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## **Sustenance of Native Culture in Multilingual Written Texts: A Case Study of *The God of Small Things* and *The Hungry Tide***

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*Literary multilingualism* has been dexterously used by the Indian English writers to reflect the cultural and behavioral style of the characters and make the setting realistic. The paper attempts to identify and analyze the kinds of literary techniques used in Indian English fiction and how through the use of these techniques, the writers have tried to sustain the native culture in the setting of the novel. The tools chosen for analysis include translated proverbs, songs and religious verse and the methodology preferred for this purpose is narrative methodology. The analysis of these devices in the textual background shows that in the Indian English fiction, the native culture in the setting of the novel can best be sustained by the use of native elements.

**Keywords:** Literary multilingualism, sustainability, Indian English, culture, proverbs, religious verse

"The term *literary multilingualism* primarily refers to the more or less extended mix of two or more languages in the same text, entailing a cross-cultural or experimental effect" (Knauth, 2007). Literary multilingualism or intratextual multilingualism was practiced right since antiquity but earlier it was marginalised due to the rhetoric principle of purity. But with the advent of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the globalization of communication, literary multilingualism has increased multifariously. India being a multilingual country, literary multilingualism or intratextual multilingualism was natural and can be traced back in the works of Kalidas. This phenomenon became more prominent in India after the invasions and colonization. And later eventually with English occupying a prominent position in our country as well as in the global market, literary multilingualism (mix of English and other native languages) took its shape in the form of Indian English.

*Indian English* or nativized English is a form of English where we find deviations (from the Standard English) at phonological, morphological, syntactic and stylistic levels. This new form of English was natural in a multicultural and multilingual country like ours and because of the flexibility of the English language. "To maintain the cultural references when moving from one linguistic system to another is extremely difficult, because we cannot forget that language is the repository of inherited values, belief systems, and modes of experience and sensibility" (Salvador, 2001) and so the Indian English writers had to resort to literary multilingualism, since culture-specific terms do not have English equivalents. Thus they have used native elements in their writings and most of these elements are rooted in the native culture.

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Culture as we know is “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Tylor, 1974) and “every language is like a snail, it carries its social and cultural history on its back” (Dev Sen, 1977). Thus languages can be viewed as cultural resources that can be sustained in a non-native land by incorporating the native elements. Sustainability as we know can be defined as an ability or capacity of something to be maintained or to sustain itself. Here we would show how the Indian culture and sensibility is sustained in the multilingual written texts or more specifically in Indian English fiction by the Indian English writers.

## Motivation for Study

Linguists have focused mostly on the phenomenon of written language mixing in literary genres (Schmeling & Schmitz-Emans, 2002; Knauth 2007) or spoken language mixing (Gumperz, 1982; Myers-Scotton, 1993; Auer, 1999; Li Wei, 1998, 2005). Linguists have also studied multilingual written texts “where language alternation takes the form of embedding a representation of speech (for example, dialogue) within a larger matrix (for example, the narrative in a novel)” (Sebba, 2011). One such study was Timm’s (1978) analysis of Tolstoy’s novel *War and Peace* and many similar studies followed suit in the nineties and 2000s pertaining to other literary genres. Gardner-Chloros and Weston (2015) discussed about the main types of literary multilingualism and also the major functions of code-switching inside it. They have studied the multilingual texts from a sociolinguistic point of view, including those texts with code-switching inside them, with the help of many examples. They have also focused on the differences and similarities between the functions of code-switching in spoken and written forms, and concluded that the functions are similar in both modalities and also extend to other semiotic systems like sign language and visual culture. Müller (2015) also discussed examples of literary code-switching in selected Italo-Brazilian texts to highlight the relationship between the forms and functions of literary multilingualism and their sociolinguistic implications and concluded that though the stylistic function of code-switching played a major role in literature than in other genres on a micro-level, yet on the macro-level that kind of code-switching could be considered to be a response to bilingual identity.

The Indian English writers too have used many native elements in their narratives like lexical items, translated proverbs and idioms, native songs, compounds, and written code-switching to reflect the cultural and behavioral style of the characters and make the setting in their novels seem authentic. This has given the researchers enough scope to conduct in-depth analysis of Indian English writings, the process of Indianization of English, the analysis of the native elements and the contexts in which they are used. Kachru (1983) who examined the process of Indianization of English in India stressed upon the relation between the formal manifestation of Indian English and the functional relevance of the Indian cultural settings. According to him, the deviations in Indian English are an effect of the Indianization of English that has made Indian English culture-bound in the socio-cultural setting of India. Thorat (2000) while analyzing the discourse analysis in selected five Indian novels observed that the innovations and the deviations introduced by the novelists in the speeches of their fictional characters show that they have used the English language as an adaptable resource for adding meaning. Another scholar, Warsi (2004), studied the Indianization of English media and its importance in India and concluded that Indianized English was used in Indian media to cater to the needs of the Indians.

A linguistic and pragmatic analysis of social discourse in the Indian English texts was conducted by Sarangi (2005) that included examination of literary discourses, verbal and non-verbal linguistic transactions, transmissions and exchanges to develop the relation between language use and types of situations in literary contexts. Rollason (2006) followed in the footsteps of Sarangi and analyzed native words and imagery from the perspective of plausible translation difficulties by adopting a descriptive and lexical approach. He succeeded in establishing the defining hybridity of Indian English. Another scholar Sundarsingh (2009) analyzed the novel *That Long Silence* by applying the model used by Kachru with special reference to the latter's contextualization, Indianness and lexical innovations that helped in rendering the significant characteristics of Indianized English. On a similar vein, Kakati (2013) applauded the acceptance of Indian Writings in English as an important literary enterprise. She discussed how Indianness played a pivotal role in shaping the Indian creative writing in English where the writers have taken the help of Indian elements like myths, fables, songs and legends which lends a typically Indian flavor to the Indian English literature. It was thus not surprising when the famous Malayali writer, Meera (2015), remarked that the identity or relevance of the Indian English writers in the global scenario was due to their use of Indianness in their writings and stressed upon the fact that it (Indianness) can be preserved only by strengthening the regional languages.

Scholars have accepted the fact that native situations, socio-cultural and religious values, and the inbuilt native psyche of the non-native speakers of English are responsible for motivating the Indian writers of English to use the native elements in the English language. They have also talked about the functional aspects and the extra-linguistic factors responsible for the nativization of the English language. However, no attempt has been made to study the different kinds of literary multilingualism used in Indian English fiction and how the native culture is preserved through them. It thus has left us with a possibility of exploring the kinds of literary multilingualism used in multilingual written texts and the effect they produce in the process.

## Objective and Method

The present paper thus endeavors to identify and analyze the kinds of literary multilingualism used in the Indian English fiction and how through the use of these literary techniques, the writers have tried to sustain the native culture in the setting of the novels. The novels chosen for the purpose are Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. The two novels have been chosen for the following reasons: (i) the entire backdrop of both is rural India that gives us an insight into the typical Indian society – depicting customs, culture, religious beliefs, casteism, superstitions, and social stratification, in contrast to the cosmopolitan culture practised in the Indian cities, (ii) the existence of various regional languages (including dialects) and the presence of regional and cultural variations in the two novels give us a better scope to verify our claim. The setting of *The God of Small Things* is Kerala and the characters are mostly Malayalees. It becomes evident that the language mostly used by the characters is Malayalam. On the other hand, the locale of *The Hungry Tide* is Bengal and the characters mostly Bengalis. Here the language used is either Bengali or the local dialects used in Sunderbans.

The tools or literary techniques selected for the present study are songs, religious verse and translated proverbs. Though there are many devices like the native terms, expressions, idioms, social phenomena like code-switching and code-mixing, structural and stylistic deviations, etc. which help in retaining the native culture in the multilingual

written texts, yet in the present texts it is the songs, religious verses and proverbs that are deeply ingrained in the native culture of the place and therefore more suitable for the sustenance of native culture in multilingual written texts. They give us a glimpse of the thought processes of the native people, their mode of understanding and observing reality. The retention of the songs, religious verse and the use of the translated proverb to sustain the native culture in the multilingual written texts has been most skilfully and meticulously done by the authors.

The analysis is based on the narrative methodology which is important in interpreting and theorizing the culture of a particular community. It indicates how the narrative theories enable us to theorize interpersonal communication, culture and identity of a given community. Narratives are stories or sequence of events that form an important part of any language as they contain in them the native cultural traits of the given community. Narrative theory studies how narrative is a basic human strategy for dealing with the essential elements of our experience, and from this postulation it examines the unique nature of narrative and its various structures, elements, uses, and effects. In short, it studies the tools and principles governing the organization of a story into a sequence. Thus the narrative theorists study how narrative is different from other kinds of discourse and how they aid people not only to make sense of the world around them but also to make sense of the stories. In short, they investigate diverse fields, be it written texts, film narratives or oral story-telling, to find out how narratives can steer experience. Hence, due to the popularity of narrative in our Indian culture and the diversity of the multilingual written texts or Indian English fiction, we have chosen narrative methodology in our study to achieve our objective.

There are many narrative theorists who have applied theory to explicate the structure of narratives. The most prominent among them are Vladimir Propp, Tzvetan Todorov, Roland Barthes, and Claude Levi-Strauss. But for the sake of convenience, we have identified some basic features of narrative theories, instead of focusing on any particular one. Based on the data chosen for analysis, we have observed and identified features like i) classification of the characters and their actions into clearly defined roles and functions, ii) the trend of the stories beginning in an "equilibrium state" which is disrupted by a problem that leads to the state of "disequilibrium" and at the end how the characters sort out the problem to reach the state of "equilibrium" again, iii) the cultural code – a narrative device which the audience / readers can recognize as being part of a culture, and iv) stories unconsciously reflecting the values, beliefs and myths of a particular culture expressed in the form of "binary oppositions" like the presence of God / Devil and Good / Evil.

### Tools for Analysis

All narratives as we know are culture-based and are rich in native linguistic expressions like proverbs, idioms and mythological stories closely connected with the native culture. Like other languages, the Indian languages also contain many narrative contexts consisting of a large number of proverbs, idioms, and traditional stories with religious and mythological associations, which are entrenched in the native culture. Every aspect of these proverbs, idioms, and stories, i.e., the characters, the situations and the objects has long socio-cultural and religious associations, which cannot be replaced by proper correspondences in the other languages nor in English. The illustrations drawn from these contexts from the Indian languages are included in the Indian English fiction too. We have included the translated form of the native proverbs, songs and religious verse in this study as they are the English interpretations of the original linguistic expressions.

We know that the significance of songs varies according to culture and social context, as they are inextricably intertwined with the ways of life of the people. Sometimes, a culture's history may be transmitted orally through songs. Religion plays a pivotal role in the lives of the people of India and influences the Indian culture significantly. Religious verses or hymns are inseparable part of any religion and play a vital role in influencing and determining the value systems used in the culture of a particular community. And India being a land of diverse religions, these religious verses plays a crucial role in shaping the Indian culture. Thus, the songs and religious verses used in the multilingual written texts or to be more precise, in Indian English fiction, are not only contextually significant but they also help in bringing out the natural surroundings, the picture of the society and the primal Indian culture with its beliefs and traditions.

Proverbs, on the other hand, are sayings that have gained credence through frequent use and indicate the essence of experience of the speech community. Words can neither be added nor deleted from the proverbs. They are thus the most native items of any particular community and form an important part of its tradition. They are an integral part of the Indian milieu without which the real picture of the Indian society cannot be captured. They also act as a true link to the underlying story and its implication, as every proverb has originated from a story or incident. They are mostly used in informal conversations, discourses and narratives. In narratives and conversations, they are most specifically associated with the contexts. The Indian writers of English have thus used many translated Indian proverbs in their writings to transmit the underlying Indian sensibility. Hence, the translations of proverbs need skillful handling because a writer has "to make sure that the translated idioms or images do not go against the grain of English language" (Mukherjee, 1971). Therefore, we have chosen songs, religious verses and proverbs as the literary multilingual devices or tools for our study.

Thus in this paper we will show how the authors have used the above literary techniques to recount the prevalent customs, beliefs and superstitions of the native people and in short how they have sustained the native culture in the texts.

## Data Analysis

In this section, we are going to analyze the data from two texts – *The God of Small Things* and *The Hungry Tide*. The data have been put under three categories – songs (original along with their translated versions), religious verse (original along with its translation) and translated proverbs. In the text, *The God of Small Things*, we find two songs – one from the Onam boat race and the other from a Malayalam film, Chemmeen. We find a religious verse and a translated proverb in *The Hungry Tide*. Here we are going to show how the authors have used the above literary multilingual devices to sustain the native culture in the multilingual written texts.

### Songs

- (i) *Thaiy thaiy thaka thaiy thaiy thome!*  
*Enda da korangacha, chandi ithra thenjadu?*  
*(Hey Mr Monkey man, why's your bum so red?)*  
*Pandyill thooran poyappol nerakkamuthiri nerangi njan.*  
*(I went for a shit to Madras, and scraped it till it bled.) [GST 196]*

This is a song from the Onam boat race. Onam is the state festival of Kerala, which is celebrated in honor of Mahabali, the mythical Asura king of ancient Kerala. The Malayalees believe that on Onam Day, Bali visits his subjects. An event that is synonymous with this festival is the *Vallamkali* or the snake boat race. Kerala is surrounded by seas and is full of inland water bodies and so boat races are a speciality of the state. Young people take part in the boat races and various songs are sung of which the above song is one. The author has retained the original song from the boat race to make the readers aware of the cultural festivals of Kerala and has at the same time given the translation of the song so that it does not become inexplicable to the non-native readers. The boat and the song are symbolic in the context because surrounding it (boat) many tragic incidents take place in the novel. Thus, the song is culture-specific as it is directly linked to the Malayali culture and one of the main festivals of Kerala. The song reminds us not only of the culture but also of the mythology associated with the festival.

- (ii) Pandoru mukkuvan muthinu poyi,  
 (Once a fisherman went to sea,)  
 Padinjaraan kattathu mungi poyi,  
 (The West Wind blew and swallowed his boat,)  
 Arayathi pennu pizhachu poyi,  
 (His wife on the shore went astray,)  
 Avaney kadalamma kondu poyi.  
 (So Mother Ocean rose and took him away.) [GST 219-220]

This is a song from the Malayalam film, *Chemmeen*. *Chemmeen* which means 'shrimps' is based on the novel of the same name by Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai. It is set in a small fisher folk community living in the coastal region of Alappuzha. In the story, the central characters Karuthamma and Pareekutty are lovers who belong to two different communities, she to the Hindu fisher folk and he to the Muslim community, and marriages between the two are strictly forbidden. Karuthamma is separated from Pareekutty by her father who marries her off to Palani, a fisherman from another village. Palani returns home safely every day until one day his wife unites with her old lover, and he drowns in the sea. The pair of lovers also commits suicide.

According to the myth of Kadalamma, goddess of the sea, she is beneficent to the fisherman who leads a life of moral purity. 'She is beneficent to the fisherman who leads a life of moral purity; even on the stormiest seas, she guards the fisherman whose wife remains chaste and prays for his safe return while he is at sea. It is not only the man's life, but the life of the community as well that hangs upon the moral purity of the woman. The land, or in this context, the seashore, is identified with the woman's body because local lore depicts a chaste woman who succeeds in bringing her man back from the jaws of impending death' (Chandran, 2007). The myths revolving the sea goddess is common in most sea-faring countries and these myths are inevitable amongst communities that live close to sea. The Kadalamma myth also is ingeniously woven with the fisherman community's belief that the safety of the man at sea is in the hands of his woman who, remaining chaste, prays for his safe return.

The story of *Chemmeen* can be closely linked to the story of *The God of Small Things* where society punishes the lovers who try to break the social customs. Thus through the song, the Kadalamma myth and narrative associated with the native community and its cultural belief comes to the forefront. Here also the author has provided the English equivalents to make the song comprehensible for the non-native readers.

India is a land of cultural diversities and every region in India has its own folk music and songs. The culture of a particular community or region is reflected through these songs. Driesen (1999) correctly observes that, "Intertwined with the songs are the cultural allusions which import the indigenous heritage into the master text". Therefore, the author has very dexterously used this kind of literary multilingual device to preserve or sustain the native culture in the multilingual text. Thus though the language used in the narrative is English, the native culture is sustained through the use of the native songs.

### Religious Verse

*Bismillah boliya mukhey dhorinu kalam / poida korilo jini tamam alam\*  
baro meherban tini bandar upore / taar chhani keba achhe duniyar upore\*  
(In Allah's name, I begin to pronounce the Word / Of the whole universe, He  
is the Begetter the Lord\* To all His disciples, He is full of mercy / Above the  
created world, who is there but He\*) (HT 246)*

The religious verse has a hybrid language – a mixture of Bangla, Arabic and Persian. The Bangla used here is 'Sadhu Bangla' that is employed in literary texts and in religious verses. Here the original verse makes the context clear which only the translated form would have failed to do. It brings to one's mind the narrative of Bon Bibi – the goddess of the forest, who protects the people of the Sunderbans from wild animals and other perils. She is a multicultural goddess and is worshipped both by the Hindus and the Muslims. Bon Bibi is worshipped by her Hindu followers as *Bandurga*, *Bandevi* or even as *Banbibi*, and her *vahana* (vehicle) is a tiger. She is revered by her Muslim followers as *Banbibi* and is known as a *pirani*. As the legend goes, there was a childless Sufi fakir, Ibrahim who lived in Medina. Archangel Gabriel blessed him with two children, a daughter (Bon Bibi) and a son (Shah Jongoli). When they grew up, Archangel Gabriel, asked them to go on a divine mission to Sunderbans, or Atharo Bhatir Desh (Land of 18 Tides), to save its people from the tyranny of Raja Dokkhin Rai, the wicked Brahmin or the demon king of the jungle, who tracked and killed humans in the guise of a tiger. They managed to overpower him and made him promise not to kill humans.

Bon Bibi and her brother divided the forest into areas where people can live and where the Demon would live. Another legend intertwined with the previous one is about two brothers, Dhonai and Monai, who set out to collect honey wax, accompanied by their young nephew Dukhe. A dejected Dhonai, unable to find any beehives, returns to his boat and falls asleep. Raja Dokkhin Rai appears in his dream and demands the sacrifice of human flesh. He reminds him that they had not worshipped him prior to entering the forest. Fearing the wrath of the demon king, Dhonai decides to sacrifice Dukhe and leaves him in the jungle to be eaten by Dokkhin Rai. Just as the demon is about to pounce on Dukhe, in the guise of a tiger, Dukhe begins praying to Bon Bibi who appears before him, and saves him. A bitter fight ensues between Shah Jongoli and Dokkhin Rai, leading to the latter's defeat. Bonbibi sends Dukhe home and bestows him with enormous wealth. Dukhe then establishes a shrine dedicated to Bonbibi in his village, ushering in the tradition of puja (worship) to the forest deity. In the Sunderbans, people of all religions worship Bon Bibi. Thus, in the land of the Sunderbans, ruled by tigers, tides, and the uncertainties of nature, there is a unique tradition of conservation and communal harmony. It is based on the villagers' unwavering faith in Maa Bonbibi (forest deity) who is believed to bequeath them with strength and protection against Raja Dokkhin Rai (tiger god) as they struggle to eke out a living in the mangrove swamps. So, the verse is contextually significant and culture-laden.



Thus, by introducing the religious verse in the text, the author unravels the lesser known folklore of the Sunderbans, the legend of Bon Bibi which helps in retaining the native flavor of the text. The native culture and beliefs of a particular community is preserved in the text by the author through the introduction of the religious verse.

### Translated Proverb

“You can’t explain what a madman will do any more than you can account for what a goat will eat” (HT 279).

The original Bangla proverb is “*Pagole ki na bole, chhagole ki na khaye.*” Bengalis believe that no one can predict what a mad man would do and say, just like one does not know what a goat would eat. Goats eat everything and similarly mad men talk any nonsense. Here the attitude of the speaker (Horen) is also revealed. It shows that he did not approve of Nirmal’s incessant talks on idealism, and hence, takes the help of the proverb to express his view. The author has deliberately provided the translated form of the proverb to make it conducive for the non-native readers to guess the meaning of it from the context. The native Bengali readers would be easily able to associate it with the original proverb and the purpose of using it in the said context.

Thus the author has wittingly used the proverb to make the readers aware of the cultural beliefs of a particular community associated with it.

### Conclusion

The analysis of the data in the previous section shows how through the use of literary techniques like songs, religious verses and translated proverbs the authors have succeeded in sustaining the native culture in the Indian English fiction. The native elements selected for the analysis intrinsically relate to the native culture of the community in the setting of the texts. The native words, expressions, idioms, code-switching and code-mixing, structural and stylistic deviations, etc. also help in retaining the native culture in the texts but in the present texts it is the songs, religious verses and proverbs that are deeply entrenched in the culture and hence more apt for the sustenance of native culture in the multilingual written texts or more specifically in Indian English fiction. It is because they give us an insight into the thought pattern of the native people, their way of experiencing and perceiving reality. The entire narrative or folklore of a particular fisher folk community of Kerala and the mythology associated with the religious practices and festivals of Kerala are represented through the songs. Similarly the mythology and religious beliefs of the people of a particular community of Bengal is narrated through the religious verse. The translated proverb also narrates the inherited beliefs and sensibility of the people of Bengal. In many communities, the native culture is projected through oral communication like songs, religious verses and proverbs and sometimes these are localized. The study shows how these literary techniques or rather how these examples of literary multilingualism can be used in the Indian English fiction to sustain the native culture in the texts. The authors have successfully used these procedures as a means to encapsulate the Indian culture and sensibility and sustain it in their texts.

Abbreviations: GST: The God of Small Things; HT: The Hungry Tide

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