



Postcolonial 'English' In Mulk Raj Anand's Novel Untouchable

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Abstract:

Mulk Raj Anand is one of the galaxy of grand masters of Indian English fiction, who has rendered a great contribution in the field of fiction. His reformative zeal, keen observation and humanistic attitudes towards society gave him a surging call to pen 'Untouchable' delineating the every corner of suffering, subjugation and inhuman plight of the Dalits or marginalised class who were stamped as Untouchables under the domination of the upper class Brahmins who were no less than the British counterpart in dominating attitude. Though M.R. Anand does not belong to post-colonial era of literature historically, his novels and short stories bear strong perspectives of postcolonial literature. This present paper aims at analysing his use of postcolonial language i.e 'english', a deformed and reformed form of standard English, as formulated by the critics Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in their 'Empire Writes Back'. During the colonial period the British colonizers not only destroyed the economy of the colonized natives but also the culture, language and every social aspects were dashed to ground brutally. After the decolonization, the postcolonial writers of the former colonized countries like India asserted cultural fundamentalism and the use of native language for writing. Some postcolonial writers advocate complete return to the use of indigenous languages while others see the language (e.g. English) imposed by the colonizer as a more practical alternative to enhance inter-nation communication and to counter a colonial past through de-forming the standard form of English and reforming it with native flavour.

Keywords: Abrogation, appropriation, Colonialism, cultural fundamentalism, decolonization, postcolonialism.

Introduction

For better and broad understanding of the term "Postcolonialism" the etymology of the of the words 'post' and 'colony' should be traced. The word 'Post' is derived from Latin term 'Postis' which means 'after' or 'behind'. The word 'Colony' originated from Latin term 'Colonus' which means 'a settler in new land' and therefore, etymologically 'Postcolonialism' refers to 'the period after colonialism'. Broadly, the term postcolonialism refers to the ways in which race, ethnicity, culture, human identity itself are presented in modern era after many colonized countries regained their independence from their colonizers.

The earliest colony was established by the Romans in the newly conquered countries. At that time ruling was not their priority. Those colonies were not the structures of governance over the native races. Colonies were simply new settlements by communities seeking a better life (*The Routledge Handbook of the Settler Colonialism, Edward Cavanagh*). However, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the European settlers in the non-European countries, rather than assimilating into native races or cultures, began to perceive the natives as 'other', the colonizers sought to destroy native cultures, language, economy and every social aspect. They

exercised their power upon the colonizers, exploited them, plundered them by violence. In order to strengthen their governance upon the natives in the countries like India, the European powers like Britain ran strong drive to establish the use of English, the natives were forced to learn and speak the language of the colonizers. Thus the colonizer and their language grew stronger together. Elio Antonio de Nebrija, Bishop of Avila, rightly commented “Language has always been the consort of empire, and forever shall remain its mate. Together they came into being, together they grow and flower”.

“Until the lion learns how to write;

Every story will glorify the hunter.”

These words of Nozipo Maraire, stresses the necessity and significance of Postcolonial Literature. The term "Postcolonial Literature" refers to "the literature produced by the people, who were formerly colonised and subjugated". In other words, "Postcolonial Literature", refers to "the body of works by the colonised people to annihilate the influences exerted by the colonizers in their lives". Postcolonial Literature emerged in the mid-twentieth century, when many colonised nations were fighting for their liberation from the colonisers. Helen Gilbert's definition of 'Postcolonialism' reads as, “It is the term that indicates a degree of agency or a programme of resistance, against cultural domination, signals the existence of a particular historical legacy, a stage in a culture's transition into a modern nation state”. (*Post-colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics.*)

The term 'Postcolonial' has become a convenient term to describe any kind of resistance against class, race and gender oppression. The Australian critics Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin enlist the purpose of the term 'Postcolonial literature' as--

“.....to cover all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by the European imperial aggression.” (*The Empire Writes back, p. 2*)

Language Employed by The Postcolonial Writers

After decolonization, globalization presents the newest challenge to the countries that have barely begun to recover from the cultural assaults of colonialism. English, the language of the colonial master, has already established itself as the global language that homogenizes various parts of the world under its umbrella. This linguistic imperialism led the postcolonial writers and critics into polarization regarding the language they should use for their writing. Postcolonial writers across the world have had an uneasy relationship with the language of the colonial master. Some of them advocate the complete return to the use of native languages as a medium of their writing. These writers strongly believe that their indigenous habits, customs, beliefs, manners, thoughts, culture and values can find best expression in their native language. Their further contention is that to use the colonizer's language means to legitimise the colonizer's cultural and political values. This is a kind of postcolonial resistance against the hideous impact left by the former colonizer. Postcolonial Kenyan novelist Ngugi Wa Thiong'O started a brilliant career in English but later he rejected English and adopted native language Gikuyu, a language primarily spoken by Kikuyu people of Kenya. For him, English is a “cultural bomb” that continues a process of erasing memories of pre-colonial cultures and history and installs the dominance of a new and more insidious forms of colonialism. In his opinion indigenous language is both communication and culture and they are the products of each other, an indigenous language can not be separated from native communities because specific form, character, a specific history and a deep sentiment are inherent in that native tongue. To kill a native tongue is equal to kill a native culture. Meena Alexander echoes Ngugi's sentiments about the violence of colonial language thus : “There is a violence in the very language, American English, that we have to face, even as we work to make it ours, decolonize it so that it will express the truth of bodies beaten and banned. After all as we are the territories are not free” (*Fault Lines, 199*). The ‘defend-the-local-language-against-English’ movement in India is surging in slow pace and Balchandra Nemade and Chandrasekher Patil should be mentioned prominently as the proponents of this movement against the use of English. However, on the contrary, a host of prominent writers shared a strong advocacy to use English for their writing. Among these writers are Chinua Achebe, Salman Rushdie, Kamala Das, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan, V.S Naipaul, David Dabydeen, Grace Nichols, Lorna Goodison and so on. But the important fact is that they did not advocate the use of the colonizer's standard form of English but the deformed and

reformed, nativized, indigenised and localised form of colonizer's standard English, the type which is termed as 'english' (without capital E) by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. What this means is that there is evidently no 'standard' English being used by the postcolonial writers. English has been multiplied, fragmented, hybridized and indigenised by the authors and cultures across the former colonies. We have now, as a result, many Englishes, as evidenced by studies in journals such as World Englishes and English World Wide. This is sharply distinct from the colonial role of English which was imposed from the top. Here English is practically reconstituted to create local variants. Indigenization of the language marks the process of postcolonial resistance through rejection of standard English. Thus English's decolonization through indigenization and violent reconstruction de-links the language from its former colonial centre and politics. This "abrogation" and "appropriation" of colonizer's English are best authenticated in the words of Raja Rao in his forward to Kanthapura:

"One has to convey in a language that is not one's own, the spirit that is one's own.

One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought—movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use the word 'alien', yet English is not really alien to us. It is the language of our intellectual make up- like Sanskrit or Persian was before—not of our emotional make up."

"Appropriation" is further expressed in Chinua Achebe's words:

.....the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new surroundings"

Mulk Raj Anand's Use of 'english' in Untouchable

Literature is the product of society and its culture and its current political and economic ethos. It is the mirror in which the society, culture, politics, economy and the condition of the people are faithfully reflected. Matthew Arnold is faultless in saying that Literature is criticism of life. Like all other art forms literature studies the social system of the period in which it is produced. An author can not keep himself aloof and segregated from the contemporary atmosphere and surroundings. The current socio-political and cultural ethos supply the sustenance to the mind and heart of the author to take up pen. Mulk Raj Anand was the product of his age. His creative fictional mind was developed by the then social and political evils. He witnessed a great socio-political and cultural upheavals in India under the British colonial bondage. Feudalism unleashed terror on the poor Indians. They sucked the blood of the poor like leech. Social and religious practices of the upper classes ran brutal exploitation and torture on the under-dogs. Evil social practices like untouchability destroyed the equilibrium of the society. The marginalised classes were undergoing traumatic situation under the dominance of the upper classes. Anand's sympathetic mind and humanistic attitude prompted him to delineate the condition of the poor, underdogs, Dalits and marginalised classes and raised his voice against these evils in his novels, 'the epics of misery'. In order to deal with this native theme, concern, the growth of the communal forces, social evils like marginality, untouchability Anand, like other Indian English writers, used English language in native flavour. He indigenized English with native expression, tone, slang, syntax and vocabulary. He multiplied, hybridized, fragmented and nativized English with native culture and native language specially with Punjabi and Hindi expression and tonal quality and vocabulary. 'Untouchable' is the greatest sociological novel of Anand. It gives an account of single day events in the life of Bakkha, the spokesperson of the author for the under-dog, the marginalised, the downtrodden and underprivileged class. For the portrayal of the subhuman, destitute and wretched condition of Bakkha's life as well as of the whole class and caste he belongs to, Anand uses 'english', the deformed and reformed form of 'English', with the following nativized linguistic paraphernalia:

1. Address Terms
2. Caste Related Words
3. Hindi Words
4. Change in Spelling/Phonological deviations
5. Hybridization
6. Translation of Hindi phrases/ sentences
7. Words for Abuses
8. Colloquial language

1.Address Terms:

Address terms may be defined as words or phrases or titles or names used for addressing a person. These may be friendly, unfriendly, neutral, respectful or disrespectful. These address terms are socially driven linguistic phenomena. These are determined by several factors like social structure, cultural pattern and geographical setting. Address terms are also the outcome of the effects of socio-economic status and literacy level of a person or community. The typical address terms in Anand's great novel '*Untouchable*' are mostly taken from Punjabi language, habitual use of diminutives and the Indian idiomatic expressions. These address terms give strong authenticity to Anand's nativized English to suit the native theme.

The prominent categories of address terms used by Anand in '*Untouchable*' are:

1. Caste related--- Scavenger, Bhangi, Chamar, Brahmin, sweeper etc.
2. Status related—Huzoor, Maharaj, Your Highness etc.
3. Profession related—Hakimji, Padri Sahib, colonel etc.
4. Derogatory terms – son of pig, son of swine, illegally begotten, eater of master etc.

2. Caste Related Words:

The society presented in the present novel is class and caste ridden. The low caste people are addressed with the help of derogatory caste related words or expressions and the high caste people are addressed with honorific tags. Mr. Anand has used these numerous caste related words to show the caste-ridden native society and its influence on the language. Some brilliant example of such words are- 'Gulabo, the washer woman' (p.15), 'Waziro, the weaver's wife' (p.17), 'But Punditji' (p. 21), 'a Hindu water-carrier' (p. 22), 'Scavenger' (p. 53), 'Bhangi' (sweeper) (p. 73), Chandal ! (low caste) (p. 73). These expressions indicate the class and caste discrimination. The low caste people were ill-treated by the upper class people but the low caste people always addressed the high caste people as 'Babuj', 'Bibiji', 'Maharaj' to show politeness and reverence towards them. The suffix 'ji' is used to show politeness in Indian language context. The subordination, their dependency on the upper caste and lower position in the caste system determined the linguistic behaviour of the downtrodden people.

3. Hindi words:

The use of Hindi words in English is another feature of Anand's indigenization of English. These Hindi expressions cover a wide range from different areas like food, clothing, forms of address, abusive expressions, festivals and others. In the novel '*Untouchable*' we encounter the Hindi words like Chapatti, roti, kheer, ladus, jalebi, prasad, khaki, kot-patloon, salaam, and so on. These Hindi words add Indian touch and native flavour to Anand's English.

4.Change in Spelling:

In order to indicate illiterate native characters' pronunciation Mr. Anand has changed the spelling of some words which highlight his effort to nativize English language. In the novel '*Untouchable*' the prominent words which have been changed in spelling are worth mentioning here like—'fashun' (p. 10) for fashion, 'gentreman' (p.17) for gentleman, 'Laften Gornor' (p. 53) for Lieutenant Governor, 'sentry inspictor' (p.50) for sanitary inspector, 'jernel' (p.102) for General, 'Dilli' (p. 102), 'bungla' (p. 21) for bungalow, 'motucars' (p. 20) for motor cars and others.

5. Hybridization: Hybridization is a linguistic process through which two or more than two varieties are blended together to derive a new word or phrase. In *'Untouchable'* Mulk Raj Anand has combined English and Hindi elements to form new words and phrase which show the native linguistic habits. In this context some noteworthy words which can be cited as example are—'brahminee bull' (p. 58), 'sadhuhood' (p.78), 'sahibhood' (p.111), 'dharmic culture' (p.110) etc.

6. Translation of Hindi Expressions:

Mulk Raj Anand has translated Hindi phrases and sentences into English to authenticate the indigenization of the language he is writing in, i.e English. We come across such instances when the novelist says “rats were running around his belly” meaning that he (Bakkha) was very hungry. The Hindi expression is 'Usake pet main chuhen daud rahe thein'. Bakkha says “Huzoor, it is all your blessing” (p.17) meaning 'Sir, this is by your grace alone'. Anand translates the Hindi expression 'Mahoday, yeh aapki kripa hain' into English to give an Indian touch. There are so many similar instances of English translations of Hindi expressions at random throughout the novel.

7. Word for abuses:

There are excessive abusive words in the novel which Anand drew from Punjab or Northern region of India where free flow of such abusive expressions are experienced. Such abusive expressions like “son of a swine”, “son of a dog”, “bahin chod”, “bitch” and “brother-in-law” are quite frequently used in *'Untouchable'*.

8 Colloquial language :

Anand's novel *'Untouchable'* is set in rural background. His characters are drawn from the grass root level of that background to vindicate the social evils like untouchability. Anand, therefore, has chosen very simple language spoken daily by the native characters. His colloquial language has the rhythm and speech pattern of the language spoken by the common people of the native place. Thus colloquial form of English, not the standard English, has been used by Mulk Raj Anand as a vehicle for vindicating the social curse of untouchability in the novel *'Untouchable'*.

Conclusion

Mulk Raj Anand is a great socio-linguist as well as being a great novelist. In his epoch making novel he has explored the native theme with the help of English which has been nativized with native language properties. English has no more retained its former standard form which the British colonizers employed in India like many other colonized countries as a weapon to legitimise their colonization. After the decolonization the postcolonial writers from the free countries like India deliberately uses English language in the native flavour. Anand took the same path. He decolonised English from its former aura of exalted glory. He indigenized English , hybridized it, gave it a new reformed form like many other postcolonial writers in India and other third world countries. His use of 'english' to explore the native realistic theme has made the novel *'Untouchable'* a grand success. His 'english' has reached the novel even to semi-literate persons and marked clearly the process of decanonization.

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