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## Decolonizing English Literature through Indian Knowledge Systems: A Study of Select Indian English Texts

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### **Abstract:**

*The study explores the possibility of decolonizing of Indian English literature using the perspective of Indian Knowledge systems. In colonial education, the emphasis was placed on western literary models, European aesthetics and the colonial approach to the understanding of culture and as a result, English literary studies have grown in India to a large extent. This led to a neglect or marginalization of Indian philosophy, spiritual and oral traditions and ecology, and ethics. This study can be said to have called into question the idea that Indian English texts can be read only as a copy of the literary forms of the British. Rather, they are to be seen as creative expressions that take English as the language to create Indian cultural memories, indigenous knowledge, and local reality.*

*The paper is focused on the three novels of Kanthapura by Raja Rao, The Guide by R. K. Narayan and The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy. The following texts have been chosen as they cover various aspects of Indian life—village culture, spirituality, morality, caste, ecology, oral tradition and social change. The study examines these texts qualitatively, by looking at how they embody ideas of dharma, karma, spirituality, ecological consciousness, caste critique, and Indianized English. The paper also brings to focus the nature of Indian writers' assimilation of English for Indian rhythms, idioms, myths and cultural experiences. The study suggests Indian Knowledge Systems as a powerful alternative to a colonial and Eurocentric approach to the reading of Indian English literature, which renders literary studies more culturally grounded and intellectually open.*

**Keywords:** Decolonization, Indian Knowledge Systems, Indian English Literature, Postcolonialism, Indianized English, Dharma, Karma

### **Introduction:**

There is a close association of English literature to colonial history in India. Under British rule, education was not just a means for imparting language knowledge, but also a tool for instilling cultural and intellectual perspectives among Indians. The educational policy of Macaulay was to produce a

class of Indians who will be Indian in colour, but English in taste, thought, and opinion (Macaulay, 1835). This policy had an impact on the study of English literature in India. British literature was considered superior, and Indian literature, oral knowledge, and indigenous knowledge were considered secondary.

The decolonization of English literature involves challenging this colonial order. It is not an outright rejection of the English language. It is not, however, the use of English language in order to reclaim the Indian identity, culture, philosophy and knowledge systems. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o suggests that language is inextricably linked to culture, memory and identity (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986). As a result, the use of colonial languages within colonized societies means a challenge to the cultural domination of these languages.

Postcolonial scholars have demonstrated the extent to which colonialism was in control of both land and economy as well as of knowledge and representation. The East was described as inferior and irrational, and required Western interpretation, which was colonial discourse (Said, 1978). In the Indian context, this implied that Indian life and culture were often viewed through colonial lenses. Decolonisation is a call for a recovery of Indian ways of knowing and a way of knowing literature.

Indian Knowledge Systems comprise the philosophical, spiritual, ethical, linguistic, artistic, ecological and social traditions of India. These systems can be traced back in the ancient texts, or in oral and folk traditions, religious philosophies, classical aesthetics, and community-based knowledge. The terms dharma, karma, rasa, ahimsa, moksha, prakriti, and lokasangraha offer other perspectives on human life, society, nature and literature.

Indian English literature is an important space for this decolonial project. On the other hand, the writers like Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan, Arundhati Roy, use English but mould it to Indian cultural experience. Their writings reflect an assault on colonial literary norms, and demonstrate that Indians could communicate Indian knowledge, Indian consciousness and Indian social realities in English.

### **Research Objectives:**

#### **The main objectives of this paper are:**

1. To examine the role of Indian Knowledge Systems in selected Indian English texts.
2. To analyze how Indian English writers challenge colonial and Eurocentric literary traditions.
3. To explore Indian cultural, philosophical, spiritual, and ethical values in selected texts.
4. To study how Indian English writers Indianize the English language.
5. To show how Indian Knowledge Systems can help decolonize English literary studies.

### **Research Methodology:**

This paper adopts qualitative and interpretative research method. Textual analysis is the main analysis applied to this research. The set texts chosen are *Kanthapura* by Raja Rao, *The Guide* by R. K. Narayan and *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy. The texts are analyzed using the

postcolonial theory, decolonial theory and Indian Knowledge Systems.

The paper also relies on secondary sources like books, journal articles, critical essays and theoretical writings. Themes of the selected texts are not only discussed but also language, narrative style, cultural references and philosophical depth.

### **Theoretical Framework:**

The theoretical framework of this paper encompasses three main themes: Postcolonial theory, Decolonial theory and Indian Knowledge Systems.

Postcolonial theory is one way to analyze the effects of colonialism on literature, language, identity and culture. Said sees colonial knowledge as not being neutral, but linked to power and domination (Said, 1978). The idea is significant since the English literary studies were also influenced by colonialism in India. Colonial identity is created through the processes of hybridity, mimicry, and cultural negotiation (Bhabha, 1994). This is helpful for the comprehension of Indian English literature, in which the Indians write in English and alter it in the process of their Indian experiences.

Spivak asks what it means to have a voice in the dominant system of knowledge for the marginalized persons (Spivak, 1988). The idea is applicable to Indian English literature as some Indian writers try to voice the communities that were ignored by the colonial and elite discourses, women, lower caste and local culture.

Decolonial theory is more than independence for the political. It challenges the supremacy of Western knowledge. Mignolo states that coloniality persists after colonialism, as Western knowledge systems are still affecting education, culture, and academic interpretation (Mignolo, 2011). Thus, decolonization must be epistemic, to challenge the assumption that Western knowledge is the only knowledge that is valid.

Indian Knowledge Systems offer an alternate way of interpretation. In Indian philosophy, there is no division between knowledge and ethics, spirituality, society and the nature. Dharma and Karma are concept ideas that correlate human action with moral responsibility. The definition of rasa in Indian aesthetics is literature in all senses of describing it as a representation and an entertainment, but it is also an experience of emotions, experience of spirituality (Bharata, 1951). Thus, Indian Knowledge Systems enable readers to read literature in a holistic way.

### **Decolonizing English Literature:**

Decolonizing English literature involves changing the focus of interpretation from the colonial authority to the experience of the indigenous people. English literature was sometimes taught to colonizers as universal, refined, and superior in colonial education. The literature and knowledge systems of India were seen as local, emotional or less developed. This led to the establishment of a hierarchy of Western knowledge and Indian knowledge.

Postcolonial writers, on the other hand, contest the hierarchy by employing English in

innovative ways. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin believe that postcolonial writers “write back” to the empire by changing the language and literary forms of the colonizer, (Ashcroft et al., 2002). Indian English writers do likewise. They speak English but with all Indian rhythms and idiomatic expressions, myths, cultural references and philosophical meanings.

It's not about imitation, it's about transformation. Indian English is not just British English that is used in India. It is a variety of English that is restricted in use and has been shaped by culture. Kachru claims that Indian English has acquired a new identity and it operates in Indian society (Kachru, 1983). So, the one should not only evaluate the Indian English literature by the British standards of language and form. It should be read as a creative area in which English is indianized.

It is also important to recover Indian literary and philosophic concepts in the process of decolonizing English literature. In the Western reading of a novel, for example, the main emphasis may be given to plot, character, realism, and the psychology of the individuals. An Indian Knowledge Systems reading can also be on dharma, karma, community, oral tradition, spiritual transformation, ecological balance, and rasa. It does not negate Western theory, but it broadens the interpretation of literature by incorporating Indian theory.

#### **Indian Knowledge Systems in Kanthapura:**

Kanthapura, written by Raja Rao is a very good example of decolonising English literature through Indian Knowledge Systems. The novel has a location in a village of the south of India and depicts the influence of the free movement of Gandhi on the village life. The novel is written in English but its structure, rhythm and worldview is very Indian.

The oral narrative is one of the most salient aspects of Kanthapura. Achakka, an old woman living in the village, tells the story. She tells her story like the oral tradition of India where memory, repetition, myth, devotion and the community experience are central. This defies the western notion of novel structure in terms of linear, individual narration. Rao says that he has developed a style of English narration, which he has seen as rhythmic as Indian speech and storytelling.

In the foreword to Kanthapura, Raja Rao argues that Indians cannot write like the English because their lives are different, their tempo and movement is different (Rao, 1938). This is a very significant statement for decolonizing the literature of English. Rao is not against English, but he is against employing English as a language exclusively British. He is a reformer of English, making it conform to Indian thought and expression.

Myth is also a source of knowledge in the novel. The villagers have a religious and mythological understanding of the freedom struggle. Gandhi is not a mere political figure; he becomes a moral and spiritual one. The young Gandhian activist Moorthy is also known in the framework of dharma. His fight against the colonial rule and caste injustice turns into a moral obligation. It becomes his fight of colonial rule and caste injustice a moral obligation.

This relation of politics and spirituality is an observation of Indian Knowledge Systems. Social action is not distinct from ethical duty in many Indians traditions. Dharma is duty, righteousness and moral order. The struggle for freedom in Kanthapura is not only a political movement but a struggle against injustice based on dharma. Freedom movement in Kanthapura is not political movement alone but struggle against injustice since dharma.

Community is also a source of knowledge in the novel. The village is not only a place but a world of morals. People have a collective sense of events. Women, elders, workers and regular villagers are part of the making of history. This questions the conventional colonial perspective of passive or backward Indian villages. However, Rao focuses on the village as a place of resistance, memory and cultural strength.

Kanthapura, as a result, brings about decolonization of English literature by merging the English language with the Indian oral tradition, mythic consciousness, Gandhian ethics, and community-based knowledge.

### **The Guide presents Indian Spirituality and Ethics. Indian Spirituality and Ethics in The Guide.**

The Guide by R. K. Narayan is yet another significant example of Indian Knowledge Systems in Indian English Literature. A story of Raju who starts as a tourist guide and slowly becomes a spiritual guide. His transformation may be understood in the context of Indian notions of Karma, dharma, tapasya, and spiritual self-realisation.

Raju at the outset of the novel is guided by desire, ambition and self-interest. His friendship with Rosie and his act of forgery causes his incarceration. Raju's life illustrates the principle of Karma from the point of view of Indian Knowledge Systems. His actions have consequences which compel him to suffer and reflect on himself. The word 'karma' is not a punishment here but a means of facing the moral consequences of his actions.

Raju is mistaken by the villagers for a holy man after his release from prison. Slowly, he takes up this role. The villagers have faith in his spiritual abilities and hope that he will pray for rain. This section of the novel is evidence of the Indian belief in tapasya (sacrifice) and in the spiritual strength of self-discipline. Fasting in Indian tradition is not just about making do without physical pleasure, but also a way of getting pure, powerful and in balance with the cosmos.

Narayan depicts this spiritual change in an ironic and ambiguous manner. From the outset, Raju isn't presented as a saint in the proper sense. He's a fallen human being. But his last fast implies that there is a possibility of transformation in the inner man. He starts out as a performer of holiness but could end up being a spiritually sincere person. This ambiguity contributes to the richness and realism of the novel.

A purely rational or a colonial reading might question the fact of the conversion of Raju into a saint or the actual arrival of the rain. However, an Indian Knowledge Systems reading is more about

the ethics and symbolism of the action. When Raju embarks on his fast, individual life, social faith and cosmic hope combine. His body is a sacrifice for the community.

Alongside, Narayan's language is an agent of decolonization. His English is simple, clear and Indian Social. He is not a copycat of high British literature. Rather, he produces a kind of English that can represent the Indian towns, families, religions and moral struggles. This makes *The Guide* a substantial text to study Indianized English and Indian ethical consciousness.

### **The God of Small Things is about ecological and cultural memory. Ecological and Cultural Memory in The God of Small Things.**

*The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy is a more modern version of decolonial writing. The novel focuses on caste, gender, family, trauma, memory and social violence in Kerala. While *Kanthapura* and *The Guide* show Indian tradition as totally coherent, Roy's novel does not. Rather, it critically explores the potential of tradition to be oppressive when it is linked with caste hierarchy, patriarchy and social control.

Roy's novel is decolonial as it is an attack on dominant systems of knowledge and language. The story is disjointed and broken up. It passes through the memory, trauma, childhood perception, and emotional association. This is an architecture that defies the expectations of a Western realist concept of "story" and "stable narration. The novel is not a colonial history; it is a history of memory and pain.

Small, local and marginalised experiences are also highlighted in the novel. The title alone gives away that it is a small thing. The histories typically associated with the "colonial style" or the "elite" tend to emphasize rulers, wars, laws, and key events. Roy is interested in children, women, forbidden love, caste violence and emotional wounds. This is a decolonial approach because it challenges what is deemed history and what experience is considered.

The novel is heavily influenced by nature and ecology. The river, rain, insects, plants and landscape are more than background. They are a component of the emotional and moral realm of the text. In India, the philosophy of nature and human life is interdependent. The river and environment are being damaged, reflecting the moral and social decay of the community. This can be related to the Indian Knowledge Systems notion, that nature is no other than human beings.

Along with that, Roy decolonizes English in language. She transgresses the norm of the grammar, creates phrases, introduces Malayalam words and creatively introduces children's language. This is an attack on colonial notions of proper English. Roy Indianizes English, much like Raja Rao, yet her style is more experimental, playful and fragmented. Her language is like a child's, a traumatized child, and a local culture's.

But Roy also demonstrates that decolonization must be critical. Tradition of India is not something that can be romanticized. Velutha, an untouchable character, reveals the oppression of

marginalized people—they are silenced. The question of the subaltern posed by Spivak is pertinent here because of that of Velutha's: his voice is muted by caste, family, law and social power (Spivak, 1988). Thus, decolonisation of literature in the context of Indian Knowledge Systems must also involve critique on injustice in Indian society.

### **Indianization of English:**

The Indianization of English is one of the most important strategies of decolonization in Indian English literature. English is the language of the Indian writer, and the Indian writer doesn't let English be merely a language of the colony. They change the form of the same by using Indian idioms, speech patterns, myths, cultural references and philosophies.

Raja Rao Indianizes English by oral storytelling and the rhythm of Kannada speech. R K Narayan Indianizes English with simplicity, irony and Indian towns' everyday lives. Produces Indianization of English by way of words in Malayalam, broken syntax, repetition, and child-like expression. In all three writers English turns into a medium of Indian experience.

It is significant because the norm of correctness in colonial education was British English. Indian English was frequently viewed as inferior or not quite 'right'. However, Indian English literature demonstrates that English may be expressed in numerous ways. The view is supported by Kachru's view on World Englishes, which demonstrates that English has different identities in different cultural contexts (Kachru, 1983).

In this respect Indian English literature is not just part of English literary tradition. It is at the same time an Indian literary and intellectual heritage. It speaks English words, but its imagination is colored by Indian society, memory, morality and knowledge.

### **Major Findings:**

This study shows that English literary studies is decolonized by the literature of India in English language. The chosen texts reject the norms of colonial literature, employing the traditional modes of storytelling; Indian philosophy; local culture; and non-Western ideas of human life.

Firstly, Kanthapura makes use of oral tradition, myth and Gandhian dharma to reshape the English novel into an Indian one. Second, The Guide is about karma, faith, sacrifice and spiritual undertones in the story of Raju. Thirdly, The God of Small Things breaks the dominant social and linguistic structures using ecological memory, caste critique and experimental language.

The study also reveals that the Indian Knowledge Systems are not confined to ancient manuscripts. They are living traditions which are present in language, narration, ethics, community life, ecologic awareness and social critique. But these traditions have to be examined critically. It ought not to be the glorification of the past without discernment or critical analysis. It is essential that it recovers Indian knowledge and challenges caste, patriarchy and the other illegitimate structures.

## Conclusion:

Decolonial Reading of English is the re-reading of Indian English texts from Indian cultural, philosophical, ethical and aesthetic views. It depends on colonial understanding of “universal” and “superior” literary models. It also gives back the significance of Indian knowledge systems.

This is the side of English that can carry Indian oral tradition, Indian myth and Indian dharmic politics as witnessed in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*. In *The Guide*, R. K. Narayan offers a clear, yet richly cultural explanation of Indian spirituality, karma, and moral transformation. *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy is an extension of decolonisation, incorporating language, ecology, memory, caste and marginality.

It has been demonstrated through the selected texts that Indian English literature is not a copy of the British English literature. It is an area of creativity and intellectual activity in which English is changed by its Indian experience. A strong conceptual tool to understand this transition is Indian Knowledge Systems. Meanwhile, decolonization needs to be inclusive and critical. It is necessary to reclaim the knowledge of the indigenous but also to have the voice of the marginalized.

Thus, the study of Indian English literature should not be based entirely on the western theories but also on Indian Knowledge Systems. This can help to decolonize, diversify and culturally embed the study of English literature.

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