

## English in India - Servitude in Freedom or Freedom in Servitude?

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### Abstract

Of all the legacies of British colonial rule, India has not yet come to reasonable political and intellectual terms with English. Its legacy is at once prized and discounted, strongly desired and vehemently decried, by the very Indians who recognize English to be their sole medium and message for determining where they stand in such crucial matters as trade and business, education and culture, national and international relations. This essay argues that English in a multilingual, multicultural India ought to be different from its colonial name and address, an argument buttressed by a brief discussion in its final section of a parabolic allusion to *The Tempest*, courtesy of Bill Ashcroft, that tells us that the freedom to make the lesson theirs in a language refashioned by them is a prerogative of learners. That English alone among the languages of India makes its users aware of this prerogative accounts for its unique status and continuing influence among the Indians.

**Keywords:** Modernity, Minute on Indian Education, Neo-Macaulayism, English among the *Bhasha(s)*, Indian language(s), translation

*History may be servitude,*

*History may be freedom.*

T. S. Eliot, 'Little Gidding'

English continues to be the unusual bond that it has been in India across vast linguistic and cultural divides among classes and castes for about two hundred years. At once a language most effective in bonding the élite classes of India, English still has the power to hold them in seeming bondage. This makes it a fascinating subject of more than 'academic' interest. The

enormous power English wields in administrative and academic matters, its purchase on all varieties of modernity on global offer, and its continued appeal to all aspiring classes in a country of impressive demographic dividend are subjects widely debated in India. The Indians do not however seem to consider seriously enough the possibility that the illusion of freedom English has given them might well have deprived them of even an illusion of being so disillusioned. While the dubious role English has played in reforming a British colony into a modern nation might be easier to discern, its divisive and imperialist tendencies are still discernible in India's curricular choices and pedagogy, the translation of Indian classics, the political deference to Anglo-American global models of development, and certain neo-Macaulayist tendencies of Indian intellectuals.

Few questions leave us more confounded than those relating to English in societies where the language first arrived with the trader/invader. While English is India's Second Official Language, and used widely in formal and official circumstances by metropolitan India, its fluent users would be no more than five to six per cent of a population of 1.28 billion. In a society of wide caste/class/regional/ linguistic differences and disparate socio-economic growth, some knowledge of English is undoubtedly an asset for an average Indian. Furthermore, what makes English a subject of more than academic interest (which indeed it still retains, punningly, for to be educated at higher levels in India means to be educated in English as well) is the allegedly dubious role it has played and continues to play in the making of a modern nation. The latter role, however, is certainly not merely of academic interest. The question still provokes some animated debate among India's public policy makers and intellectuals. What breaks past the discipline of irony is the freedom the Indians seem to have gained by their continuing servitude to English.

Such paradoxes of inheritance upon which history sometimes makes inheritors reflect can only be explained by an insight from Walter Benjamin (1996) who once remarked that: 'Knowledge and truth are never identical; there is no true knowledge and no known truth.' Nevertheless, he conceded, 'certain pieces of knowledge are indispensable for an account of truth' (p. 279). Now, what if the 'certain pieces of knowledge' relating to their English are vouchsafed to the Indians *by* English, and not just *in* it? What if, as Laura Doyle (2012) reflects in her Afterword to a volume on Global Modernisms, English has already positioned the discussants rather ineluctably in a language that cannot but present their 'other' Modernisms/Modernities as always 'belated,' and 'derivatory,' trying hard to catch up with Anglo-American 'originals'? 'Constrained by an Anglophone circumference,' she observes how 'this excavating, mapping, reorienting, rethinking, rehinging, and unsilencing occurs in

English' (p. 670), an awkward gesture historical transactions of Other Modernisms must learn somehow to live with. That indeed is the history of English for the Indians who have begun to realize that the progress of this language (in places and among peoples whose ethnic variety and native linguistic resources had proved mindboggling to the British administrators) through two tumultuous centuries of political activity both across colonial India and the British empire, was far too complicated for the linguistic geographers to monitor let alone map with any degree of certainty or accuracy. Since the maintenance of educational records and registering stationery was considered ancillary to the exigencies of political and economic book-keeping during the colonial period, and neither synchronic nor diachronic records exist even for the presidencies, students of English in India must draw upon an assorted, unorganized, and widely disparate archive of local initiatives such as school records, periodical presses and translations, minutes and logbooks of nationalist caucuses, private collections and book-clubs, and a large body of personal memorabilia and private documents of the nineteenth century that have begun to surface in the Indian languages, the *bhashas*. Institutional narratives so archived tend to be notoriously biased and riddled with contradictory data and unseemly blanks. One could imagine how 'true knowledge' and 'known truth' sometimes play handy-dandy in English that still manages to remain as 'authentic' as any *bhasha* with which it had shared discursive space for almost two centuries.

What indeed makes for the 'linguistic imperialism' of English<sup>1</sup> is its long history as the language of British colonial rule on the Indian subcontinent, a history and politics it shares somewhat with two former languages of colonial dominance, namely, Sanskrit and Persian respectively. What complicates this history even more is the credibility of a colonial narrative that often reminds us that there couldn't have been anything more beneficial to the Indians than the gift of English and the innumerable modernities it sponsored under the benign British rule. The earliest, and by far the most persuasive, version of this narrative is credited to T. B. Macaulay whose infamous Minute of 1835 proffered modernity to the Indians through English education. That education, according to Macaulay, would not only create a new class of Indians who would interpret the greatness of imperial munificence but in time would feel obliged to pass on the English 'benefits' to other Indians. Reform and development of a backward people would thus begin with this 'filtration' and hopefully India would never regret this unique experience and experiment; or so believed Macaulay when he presented his Minute to the British parliament in 1835. Shrewd commentaries on English education have observed however that the phenomenal success of Macaulay's narrative was buttressed by an

overzealous bureaucracy it spawned, one that outMacaulayed Macaulay in the rigours of civil administration and the Indian Penal Code. Here is one brief comment as sample:

English was introduced as a conduit of reform, a means of keeping India in step with (although respectfully behind) the continuing advancement of the West. Ironically, it also became a gesture of removal, increasing the distance between government and the governed and establishing an Olympian bureaucracy within a steel frame of self-righteousness. [...] The British stayed aloof, physically in the segregated world of their cantonments and psychologically on the protective heights of Western superiority and on the platform of racist theories erected later on those heights. (Rajan 1999, p. 193)

For a country that is given to gloating over its demographic dividend, it is hardly surprising that for the Indian youth English is certainly aspirational. Those in the business of English (and Business English) in India never tire of impressing upon the youth the affinities of English with exemplary business practices, centres of sophisticated work and global outreach. And yet, the Indian youth are probably the most neglected among the sections of this country in terms of educational opportunities, employment, social welfare, health-care, self-help orientation and training. Most ironically, such questions are still ‘academic’ and debated in the public media and classrooms across the country largely *in English*. Since the ‘academic’ in this sense borders on the reprehensibly political and pragmatic, English seems to have devised at once a way of questioning itself (somewhat ingenuously, I believe) and so holding fast to its putative dominance in matters relating to education and culture. So much so that no problem worth India’s urgent attention is a problem unless it figures in English; once English casts it as a problem, however, it cannot look anything other than ‘academic’ to the larger sections of Indian public that still believe that *the powers that be* are *seized of the matter* and will *do the needful*.

No wonder these last three phrases are the most widely bandied about clichés of Indian bureaucracy, and probably the most cynically dismissed by the educated public. For the Indian civil servants were smart enough to learn and repeat such expressions that help hedge their office-notes and comments. That those very phrases also have considerable potential to stymie any immediate public action, and thereby cause another deadly flare-up of the same problem, was an alarming prospect many national leaders had feared when the Indians were seen to hanker after English education and scientific advancement sponsored by the British. As early as 1909, for example, M. K. Gandhi (1997) realized that the worst effects of British colonial rule would be seen, in the long run, when Indians unproblematically conflate ‘modern’ with

‘English’ and vice versa. All this modernity will ‘make India English,’ he said, or lead to an ‘English rule without the English man’ (p. 28). The demand for more and more western institutions and the ideas that underpin them - dress, food, entertainment, pedagogics, health/hygiene and medical practices, railways, public policies and projects, the law and parliamentary system...- signalled for Gandhi the subsumption of English and modernity in the Indian mind. When we see the persistence of Neo-Macaulayism in India, we ought to concede somehow that Gandhi’s fears were not wholly unfounded. The *Report of the University Education Committee* of 1949 endorsed Gandhi’s fear by observing that ‘The use of English divides the people into two nations, the few who govern and the many who are governed, the one unable to talk the language of the other, and mutually incomprehending [sic]’ (p. 316). Put differently, English has some strange way of distancing Indians from themselves and making way for unfair discrimination and stigmatization, for engineering and sustaining democratically untenable schisms between and among workers, institutions, and communities. More perniciously, all these divisions and differences are hard to trace directly to a language or a culture, a source called English, an authority that seems to emanate from some unknown centre outside India, a supervening power to which none of the privileged classes in India is able to meaningfully respond, let alone offer self-determined resistance. In absenting itself from the immediate scene of political action, English has succeeded nonetheless in promising to new India a modernity other societies are unlikely to acquire without it, or in offering multiple projects and prospects under its aegis that are bound to remain unfinished. The crucial question English raises now is whether the Indian élite wants the modernity that still remains unfinished even in their own understanding of it. Certainly this grim vindication of the Gandhian scenario of ‘English rule without the English man’ needs no further debate. The grand narratives of modernity (with an enormous English underpin) have come under fire in postcolonial debates by Indian scholars abroad.<sup>2</sup> They have once again echoed Gandhi’s critique of English modernity by worrying about the servitude it imposes on pre-modern societies, their cultural ‘otherness’ interpreted to be a lack only western modernity could somewhat mitigate. Now this is a crucial detail the reformist agenda of English India has not yet quite registered. If one centres English and relegates all non-English thought and Indian languages to a periphery, English is at best an illusion of freedom, at worst nothing short of servitude. Modernity contradicts itself when English practically pre-empts debate by depriving us of democratic options and avenues for individual and social wellbeing. In the simultaneous and rivalling locations of cultural modernity in today’s world, Homi Bhabha (1994) raises the following question with this apprehension in mind: ‘what is modernity in those colonial conditions where

its imposition is itself the denial of historical freedom, civic autonomy and the ‘ethical’ choice of refashioning?’ (p. 241) The point is that unless the English-educated Indians are vigilant, the very modernity of their English might becloud their vision and might deprive them (if it hasn’t already) of their cultural illusion of being disillusioned.<sup>3</sup>

Take, for example, Macaulay’s Minute. While reading the Minute in a course called ‘Victorian Literature and Thought,’ my class and I see it as swelling a cultural debate resonant with discriminations and devolutions that characterized the Victorian elite mind of the 1830s, bracketed now with other select and abridged texts (such as W. H. Russell’s *Diary in India*, J. A. Froude’s ‘The English in the West Indies,’ T. N. Mukharji’s ‘A Visit to Europe’...) in *The Norton Anthology: The Victorian Age*, deterministically framed as specimens of prose reflections upon ‘Empire and National Identity.’ As the editors of the *Anthology* point out, the Minute breathed the air of *noblesse oblige*, ‘the assumption that Britain [ought to] bestow the benefits of its culturally and morally superior civilization upon a lesser people’ (p. 1608). While England’s burden of trusteeship, its benevolent zeal in extending cultivation to alien shores, makes some sense in studying Victorian England, the postcolonial Indian classroom seems to have another take on the same Minute. Magnifying it out of proportions, nearly all postcolonial readings invest the Minute with a power which indeed it did not have, then or now. For the Minute hardly recommended the abolition of education in Indian languages or sought to deprive the Indians of their native linguistic agency. The Orientalist and Vernacularist bids on the Indian educational scene post-Macaulay were weak; they were down but certainly not out.

These considerations sometimes make us wonder what sound logic of curricular politics enjoins the Departments of English and Higher Education across India to routinely hold Macaulay’s Minute in continued deference. We are not sure either whether their deference is mock or earnest, whether they view the Minute as historical contingency, or as the bedrock of their self-reassurance and *raison d’être*. In any case, I cannot imagine anyone in an Indian English Department advancing a more convincing argument than Macaulay’s:

How, then, stands the case? We have to educate a people who cannot at present be educated by means of their mother tongue. We must teach them some foreign language. The claims of our own language it is hardly necessary to recapitulate. It stands pre-eminent even among the languages of the West. It abounds with works of imagination not inferior to the noblest which Greece has bequeathed to us [...]. Whoever knows that language, has ready access to all the vast intellectual wealth, which all the wisest nations of the earth have created and hoarded in the course of ninety generations (Macaulay 1965, p. 110).

If, nearly 200 years after the Minute, no Indian language has yet made a claim challenging Macaulay's cultural arrogance, or if such a claim cannot now be made regardless of English India, the fault surely is with the management of India's linguistic resources so mindlessly left to some state institution's devices. Independent India was far too busy managing its material resources while leaving its very rich and vibrant cultural assets to ministries and academies that were destined to go to pot through decade after decade of political and economic misrule. It has sometimes seemed conspiratorial for a free India to invest heavily in English and underfeed its languages in a mean spirit that shames even the imperialists. It is indeed a sad state of affairs when no linguistic group within India can freely communicate with another group unless English (and to a very small measure, Hindi) mediates as an interpreter or translator. Now the Utilitarian provenance of English is well known. English, it would appear, charges a handsome fee for any such meditation when goods and services delivered at academic or administrative doors, and the Indian languages have all along been willy-nilly paying the tithe unmindful of the loss of their vast and varied cultural produce in the bargain.

The dominance of English is nowhere more directly palpable than in the near-monopolistic English translation of Indian literatures. During the annual literary festivals across India we are treated to the routine debates (in English!) about the greatness of the *bhashas* and the alleged favours English receives from official and private agencies. The celebrated Indian English writer is often an Atticus, so goes the *bhasha*-writers' rant, who can 'Bear... no brother near the throne.' English sets non-negotiable terms of literary production and standards for the market; the Indian languages have merely to comply. More crudely but truly, nothing that English cannot 'receive,' or can take in linguistically and disseminate on its culturally resolute terms, will ever reach other parts of India, let alone abroad. The asymmetrical reception and transmission of Indian literatures abroad was 'one of the unresolved mysteries of the global marketplace of literature' for Meenakshi Mukherjee (2008, p. 14), although in the later pages of her essays on Indian literary culture and memory, *Elusive Terrain*, she indicates that English publishing has always been discriminatory when it comes to publishing Indian novels in English. The 'multinational companies,' she regrets, '...never, I repeat, never take up Indian novels in translation...' (p. 103). Far from honouring reciprocal strengths and losses of languages as equals, English-as-translator assumes the self-appointed role of an ethico-ideological gatekeeper who determines the nature and extent of what (and how much) of 'vernacular' India should reach (or reach out to) its other. That 'other' India, which Mukherjee and her co-editor Nissim Ezekiel once called 'Another India,' is much larger, culturally and historically much more diverse and vibrant, than English allows.<sup>4</sup> When the Master rules,

Indians had better master the language of the Master. Protocols of an English Club of the colonial era are clearly in force when English translations cross borders and close gaps within India. This invisible repression, abridgement, or downright abrogation of linguistic rights of Indian regions, ethnic groups and minority dialects hardly ever figures in any document of India's official literary cultures. It is anyone's guess how the Indians who do not know any English feel estranged and helpless when they must confront the State that speaks to them in no other language of law or governance. Larger and larger sections of the public, among them even those who know English somewhat but not the language of legal redress and appellate bodies, have begun to feel that India at present is another country and they do things differently there, even before they grow old to appreciate the logic of L. P. Hartley's famous saying. What Giorgio Agamben (2005) calls 'the state of exception,' where the suspension of the rule of general law in times of peace by a sovereign power, may be few and far between in elected democracies, but India is not unknown to such veiled 'states of exception' off and on. *What is banned and withdrawn from public circulation, for how long and why, are all couched in strange officialese of a kind upon which even the educated Indian public draw a desperate blank.*<sup>5</sup>

Most Indian intellectuals, especially those most heard or seen on the public media, belong to the academy or quasi-academic bodies and they choose to respond to contentious socio-cultural issues of the most elitist if self-serving kind. Of course they are educated in English but one cannot be sure that they are 'politically' sound or conscious when it comes to the national and regional issues that beset ordinary Indians. The best of them however are self-reflexive to a degree that compares them favourably with their counterparts in other parts of the world. No matter how well-meaning, they cannot easily dismount from their hobby horses upon which they have been lodged by respective political ideologies transmitted to them in English and through the Western media. An implicit loyalty to Western modes of thought and expression therefore gives them a uniformly colourless *habitus*, probably unbeknownst to even the cleverest of them. That perhaps helps us see why they look pigmies beside their distinguished forebears of nineteenth century India. The leading lights of India's national movement were effortlessly and proudly bilingual. They mastered English with an express desire to talk to the world at large, but never neglected to speak to their compatriots in their own languages and regional dialects. 'The Indian intellectual who grew up under the British learnt to love the language of his [sic] ancestors,' observes Ramachandra Guha (2004) who bemoans the rarity of such among his contemporaries, but adds that the earlier generation of intellectuals also showed 'a healthy appreciation for the tongue of the rulers as well. The best of these intellectuals were bilingual, in keeping with the cultures they loved and worked in' (p.

3). Sadly, independent India saw the gradual decline of the *bhashas* on the national scene. Very few among the public intellectuals of the day seem to have real stakes in their languages for they talk mostly among themselves (when they are on talking terms at all), ignoring the largely multilingual non-metropolitan India (derisively, albeit under one's breath, called *Bhārat*, meaning far too mythic and musty for immediate or serious attention). 'There is an increasing *separation* of [public] discourses,' regrets Guha,

with some speaking and writing in English, and many others doing so in their own tongues. Few are the scholars now who can travel between these very separate worlds. [...] Peasants in the countryside often speak only one language, but in the cities, workers, clerks and artisans are often conversant with three or four languages. I want here simply to state the plain fact ... that Indian intellectuals today are less in tune with popular sensibilities than they were when we were ruled by the British (p. 3).

Perhaps the good sense the older generations in India had had in nurturing the *bhashas* in order to cultivate English, their belief that the real strength of any additional language to the Indian linguistic repertory, 'our' English in this case, was (or ought to be) predicated on the sheer strength of our *bhashas* had very little indeed to do with a 'subaltern nationalism' of the kind Dipesh Chakrabarty identified with the Indian peasants (in contradistinction to the English-educated Nehruvian élite nationalist) in his *Provincializing Europe* (2000). Nor did their robust common sense and political sanity hardly influence those educationalists who had later begged for fancy methods and models for teaching English from the British Council and the US Educational Foundation. (It is not for nothing that the trade manuals of these agencies still manage to convince the unsuspecting Indians that English is the Champion of the Humanities and the First among Instrumentalists. For all the animus against the 'job-stealing Indians,' the Anglo-American corporates have a sneaking regard for the heavily-accented Indian English nurtured on fairly sound orthographic and grammatical principles.) No one cared to wonder why the best of English teachers from India schooled abroad were respected there all the more for their command of their native languages *besides* English. The fairly impressive TOEFL scores of Indian students from metropolitan areas attests to the fact that the best English schools located here continue to turn out highly proficient learners whose diglossic facility compares with top-class students from the Anglo-American worlds with whom they compete. (Their Chinese counterparts, let's recall, are pretty poor in diglossic proficiency which makes them laughably insensitive to language varieties and contexts of English usage).<sup>6</sup>

What indeed helps Indian intellectual commerce across the world is the cumulative purchase on our native languages alongside English in our access to foreign multicultural and occasionally incompatible value systems and ideological perspectives. Multiple accesses to languages are known generally to facilitate the mind's movement between value systems, and such a proficient mind questions the objectivity and rationale of each value system in order to assert its own with peculiar earnestness and ethical force. The urgent need therefore for envisaging ELT initiatives across India within the richly diverse spectrum of Indian languages has often been proclaimed, but the evil of English monolingualism seems to persist in all our schools. 'Overlooked are the ways in which English always needs to be seen in the context of other languages,' rues Alastair Pennycook (2008); in a globalizing world, English had better be seen 'as a language always in translation.' For the monolingualist ascendancy of English is hardly sustainable in this century when English has been continuously crossing and re-crossing international borders thanks to the majority of its non-native speakers. 'English is always a language in translation,' argues Pennycook, 'a language of translingual use' (p. 34).

If Pennycook's wholly convincing logic fails to appeal to us, it is not difficult to see why no one feels distressed about India's reliance on English monolingualism in presenting and representing itself abroad. In its ambition to join the super powers of the world and partner with the global rich, India must harness all its English might rather than speak a language which it celebrates nationally (or notionally?) as its *Hindi Divas*, the Hindi day. Apart from fanning chauvinistic flames and thundering jingoistic claims within the country, Hindi has been least effective in talking across India's multilingual borders or speaking to an international audience or the media.<sup>7</sup> Yogendra Yadav is perhaps alone among the Hindi-speaking public voices to deplore the annual brouhaha over Hindi on a day he nicknames 'Hindi-rance [hindrance] Divas.' He believes that Hindi had flourished in India not because of governmental patronage but despite it. Multilingual speakers from India would unreservedly endorse his 'proposal to replace "Hindi Divas" with "Bhasha Divas," a day to mark the linguistic diversity and richness' of India (2014, p. 11).<sup>8</sup> In any case, even the most sophisticated users of English within India's diplomatic corps or the polyglottal External Affairs pundits on global parade seem to be as politically shrewd as Edward Said (2002) in the following passage where he cautions against an English trap into which all negotiators from small worlds are likely to fall, a trap set for them by the most powerful international Anglo-American media:

[T]ransparent, simple, clear prose presents its own challenges, since the ever-present danger is that one can fall into the misleadingly simple neutrality of a journalistic World-English idiom that is indistinguishable from CNN or USA-Today prose. The quandary is a real one, whether in the end to repel readers (and more dangerous, meddling editors), or attempt to win readers over in a style that perhaps too closely resembles the mind-set one is trying to expose and dismiss. The thing to remember, I keep telling myself, is that there isn't another language at hand, that the language I use must be the same used by the State Department or the President when they say that they are for human rights, and I must be able to use that very same language to recapture the subject, reclaim it, and reconnect it to the tremendously complicated realities these vastly over-privileged antagonists of mine have simplified, betrayed, and either diminished or dissolved (pp. 28-29).

Why is English at a remove from, at any rate seemingly beyond the reach of, even the most gifted and privileged users of that language in India? Why do those who claim titular rights over English keep those who do not have any English at all at such socio-cultural remove? Imperialism of a new kind, somewhat of submerged cultural imperialism, seems to operate in the erstwhile colonies when the predators and marauders have no more territories to invade and annex, and no more people to subjugate. The cultural imperialists for whom English now serves as a serviceable weapon are however not foreigners, the proverbial barbarians at the gate, or terror-mongers from across the border. Home-grown, even native, they are the 'new barbarians' who share Indian space and are all about us. They will never leave us alone by constantly adverting to 'our nation' and 'nativity,' but devilishly executing institutional discrimination by establishing English norms of access and success with scant regard for equal opportunities in education and employment. They cannot help seeing in their own people great opportunity for subjugation and exploitation, and that too, in ways hardly perceptible to the victims of such subjugation and exploitation. English perhaps has now begun to appear as that new colonial agency in today's India, at least for the most part. If English unites Indians to stand and divides them to fall, it is because there has been no serious challenge to the institutional logic of its presence and influence among the Indians. They have not quite been able to see in English true liberation of the kind Edward Said never tired of underscoring, after Franz Fanon: '*L*iberation, and not nationalist independence, is the new alternative, liberation by its very nature involves ... a transformation of social consciousness beyond national consciousness' (1990, p. 83; italics in the original). You often see the cultural extremists and those on the liberal left strike vigilantist gestures and poses. When they speak English, we can hardly tell one ideological group from the other.

We might only wonder to what historical antecedents this awkward schism among the Indian élite is traceable. The rivalry between North Indian Hindi and Urdu for the status of a national language began long before Indian independence, its linguistic politics complicated further by religious biases and communal stances to which English was often drawn as witness, an arbiter and appellate entity.<sup>9</sup> It is not quite clear to the historians of multilingual India whether the role English had played in this highly emotive public issue was that of a fair-minded arbiter or of a mean-spirited exploiter. During the anti-colonial struggle known as *swadeshi*, it was clear that all foreign goods and services that caused economic exploitation of India were to be boycotted but English still occupied its pride of place in the political affairs of the two national leaders of the Congress, Jawaharlal Nehru and Mohammad Ali Jinnah.

If the Neo-Macaulayists, the new cultural imperialists of India do not see English as conducive to transforming or awakening social consciousness beyond their narrowly left-leaning radicalism and call for an enlightened liberalism, their opponents are sworn enemies of anything that smacks of the 'West' or 'English.' Sometimes it is hard to see why the two opposing groups seem to revile and revere at once modernity *and* English; or suddenly turn impromptu custodians of Indian, Hindu, Muslim, Minority, Tribal and Caste interests; why they feel compelled to proclaim themselves as the sole defenders of a political, religious, or cultural agenda the rest of India can neither comprehend nor subscribe to in good faith. (I desist from naming and shaming them but all of them own and maintain English websites that feed hate and misinformation worldwide for those hungry for them.) When it suits them, English is home-grown, unmodern, traditional, and Indian; after all, isn't there a family called 'Indo-European'? - an ideal medium for open dialogue with their chosen kind; otherwise, English and western modernity are corrupt and corrupting. Add to this a perverted notion of correctness and propriety that courts a synecdochic fallacy where English stands for all that is universally desirable and conducive to modernity in India: ascendant corporatism, sophisticated life-style, smart-city infrastructure, advanced developmental models, media/communication, global reach/power, cultural values/clout, economic liberalization, global trade, geopolitics and business, etc.<sup>10</sup> Ironically, much the same synecdochic fallacy imputes to English all evil motives of the colonial era, especially the colonial master's language trying to dismantle Indian identity by false promises and cunning inveiglement.<sup>11</sup> When a violently bitter confrontation between those who have got it all wrong about 'English' and the 'West' becomes inevitable, we are able to see clearly the mendacity of rival claims that conflate English, Modernity, and the West if only to hate whoever refuses to see these concepts synecdochically. Writing on the complete dissociation between civility and social sense in contemporary India, Dipesh

Chakrabarty (2012) instances the extreme reactions of the illiberal left and right in India for whom the West/English is perhaps a deliberately misunderstood concept:

The West is no longer a question of civilization but of certain kind of aggressive pursuit of freedom in consumption and lifestyle, focused on the freedom of the individual to express him or herself and not be oriented to a community except in seeking protection in public life from violence and oppression that could be directed towards such an expression-seeking individuals. On the other side stands a very violent, oppressive, and patriarchal construction of 'tradition', mortally opposed to this figure of the individual that it construes as 'Western' as 'foreign' and a threat to 'tradition' and which therefore subjects the allegedly Westernized women to patriarchal and undemocratic violence. (p. 150)

In short, among those who prefer to keep English away from the underprivileged Indians are, sadly, those who refuse to see English as resurgent subjectivity, subjectivity still evolving and open to process, invention, and growth in a society where English must co-exist and engage with the social reality of Indian languages. What further complicates the picture is the poor understanding of standards and the Standard that English Language educators are exhorted to uphold in South Asia by the professional bodies sponsoring programmes for English teachers. Somehow the bugbear of the Standard still terrifies and mystifies curricular reformers and the teachers at the high school and intermediate college levels. They still believe in the absolute Standard of English textbooks and audio-materials, now freely available from Anglo-American websites. They hardly realize that the standard is not the Standard Absolute, analogous to Latin against the vernaculars of Rome, but some provisional authority to compare with the Indian speech patterns and writing exercises teachers could draw upon. Use of this provisional standard (in written texts and spoken records) will enable them to see how inventive and creative English in India is, and has been. It is perhaps in that indeterminate non-hegemonic, intermediary zone that English breaks past tenses and time, historical and present time, and breathes the natural air of Indian streets, home, and offices. The ordinary against the extraordinary, an adaptive and improvised Indian word or a locally realigned syntactic formulation against a staid and moribund English pattern, often surprises the world. Languages evolve not only within but without their historical precincts, and English has pre-eminently shown us how they do in a globalized world. In fact the new English of this century will grow only from such extensions of the Standard - the tensions between the classical literate/ literary,

and the popular and contemporary, the non-literary uses beyond the classical and the canonical standards.

From such dialectical exchanges between English and the *bhashas* grew the landmark events of India's national struggle for independence. But today, when the *bhashas* and English share no common cultural ground, the exchanges between/ among them are no more assumed to be crucial, and English further seems monologically poised for driving a fast-paced globalizing economy, India ought to worry more and more about what cultural forms from within and without are all set to replace the country's long-standing institutional and disciplinary forms. What integrative role will English play in this new scenario where India's human and cultural resources can command more global purchase than they used to in the colonial past? Much the same anxiety inflects Pramod K. Mishra's observation that 'it is important to understand the divide English occasions ... by its industrially propelled force from without and limited distribution within India, interpellating India's ruling classes, making them for the most part one-way customers and consumers of Western forms, but also peripherally keeping the masses and their languages at a disadvantaged position' (2002, p. 403).

'It is part of the very nature of the objects and documents studied by the humanities,' observes Susan Stewart (2005), 'that they can alter our apprehension of time. They are the archives of all the generations before us, archives of folly as well as wisdom, and carry the full weight of our legacy from the past, which we otherwise bear partially and largely unconsciously' (p. 102). From what I have seen, I have virtually no reason to believe so far that the archives of English India have either been built as national mission, or their scattered and disparate holdings will carefully be catalogued under at least three broad and distinct headings: Folly, Wisdom, and Dubious Gains. Were they to be so distinctly catalogued, the Dubious Gains folders, I should imagine, would far outnumber the other two, but what is likely to engage future historians of English in India would be the indeterminate power games the privileged Indians had played under the aegis of English in and around the time of the British transfer of power to the Indians. What indeed was this 'power'? And how was this wielded, and to what ends?

The answers to these questions will depend largely on how the national leaders and policy-makers of independent India began to see English for all intents and purposes, and how blinkered the vision of Indian education still is. Like T. S. Eliot's History, for the Indians, English may be servitude, English may be freedom.<sup>12</sup> The power that the Indian national leadership saw in English for the most part was simply the empowerment of the élite classes, an emergent middle-class leadership loyal to the Indian National Congress, especially those

who sought to govern and enjoy political clout in a newly independent, developing country. And that power, unfortunately, was not different at all from the ‘English’ of nineteenth-century India, particularly of the Hindu College and Young Bengal variety. ‘As a cultural category,’ remarks Kumkum Sangari (1999), ‘English was multiply and irreconcilably constituted as *choice, colonial imposition, cultural threat, and class power*; it condensed the political, economic, and social relations of the Bengal middle class but with differing implications for different sections’ (p. 146; italics in the original). The differential that the Indian élite power has seen in English is at least as old as Macaulay. That being so, the thought that power in a free country with a large population would be singular and unmediated; that once power is fluent, it will flow only in one direction (top down); and that the power of English would be much the same across a large country of multilingual, multiethnic populations, was indeed simplistic. And that thought alone has made English ahistorically essential and staid in all our academic discourses involving the curriculum. English among Indian languages has turned out to be a different kettle of fish from the language of dominance and power that the colony had taught the Indians on the strict pedagogical principles of Victorian coordinated skills.<sup>13</sup>

We ought, in other words, to reopen the Dubious Gains folders to which I adverted above. English in India, then, will be more fairly seen as powerful and productive of discursive relations in a country that no longer feels the oppressive might of a colonizing language. Let me cite at least one such attempt at recounting the Dubious Gains in a collection of essays by a group of Indian teachers of English called *The Lie of the Land* (1992). Writing on ‘Derozio: English Teacher,’ Manju Dalmia reflects on the circumstances that led her to examine her ‘ambivalence’ not only to English but the profession to which she remains seriously committed. The substantive part of Dalmia’s essay is devoted to reopening an old case involving Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-1831) whose mission was seriously misunderstood either by himself or the authorities of Hindu College owing to ‘some of the contradictions that governed the enterprise of English literary studies in India [aimed at] moral upliftment, political control, religious enlightenment and social stratification’ (Dalmia 43). The essay is remarkably lucid and reasonably grounded on relevant data, but what is of interest to me here is the personal use to which Dalmia puts the case in reopening a Dubious Gains folder lodged in our English-in-India archives. At this distance that time and space enjoin on such reading, neither Dalmia nor her readers can be sure whether, contrary to the official line, Derozio had indeed served the twin motives of the Anglicists in being instrumental and integrative as a teacher of English; whether, as Dalmia suggests, he had ahistorically accepted ‘the absolute value of [English] texts...’ (p. 61). Once we let that pass, are we now sure of ourselves, of where we live and what

we live for as teachers when the profession of English is in question? For Dalmia the question is somewhat different as she concludes her essay: What risks are a teacher liable to court, or can scrupulously avoid taking, while teaching feminist theory in an English class of women in a Delhi college? If her concluding remarks are apt to disappoint anyone, we had better appreciate her professional candour that certainly makes for serious thought:

[W]ere we to be too successful in bringing our students to an awareness..., we would be creating a conflict between the pressures of their lives ... and the assertion of female individuality in other cultures and in other times that our teaching would uncover. But lacking Derozio's rashness or initiative, we tread carefully in class because we do not want to rock boats or create storms we cannot handle. Our wariness contributes to the ivory tower stigma that English studies has acquired [...] The only two options available to us - radical destabilization of our social structures, or a safe 'formalism' - themselves reveal the contradictions inherent in the project of teaching English in India. (pp. 61-62)

Freed of linguistic bondage to colonial pedagogics and ideological structures, English certainly ought to pose other challenges to those who profess it in India, challenges more creative and constructive than ever imagined by colonial communities and regimes. Drawing upon Michel Foucault's insights on the subtleties of exercising power in unequal socio-political domains, Bill Ashcroft (2009) puts it this way:

The discursive power of language, that is, its function within the ensemble of relations which constitute the power of imperial discourse, is demonstrated precisely in Prospero teaching Caliban how to 'name the bigger light and how the less'. His language 'produces' reality and in the colonial situation becomes a key agent in the 'production' of Caliban himself. The immediate power of Prospero's language lies in his role as 'teacher' and is enabled, in turn, by his physical enslavement of Caliban. This power is not contained as an inherent property of language [...]; rather it is a social practice; it becomes intelligible in the techniques through which language is used (abuse, control, racialization, marginalization). (p. 44)

English in a free country, among a free people of multiethnic and multilingual backgrounds, cannot be the same as English in a colonial classroom, as suggested by the Shakespearean archetype to which Ashcroft alludes. As I see it, the significance of his parabolic allusion is this: no matter what the teacher insists as his lesson (the contrast between the bigger and smaller

light), the pupil will learn only what is most appropriate to him/her in the contrastive light the lesson affords. One cannot but smile at the ironic turn the Enlightenment trope takes in such splendid thought. Simply put, the Lesson of the Master is hardly the lesson of the pupil. Furthermore, in matters of linguistic pedagogy, it would be prudent not to exercise too much control over the imagination of the pupils, or to restrict the meanings of a world which are infinitely rich and resourceful, given that it is the language after all that produces such a world. Take away this power, and English wouldn't be the language it is for the millions of Indians who are now able to harness its power in shaping a new world and new politics where the small-minded elite will have little power.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This is Robert Phillipson's title for his 1992 book. He defines linguistic imperialism as 'The dominance of English [as] asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages' (p. 47). This dominance is arguably the biggest obstacle to social and economic reforms in today's India and the free and fair access to the country's welfare measures including higher education and the job-market for youth.

<sup>2</sup> As for the intellectuals at home in India, the appearance of occasional columns in an English daily or loud protestations of faith on a TV channel are good enough to reassure themselves that English will lead and rule India in the new millennium. The surest sign of Neo-Macaulayist rhetoric is its clever strategy of either begging the question or, as the title to a 'Face-off' column in *The Economic Times* (2009) suggests, of posing a rhetorical question: 'Should English be Abolished?' Now both participants in this 'Face-Off' see English as liberating and empowering. Uday Prakash (a Hindi writer) and Harish Trivedi (a Professor of English) are folded at once into a single party, the former just speaking his mind, and the latter trying hard not to let his mask slip. Certainly the Professor wins hands down in this staged 'debate' for the simple reason that his *English*, unsurprisingly stronger than the Hindi writer's, betrays Neo-Macaulayism for all its ritualistic bow to a celebrated Urdu writer: '[N]early all of us Indians when we speak English are, in fact, being deeply untrue to what we really are' (Uday and Trivedi 2009, p. 11).

<sup>3</sup> The dangerous implications of sponsoring English with a view to virtually destroying indigenous resources and marginalizing native linguistic efforts for all time were not quite unknown to the colonial administrators. As Kumkum Sangari (1999) notes: 'there were different tendencies even among those administrators who advocated maintaining indigenous institutions, identifying knowledge with inducement, improvement with reward. Sir Thomas Munro, for instance, saw foreign subjugation and moral improvement as fundamentally contradictory...' (p. 132).

<sup>4</sup> I allude to the publication of an English volume of fiction and poetry mostly translated from Indian languages called *Another India* (1990) which the editors openly acknowledge to be otherwise beyond the possible reach of even the most assiduous bilingual and sympathetic readers of Indian literatures. This volume is admittedly a sampling of the best work that had earlier appeared in *Vāgartha*, a short-lived literary journal that provided a forum for the Indian writers to showcase the best work from Indian languages besides English.

<sup>5</sup> On the banning books and restrictions on freedom to publish material on India's past in the last couple of years, a large number of articles have appeared, the most comprehensive of which is perhaps an essay by an *India Review* Aarti Sethi and Shuddhabrata Sengupta (2014). The bias against English publications is very evident from the cases they have studied.

<sup>6</sup> *Diglossia* refers to the co-existence of two varieties of a language within a speech community, each with its specific functions and domains of appropriate use. The high variety refers to the official or formal; the low refers to the more casual and personal uses of the everyday and intimate circumstances. Diglossic proficiency marks the level of accomplishment where a user recognizes the potential of his/her language to yield accurate and appropriate results depending on his/her choice of the variety demanded by specific purpose/context.

<sup>7</sup> Many Indians often wonder why the Prime Minister of India who avoids speaking English at home, is keen on casting all the key terms of his appeal for FDI in English during his frequent visits abroad. India's 3-Ds, he insisted, favoured great advancement in global trade and economic cooperation with any country willing to invest in India. The 3-Ds, according to him, are demographic dividend, democracy, and demand, none of which, he would concede, came to India without substantial investment in English education.

<sup>8</sup> Whenever Hindi has mounted such rearguard actions, reactions from the non-Hindi speaking public have been swift and withering. See, for example, Sujit Mukherjee's (2001) review of *Bahuvacan* numbers where he wonders whether Hindi is trying hard to survive by commissioning translations and essays in an English journal with a Sanskrit name.

<sup>9</sup> For a sketchy history of Hindi and the dubious role English seems to have played in promoting it as India's national language by marginalizing Urdu, see Harleen Singh (2014) pp. 96-101.

<sup>10</sup> I owe 'synecdochic fallacy' to Marjorie Perloff who uses it in the context of picking a part text/ writer to stand for all the characteristic styles and *Weltanschauung* of a whole artistic period or literary movement.

<sup>11</sup> In times of social unrest and controversial abrogation of the civil rights by the central or state governments, the net-savvy Indian public are deluded with hyper-active social media campaigns and conferences in English. The unsuspecting young and a small section of bigoted population are always the target of indoctrination and coercion. The hate-mongers of all religious persuasions purvey highly contentious misinformation such as ancient India's purchase on plastic surgery, stem cell and aeronautic sciences, sexology and eugenics, etc. The point is that English is routinely harnessed by a section of

Indians toward impressively radical as well as deplorably conservative ends. The fundamentalist right and the progressive left are sometimes equally reminiscent of the adversaries they decry; neither can see the modern as anything but English for all its colonial provenance. The colonial masking of English is at its functionally best when it successfully masks oppressive power.

<sup>12</sup> 'History may be servitude, / History may be freedom.' T. S. Eliot, *Little Gidding III*, lines 164-165.

<sup>13</sup> Vaidehi Ramanathan's *English-Vernacular Divide* (2005) is most sensitive to the vagaries of Indian educational policies and English, and keenly attentive to the English-Indian languages divide. Although focused entirely on select English curricular issues in metropolitan Gujarat, this monograph at least makes an earnest attempt 'to make ... second-language student-teachers more critical, more vigilant and more reflexive of their practices so that they can think of ways of changing aspects of their (TESOL-related) socio-educational worlds' (p. 120). I couldn't agree more with her observation that the privileging of English at and beyond the tertiary level in Indian institutions of higher learning, 'is also simultaneously sending out implicit messages about the generally low regard [they have] for the Vernaculars...' (p. 35).

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