

IN LOVE WITH ENGLISH

By Aju Mukhopadhyay

Thirst for learning a foreign language is akin to looking for men and women in countries and linguistic communities other than one's own, seeking to smell a different fragrance, wishing to receive new contacts. It happens in human societies with a curious feeling to know the other human beings. Usually it happens when one is on the way to progress through education, usually as a student. Otherwise the need to learn a foreign language comes as of necessity in one's service life or in professional field. It may come to a writer any time during his active life. English, though a foreign language in the true sense of the term, was already in our school curriculum as a subject though not as medium of study. I began studying English from the beginning of our school life and by now I have absorbed it, may be to a good extent.

There were English medium schools, usually run by the missionaries. During the 200 hundred years of their rule in India the English people trained large number of natives in English to run their day-to-day administration and naturally the enthusiastic students finding a treasure of knowledge, literature, science and modern ways of living in industrialized society in it paid their attention to it and quite some of them became adepts in it, specially those who moved to England for higher education. We had other Indian languages to study; Hindi and India's, perhaps the world's richest language, Sanskrit; not a dead language, spoken by some at some places of India, still and quoted on various occasions.

My first language and medium of study was Bengali or Bangla. It too is a very rich language with nasal formations like French and great literatures have been created through this media. I too created literature in it. My academic career could not be smooth. I had to enter into service life at the age of 17 years just after completing the School Final Examination. But I studied further by attending evening classes and studying privately. I

graduated in commerce, B.Com, and privately passed B.A. and then studied M.A. in Bengali privately but it could not fructify due to adverse circumstances though I have produced 12 books; poetry, fiction and essays in Bengali or Bangla. Then I tried M.A. in English studying it in the evening classes of Rabindrabharati University in Kolkata and became successful. It did not stop me from knowing other languages. I tried privately to study Urdu but the help was too meager to continue, may be that I wasn't that serious. I got enrolled with the respective education wings of the Government of India and passed certificate courses in Hindi (up to Pragma) and Sanskrit languages but they were Indian languages. I can speak n some other Indian languages.

My thirst for foreign language was not quenched. I felt attracted to one or the other language and finally got admission in the evening classes of Calcutta University for studying the French. I passed the certificate and diploma examinations and got admission in Alliance Francaise, Kolkata, for higher studies but could not proceed further for so many impediments, mainly as I was always in service so could not come in time to join classes sometimes. I learnt the French, can still read and understand it but due to lack of practice I have lost its ethos and warmth, many of its vocabulary. Speaking in it is difficult for me now.

Here are some of my thoughts on English language. There are number of bilingual writers in India like Tagore. I too wished to write in English together with Bengali. I began stumbling over difficult words. Beginning to read English books I wrote word meaning wherever I stumbled over them consulting dictionary and having interest in alternate words and new words I have from time to time created hand books of words, one in computer also, they lie here and there. Words have never left me alone. They come jumping to my pen, now computer keys and ears as I write, sometimes unknown new words and consulting dictionary I find them suitable. Words take me to new worlds.

I began creating literature in English. Some elderly editors helped me to some extent to cross over the difficulties. Time came for more vigorous practice as I was transferred out of Bengal which left me with scanty chances to write in my mother tongue. I took up

correspondence course of the Writers Bureau, Manchester, UK and obtained a **Certificate of Competence as a Published Writer**. I read more and wrote more in English and gradually I have now written thousands of pages of prose and hundreds of poems of different genres in English. I am in the Editorial Advisory boards of some good international magazines. I edited the Indian edition of a small experimental American ezine, **twenty20 Journal**. More I write more help I get from the unforeseen literary world, otherwise who the scholars and editors would take my scholarly essays in their books on mainly Indian English literature including on other subjects like environment and nature? I have written for some 60 books and large numbers of magazines and electronic magazines. I have authored some 22 books in English and have been regularly contributing to different media throughout India and some other countries. I write and the flow is uninterrupted.

Frankly speaking, words are suggested, heard or unheard, sometimes with unforeseen accuracy. Sometimes words half known or unknown come to occupy their rightful places. This is a field beyond rational world sometimes. I am sorry if this takes me out of the rational grove but more and more I feel that writing literature, especially poetry, is not just limited to the materialistic hub of the language. More I write in English, for various practical reasons and for living out of Bengal, more I feel at home in it. A distinct sense grows in me that feelings, emotions, expressions are personal which may be expressed in any language which are the outer covering of such inner attributes. Though a native of the English world would express it as per the ethos of the language and his surroundings, the others would express it molded in their surroundings and experiences in their own way in a language not their own. That way English has been to some extent attenuated and fitted into Indian thoughts and ideas, changed to suit the purpose of Indian writers, making it Indian English.

One Amaresh Dutta observed about such a language that the writers “almost forged a language with a new flavour and flexibility which went into the formation of an idiom capable of echoing the Indian voice.” (Das/44)

Though Indian writers writing in English live scattered in many places in the globe; in and out of India, their mental makeup and thought process, at least up to a few generations to come, are likely to be Indian, at least of those who create literature on Indian subjects, partly or entirely. But they do not include writers of foreign origin settled in India and writing on Indian subjects unless they absorb the local idioms and thought process while writing in Indian English. The poets and writers of Indian origin, living anywhere in the globe, may be called Indian English writers or poets.

True it is that English language and Indian English Literature has occupied an enviable position throughout the world. On one hand some talented writers of Indian Diaspora are getting awards from their countries of settlement, getting the highest international honours like noble prize, are getting patronage by the big media, on the other hand Indians living in India and writing Indian English Literature are steadily growing in number with higher quality though not reasonably acknowledged or rewarded by the Governments and their agencies and establishments which often favour their own groups or choice candidates for various reasons. It is time to honour unbiased all such deserving writers.

In this twenty-first century English has become the foremost international language linking the global community and it has become the link language among the educated Indians and almost an official link language in India. Though its origin is in UK it has historically gone to the worlds beyond the islands and has acquired different characteristics. Though it is not natural Indian language, we have adopted it and have made it another Indian language. If we now own such an international language, the lingua franca of the World, it is to our benefit. It is foolish to avoid it as foreign language. Those leaders of the society who become more patriotic in avoiding it for the common consumption and learning get their own sons and daughters or others as guardians admitted to English medium schools from the beginning. India produces and sells the largest number of books in English. I feel happy to be one of them, with it. Other technical and statistical details I have discussed elsewhere, here it is my personal choice and love story with English.

Let me tell it properly that there is a bond of love between me the writer and English the language. I do not think English now to be a foreign language as I hoarsely declare that it is my language too though it was born out of Celtic and other origins. It is a material tool or a mother figure who intimately helps its user-child to create. It is not our Mother Tongue, undeniably. Living in a multilingual country like India with the multilingual blessings of English and few more languages, I feel writing easier than those who know and work in one language only.

One thing must be clear; all this is about English as a language. I live in Indian society, breath in it, so my culture; music, play, intercommunication within my community, even with friends in other provinces, and all other relationship are based on my Mother tongue and other Indian languages around me. I have full love and concord with my Mother tongue and other Indian languages as it was before. In spite of all my love for English, it is my second love.

Work Cited

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Bio

He has written more than two hundred Essays for books and journals besides larger numbers of features in newspapers. As an essayist he received Albert Camus Centenary Writing Award, 2013. His essays and books contain such important subjects as Sri Aurobindo (Life, Philosophy and Literature), The Mother of Pondicherry, Subhas Chandra Bose, Rabindranaath Tagore, Sant Kabir, Albert Camus, Saadat Hasan Manto and among the latest writers and poets he has written number of essays on Mahasweta Devi, Jhumpa Lahiri, Bibhuti Bhushan Bandopadhyay, Satyajit Ray, Khushwant Singh, Arundhati Roy, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and others. He has written some essays specially on India like Rebirth of India and other essays and books on India. He has critiqued large numbers of contemporary poets of India besides such important subjects on Poetry as Sufi and Bhakti Poetry, Devotional Poets of Modern India, Spiritual and

Mystic Poets. On animals he has contributed mainly to Creature Feature, Cyprus besides in some Indian journals and has written essays on Environment and Adivasi Life.