

Preserving the Indian Identity: A Study of English Language and Indian Ethos

Keywords: Indian ethos, English language # linguistic plurality # cultural diversity # colonialism # Indian identity # Bhakti and Sufi traditions # tribal voices # Indian legacyn # postcolonial language #

Dr. Praveen Kumar Anshuman

Associate Professor, Department of English

Kirori Mal College, University of Delhi, Delhi- 110007

Abstract: This paper examines the complex relationship between the English language and Indian ethos, emphasizing the need to preserve Indian identity in an increasingly globalized world. English, initially imposed during colonial rule, has now become a key global medium. However, the unchecked adoption of English at the expense of India's linguistic and cultural plurality risks marginalizing India's rich traditions. The study explores how English can be integrated into Indian society without sacrificing its inherent diversity, focusing on four aspects of linguistic power: linguistic, literary, attitudinal, and pedagogical. By drawing attention to India's cultural multiplicity and its long history of oral traditions, Bhakti and Sufi poetic traditions, and tribal voices, the paper argues for a reorientation that

acknowledges both the modern relevance of English and the necessity of preserving India's native legacies. Additionally, the paper critiques the impact of colonialism and modernity on India's linguistic heritage, suggesting that English, though a powerful tool for global communication, must evolve into a language that reflects India's unique identity. The objective is to ensure that English complements India's linguistic diversity rather than erasing it, and to highlight how India's progress must be rooted in its cultural and historical depth.

Introduction:

This is to bring to our kind notice that India has the legacy which no other country in the world can claim in the similar capacity. Indian ethos with English language is somewhat a crucial issue to be kept in mind and has to be handled with at most care. Here we are supposed to understand English Language in exclusivity and then in inclusive overview with respect to Indian History along with the multiplicity of cultures and literary legacies of the country. We have to consider the English language in its overall arithmetic. And India's progress can't be valuably accountable unless we give something of Indian-ness to anything that we contribute to the world. We can move on English language in such accuracy and precision that the world may get startled but it can't be taken on the cost of sacrificing our innate being, intrinsic naturalness. What should actually be functional is the Indian variety of excellence matching

steps with the world. English language can now be used in its utmost perfection for refining our Indian culture, its linguistic multiplicity and diversity.

English Language:

English, a few centuries ago, was being spoken by just five to seven million people on one, relatively small island, and the language consisted of dialects spoken by monolinguals. Today there are more non-native than native users of English, and English has become the linguistic key used for opening borders: it is a global medium with local identities and messages. English has become a world language, spoken by at least 750 million people. It is more widely spoken and written than any other language. English is now a dominant language in more than 60 countries.

There are two hypotheses concerning language power: the intrinsic-power hypothesis and the acquired-power hypothesis. The first one's claim is that English would intrinsically possess certain linguistic characteristics which would make it a preferred language for international purposes. The second one emphasizes the ways in which a language acquires power, and thus it is also easier to understand. This is a fact that English has spread as a result of exploitation and colonisation. It is worth noting that English is still the language of exclusive social elite especially in many ex-colonies of Britain. There are various reasons for which languages are used in a society. They can be used to expand the speech community, as a vehicle of cultural or religious enlightenment to de-culturate people from their own tradition. This has sometimes been termed as the civilizing process which is in a way distancing from native cultures: the colonizers wanted

to introduce European literature to the natives, at the same time remaining ignorant of their indigenous literatures, to gain economic advantage, to control domains of knowledge and information, and for deception. The following statement by Charles Grant clearly demonstrates the attitudes of the British Raj in India:

The Hindoos err, because they are ignorant and their errors have never fairly been laid before them. The communication of our light and knowledge to them would prove the best remedy for their disorders.

In fact, four basic areas seem to arise in which the power of English is found manifesting itself: linguistic, literary, attitudinal and pedagogical.

1. Linguistic control is reflected, for example, in the codification of a language, the attitudes toward linguistic innovation and lexicographical research.
2. The literary aspect refers to the ethnocentric attitude toward literary creativity in the Outer Circle.
3. The attitudinal aspect is involved in issues concerning the identities of individuals and speech communities. The importance of attitudes gets accentuated when determining the power of a language: what one thinks the language will do for him or her and what others think of a person when he or she uses the language.
4. The pedagogical aspect deals with teaching of English in global contexts. This concern includes the model and the methods for teaching of English, which

are often commercially motivated and quite seldom consider the local needs of different countries.

Indian English:

Indian English is used mainly by Indians whose native language it is not. It is a minority language, but yet a language of national affairs, and its status is often called into question by, as Bailey puts it, "not only by foreigners with their ideas of proper English, but also by Indians who remain ambivalent about its distinctive features and uncertain about its future." In fact, many of transplanted kinds of English are so attuned to the idea of a foreign standard of propriety that their independence remains partial. The emergence of these new varieties has raised questions concerning the power of English language, questions of identity and new pragmatics of the language in new, foreign surroundings. The spread of English across different cultures and languages has meant the diversification of English, which, in turn, raises questions about the standardization of English.

Three phases could be discovered in the introduction of bilingualism in English in India. The first one of them, the missionary phase, was initiated around 1614 by Christian missionaries. The second phase, the demand from the South Asian public (in the eighteenth century) was considered to come about through local demand, as some scholars were of the opinion that the spread of English was the result of the demand and willingness of local people to learn the language. There were prominent spokesmen for English: Raja Rammohan Roy (1772-1833) and Rajunath Hari Navalkar (fl.1770). Roy and Navalkar, among others, were persuading the

officials of the East India Company to give instruction in English, rather than in Sanskrit or Arabic. They thought that English would open the way for people to find out about scientific developments of the West. Knowledge of Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic or of Indian vernaculars would not contribute to this goal.

A letter of Raja Rammohun Roy addressed to Lord Amherst (1773-1857) from the year 1823 is often presented as evidence of local demand for English. Roy embraced European learning, and in his opinion, English provided Indians with the key to all knowledge --all the really useful knowledge which the world contains. In the letter, Roy expresses his opinion that the available funds should be used for employing European gentlemen of talent and education to instruct the natives of India in mathematics, natural philosophy, chemistry, anatomy, and other useful sciences, which the natives of Europe have carried to a degree of perfection that has raised them above the inhabitants of other parts of the world. Roy's letter has been claimed to be responsible for starting the Oriental-Anglicist controversy, the controversy over which educational policy would be suitable for India. The third phase, the Government policy, begun in 1765, when the East India Company's authority was stabilized. English was firmly established as the medium of instruction and administration. English language became popular because it opened many routes of employments. During the governor general-ship Lord William Bentinck in the early nineteenth century, India saw many social reforms. English became the language of record of government and higher courts, and government support was given to the cultivation of Western learning

and science through the medium of English. In this he was supported by Lord Macaulay.

Indian Ethos:

The world can be divided in two dichotomized domains—East and West. West has given to the world the scientific temperament while East has been crucial in yielding the inner science of truth, love and life. Among the Eastern countries, India has a very rich and diverse culture with a great legacy of civilization of more than 5000 years. Variety is the hallmark of Indian culture. India's culture has been enriched by the successive waves of migration. The invaders brought with them their own culture which was amalgamated into Indian way of life and it gave birth to an eclectic mix which can be seen today. India's physical, religious and racial variety is reflected in its culture. This vast cultural diversity is manifested in the monuments - temple, mosques, churches, monasteries, Gurudwaras etc. we have collected together some interesting facts on Indian culture. As far as the varieties of Indian culture is concerned, it goes on and on as infinitum. India has been an enchanting land for all the people round the world. Interrogating the cultural praxis with reference to an understanding of what actually being Indian means within the periphery of India's geographical structure or residing beyond it is the crucial point of discussion.

India has been a vulnerable land, very receptive and fascinating for the unacquainted people of the world. They were attracted towards its cultural tides and depth of literary treasures since time immemorial. Remember Thomas Babington Macaulay, appointed as the

Secretary to the Board of Control under Lord Grey, played a major role in introducing English and western concepts to education in India. He supported the replacement of Persian by English as the official language, the use of English as the medium of instruction in all schools, and the training of English-speaking Indians as teachers. William Jones, the philologist, is known today for making and propagating the observation that classical Greek and Latin seemed to have been derived from Sanskrit. In his Third Anniversary Discourse to the Asiatic Society (1786) he suggested that classical Greek and Latin had a common root and that the two may be further related, in turn, to Gothic and the Celtic languages, as well as to Persian. These people knew the treasures present in Sanskrit language and literature.

If we try to encapsulate the Indian ways of conceiving our society, life and destiny, perhaps there will be no comparison with any other culture of the world. But I am not concerned with what India is to teach and preach to the world at large but rather with the implications and repercussions it has practically in our lives. I ask a very basic question. Who is an Indian? And what culture do the Indian people belong to? What is its religion? What attires it allows its people to wear? Do they really understand what India has contributed to the world and humanity and to what extent do the people thinking themselves to be Indians accord with what India really stands for? Let's take every interrogation one by one.

Who is an Indian?

This question is very pertinent to ask. I am reminded of

a joke. Once I met Mulla Nasiruddin. I heard that Mulla wanted to buy a map of our country but could never do so yet. I asked Mulla, 'Why haven't you purchased the Indian map up till now?' He told me, 'I am thinking of buying it when I will get the exact India.'

'Exact India?', I inquisitively inquired, 'What do you mean by exact India, Mulla?'

'Exact India means indivisible India, no further division. Whenever I am thinking of buying it, suddenly I see Pakistan is excluded from it. Then again when I go to buy, Bangladesh is separate. Again when I go, I come to know about Uttarakhand, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh. And just a few days ago, I determined to buy the map of India, but the jerk I stumbled on was the issue of Tilangana. These divisions are continuously affecting my decision of buying it. I want a complete map of India and so I am waiting for it. And this is why I could buy it yet.'

So who is Indian? The one who is living within the periphery of the map called India at present time. Or will we contradict this fact? But even people before India-Pak division were as much Indians as we are now. Who are the people living in Bangladesh? Are they not Indians? What about people living in the North-East India? Are they really to be called Indians?

People from most of these places were once very much Indian and of Indian soil at certain point of time in the history of the world. Just for example, think about an imagined situation in the past when India had won half of the world? Then who would have been the Indians? Suppose in future, some calamity happens in world politics because of which half of today's India is overtaken by China. Then who will then be the Indians?

What definition do we think to actually equate with the world Indian? Indian culture once was so magnetic that the world was drawn towards it. Many people will object here with the statement that it wasn't in the past only rather it is even now. We see western people getting drawn towards our land in search of something higher, sublimating and transcendental. But could you please show me someone who is the harbinger of Indian legacy, and who is really carrying the spiritual realization. Can you show someone who does not quote about Indian legacy, who doesn't say that India has certain kinds of exclusive people of higher consciousness and who really speaks from the bottom of his experience? What we have in India now are only crooks, thugs and felons in every nook and corner of our country. We surrender the mystics but the person comes out a cheater in an Asharam. Who to believe now? What to believe in? Is it only something related with only the blind faith syndrome?

Now what's Indian's way of living and clothing?

India was once very typical in its attire. Sari was for woman; dhoti and kurta for men. But now if we mark the clothing pattern of Indian, it is difficult to distinguish them from westerners'. From hairstyle to shoes, from capri to top, from eye lash to tattoos, everything is westernized now-a-days. And in the midst of all this, one foreign woman is found wearing a sari with all the typical Indian ornaments? Now the question arises about what's the Indian kind of cloths? Khadi? It's good to talk about it but never to be covered up with. Indian people have become a new kind of western products. Isn't there anything in our legacy and heritage, in our cloths and attires that can prove to be emblematic to

Indians and which can drive others' attention towards it and make them follow? Others come and use it. How many Indians wear the typical Indian cloths? Do we have to say that we have to match steps with the running style and need of the time? Otherwise we will lag behind. Then what do think about Buddhist's cloths, Muslims' attires? Don't we see clarity about western way of clothing and the kind of their cloths? Their cloths are very typical, changing, and easy-going with their environments and advancements. But aren't we on a baffling axiom on what kind of cloth is to be called Indian's? Do we not realize and get perturbed if there is really any?

What's India's religion?

In India, there are many religions of their own kind. They speak of greater values. It doesn't seem pertinent to move on the issue what India's religion is especially when we haven't yet known what India is. Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, Parsism, Buddhism, Jainism are here alongside new schools of Patanjali Yoga Center, The Art of Living, Osho International Resort etc. But the question remains enigmatically haunting among all these—which one is Indian religion? India is a secular and democratic country and chiefly understood as a Hindu country which has great capacity of patience and intrinsic power of absolute absorption. And by dint of this, it has given place to myriad kinds of cultures, religions and civilizations of the world on its heart. So can we say India's religion is the Hindu religion as it is the religion which is majorly attached with the Indian culture and tradition since time immemorial? And sometimes we know Indian religion is synonymously used with India. India means Hindu. Then what do we

have to call the people falling under the curtain of other religions inside India? Are they not Indians? Do they not have anything to say that their religion is also Indian religion? And then there is further segmentation in Hinduism—all fighting each other, some trying to preserve the position of superior being and others getting continuously blowed down and stating a fact that everyone is equal.

The Dalits of India? Are they Indians? What religion do they belong to? Hinduism? Really? It's the greatest joke done with them. The atrocious treatment by the upper class society of the great religion Hinduism has given to this section of its own periphery much harsher and more bitterly cruel system than any other treatment in life to be entrenched. Why don't Dalits think of themselves as a part of Hinduism? Why did Baba Saheb Ambedkar renounce this religion and accept Buddhist way of life? And why many more people from this section of Hinduism take shelter in Buddhism by conversion? Lord Buddha has been declared the tenth incarnation of God Vishnu. Then why was Buddhism could not flourish in India surprisingly? Most of the neighbouring countries of India were full of Buddhism opening its petals in complete bloom. It's not only the case with India. Other countries have also treated men of greater significance and value in the same way. Jesus was crucified; Socrates poisoned. And in the later phase, they are established as great people creating one of the biggest religions in the world or the greatest scholar ever seen on the horizon of Athens respectively. Coming on the point, are Buddhists Indian now? Does their religion have any ground to say that it is Indian religion after Buddha being the last incarnation

of Hindu God? All the religions have their place in India. Then don't we think they should keep the claim intact that they are of India? If we say, they are not Indian religions, what are they then? Who do they belong to? Or they remain just in a limbo. If we say yes, then why so many religions as every religion talks perhaps the similar truths and lessons? It speaks of what when we say emphatically that India was the Jagat Guru. Many of us may not agree with the use of was, they will say India is. But can Indian Parsi or Indian Islam or Indian Sikh or Indian Buddhist become the Jagat Guru? Or it's only the Indian Hindu?

What is Indian Culture?

Keeping choti on the sahastrar, the top of man's bald head, using tilak on the forehead, doing all kinds puja and prarthana, wearing dhoti and kurta or going to temples? Is Muslims' way of living not Indian? Is that not a part of Indian culture? Again what I have referred to is the Hindu Culture and its ways? But then the question arises—is Hindu culture Indian Culture? If no, then what do we have to name them. If yes, what about different cultures persisting in Hindu sub-communities themselves; and more so in the some segregated sections themselves where they perform sometimes in diametrically opposite ways? The development on every level in the Western countries is a natural outcome of their search in the outer surface of life. We have forgotten our own language in which the eternal songs were once being sung. And in the outer search where the West is far ahead of us, we try to compete with them which is a herculean task to be accomplished. Our country is hot comparatively but we are meat eaters, drunkards. Despite our geographical

acquisitions, we use all kinds of dress of the western kind because of which we allow consciously or unconsciously their commercial and economic vested interest inside our land.

Again then what're our cloths? Is there any? In ancient India, there were people called sanyasins wearing a saffron colour long rob but now it's intact only within the four walls of the temples and ashrams. Our coat and pants are not our creations but theirs. Do we know any country in the world whose people follow our clothing system? Now even Indian women wear sari as a show piece garment on some occasions. I would not describe here what is western, for it is very well known to all of us. But as far as what is Indian is concerned, it is very difficult to figure out anything that is concretely and tangibly perceptible and could be termed as Indian. I have not at all cited these examples to scorn the Indian culture or anything related. My intension is genuine; I am searching authentically. I am willing to inquire so that what is real could be discovered.

If we see the whole world, it can be divided majorly in two parts—East and West. West stands for scientific advancements, peeling out every covert truth without any belief system. The west is serving the whole world but where is the contribution of the East reflecting? It used to stand for the inner search for life, love and truth. But now what culture it has developed into. So it seems what is happening must not belong to what India was and what Indian culture stands for in the real sense of the term. Once someone asked Osho Rajneesh, 'Besides a few Indians, there are all foreigners in your commune. Why is this so?' Rajneesh

replied, 'You have not been able to see in the real sense of the term. There are no foreigners in my commune. I have only attracted Indians but you will not understand it.' 'You need to know my definition of India. India is not just geography or history. It is not only a nation, a country, a mere piece of land. It is something more: it is a metaphor, poetry, something invisible but very tangible. India, in fact, stands for the search i.e. search for the truth of life.' So anybody seeking and searching for the truth of life regardless of who he is and where he is born is an Indian. To be an Indian is not so easy that you are born in India and you become an Indian. It's not so cheap. It is an achievement which a very few persons are able to acquire. So India has a very metaphorical stand. It has nothing to do with whatever I have mocked upon above provided what India really stands for is understood and lived thereby.

So here I go beyond the physical circumference and say all and everyone who lived life and attained fulfilment around the world across countries, cultures and creeds are the real Indians. India is not just an entity encaged within the maps we know of. Indian mystics had a concept of Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam which is forgotten totally. I don't either think that it has ever been really understood though spoken much more. What else is needed is just to wash our face and remember that art thou which goes beyond time and space. And which is the only thing emblematic to being called an Indian. I would end up with an Osho quote which will really teach us what India has been and what has been missed in the modern times. He said, 'India is an eternal journey, a path of nectar, stretching from eternity to eternity. This is why we have never written

any history of India. Is history something worth writing? History is the name for the ordinary, the mundane everyday happenings which rise like a storm today but tomorrow not even a trace of them is left. History is just a whirlwind of dust.'

So ultimately we should neither be bothered so much about the whirlwind of dust nor do we have to remain much conscious of it. Just remember and you are it, the everlasting, the evergreen and indelible entity of Indian Culture and Tradition. And then again we can resume our search and entity which we have forgotten long back.

Linguistic Plurality and Cultural Diversity:

Coming out of the ambit of what is not the part of Indian, we have to carve out the real essence of what really is Indian. As for the plurality of languages in India, people are constantly involved in the practice of translation creatively and naturally in everyday conversation. Languages are incessantly evolving, growing and changing the slide very vibrantly due to the unavoidable give and take between cultures and languages. The cultural diversity present in Indian society inevitably seeks accommodation, negotiation and understanding of each other. The common mass here is a natural translator in our country adapting and adopting easily. We see here multicultural complexity finding its creative expression in different languages at different points of time in history. There is no comparison of Indian antiquity, continuity and complexity of human creativity with any other history in the world. As literary traditions and language study emerge from some specific political and historical points of reference, they need to be studied from within

their constantly changing cultural frames, not in isolation.

This is also be kept in mind how the extraordinarily long slavery-ridden period of colonialism and Anglicization had marginalized the study of the complex linguistic plurality and cultural diversity in the subcontinent by emphasizing English education on the one hand and exoticizing some oriental texts through translations on the other. The enterprise of modernity further diminished the significance of the long vibrant and vivacious histories of literary cultures in different Indian languages. The arrival of printing technology has though enriched the processes of standardization of scripts but on the cost of the rich linguistic plurality of India. There is no doubt in the fact that it's the written text that is the marker of the high culture. But we never think that in this process the dynamic oral traditions of the folklore and the multiple traditions of storytelling get pushed to the circumference. Now reorientation of breaking out from modern linearity and the domination of modern critical approach of critical approaches suitable only of the monolingual cultures should requisitely be compulsory for understanding the difference as well as similarities within culturally diverse and multilingual reality of our country.

Following points should be taken into consideration with immediate urgency to preserve what we call the Indian legacy and heritage and corroborate ourselves to be an exclusive variety of excellence and performance on the world scenario.

1. Bringing out the vibrantly pulsating oral traditions from the shadow of the hegemonic written literature.
2. Working out on the Bhakti and Sufi traditions to

demonstrate how different saint poets in different regions in the medieval times boldly interrogated the then existing norms and expressed their thoughts and spiritual experiences freely in different poetic forms.

3. Examining the interface of language with politics and history while studying the evolution of language in India.

4. Exploring the acceptability of English language which acquired its status quo through the colonial enterprise but has gradually settled down in the country as an Indian language owned convincingly.

5. Creating adequate space for tribal voices and their songs from different parts of the country.

From medieval era up till now, many rivulets of literary cultures and traditions in different languages of the country have been flowing in many directions seeking an actual and authentic output in some realm while at the same time each has managed to maintain and sustain its own exclusivity and individuality. So what we have done till now is the process of understanding the course of how English language has been evolving in our country, the deterioration all what has been named under the fabric of Indian legacy and culture and interrogation of much agitating phenomenon of literary and cultural diversity and linguistic plurality of our country.

The settlement of English language is accurately technical in corporate sector and management fields. But when we take the progress India into consideration as the present theme of the conference, we have to consider many other thousand factors which will contribute in it without fail. When we talk of the upliftment of downtrodden of India, they are to be supported with love and care but not out die the gamut

of their religious propensity i.e. Hinduism. When we talk of the long-ridden patriarchal domination over our women, we have to overhaul the whole system by bringing the Indian women its dignity, status and position but not beyond the adjective called the Indian woman. There is always something everywhere that makes a thing typical of Indian and that is where India stands exclusive and singular. And this dream is to be translated through expectancy of the English language and for that everything that is requisite should be done.

References:

Bailey, Richard W. 1991. Images of English. A Cultural History of the Language. Cambridge: CUP.

Hundal , Sunny. India's Bitter Culture Of Rape And Violence. 2013.

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/jan/03/india-rape-violence-culture>

Kachru, Braj B. 1983. The Indianization of English. The English Language in India. Oxford: OUP.

Rajneesh, Osho. India My Love: A Spiritual Journey. St. Martin's Press, New York. 2002.

Spolsky, R. 1978. Educational Linguistics: an Introduction. Rowley, Mass: Newbury House

William Jones (Philologist)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Jones_%28philologist%29

