloniser's language with the experiences from the local of the colonised. English language 'which originally carried only an English cultural load and an English experience is being made to reflect' (Ramchand 48) an Indian way of life and an Indian way of experience. Through localisation 'we are seeing a foreign language expressing the way of life, the experience and the particular preoccupation of a community and thus becoming the language of that community.' (Ramchand 48) The attitude and idea incorporating localisation tries to assimilate it in the rhetoric to induce the participation of the local to reach to larger audience/readers.

The new, creative, and interesting in English in India is on the rise due to a phenomenal rise of the middle class with their pan Indian presence opting to cherish their literary taste and quest through attempting to contribute through writing. They look undeterred to deliver and willingly chose local as their forte to weave interesting narratives about the son of the soil and his sojourn as local from innocence to cosmopolitan experience. Localisation in literature may not be a theoretically bound definition for study but can be read and decoded in its multiple derivative aspects. The local as a concern will remain relevant no matter how intensely the era of commodification sweeps over to support global.

Literature as one of the most expression and experience bound art forms had/has been incorporating, foregrounding and formalizing narratives to promote, project and protect the essence of the local. The paper attempts to focus upon India writes in English as a discipline to

systematically study about the reasons, reasoning and rationale behind the literary artefacts incorporating local within literary relevance to state the concept of localisation in literature.

### **Conclusion**

Localisation in literature incorporates the relevance of a number of writers writing in English who even though continuously devise metaphors to suite the language, the language in return responds to suit the needs and quest of the people belonging to the place/local. The blurring of boundaries taken as one of the core characteristics of global must duly advocate delimiting the reach of local literature to the world at large.

The core outcome of this paper is to warn of the danger that in a rush to a global literature or narratives we should not denigrate or abandon the local and localisation in literature. To do so would be to ignore a research area in literature which can offer us access to a variety of cultures/sites/places/fables/myths as well as access to different kinds of narratives. Ignorance of local and localisation in literature may shut the doors of interconnectedness, which is essential for the growth of Literature. The argument throughout the paper is certainly not to abandon any literature rather it advocates the creation of a new domain of knowledge oriented towards study and research in the field of localisation in literature. All such writers contributing to support and deliver to pronounce what is local and the practice of it to keep local relevant through all ways and means, is solely or entirely remain capable to define the concept of localisation in the domain of literature. India writes in English to portray around 'India', 'Indian', 'Indianness', 'Indian sensibilities', 'Indian experiences' and 'Indian sentiments' which is capable enough to become an essential discourse worldwide.

English certainly is as Indian a language as any other spoken in the subcontinent. As AijazAhmad too puts it quite succinctly when he says that 'one cannot reject English now on the basis of its initially colonial insertions, any more than one can boycott the railways for the same reason.' (Ahmad 77) Therefore acceptance of language leads to acceptance of literature irrespective of its point of origin whether local/global.

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