

# To the Indian Manner Born: How English Tells its Stories

## Nacido a la manera de la India o de cómo el inglés cuenta sus historias

*To imagine a language is to imagine a form of life.*  
– Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* § 19

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**Abstract:** Writing from outside the Anglo-American world is appreciated largely for the social life of English in worlds elsewhere, the linguistic oddities of its non-native cast of characters that spot poor translations. While English is easily granted inordinate powers of cultural assimilation, the languages of erstwhile colonies, the bhashas of India for example, from which this ‘translation’ presumably takes place, are seen to be rather weak and ill-equipped to meet the challenging demands of western narrative gambits. This essay offers three concrete examples of English fiction where its Indian writers afford us glimpses of a phenomenon critics have barely begun to notice. The passages examined here show how the bhashas sound differently when cast in English, or how English begins to breathe an unmistakable Indian ethos and idiom. When the Indian bhashas and English so happen together, there is no discrete language from which or into which translation occurs. It is evident that the writers here are no ‘Indianizers’ of a language whose fortunes now are global in reach and affect. For readers in India, English is still a bhasha-in-the-making, which is neither set in a ‘colonial’ far away and long ago, nor yet within current precincts of some ‘postcolonial’ felicity. If the efforts of these writers at resisting translation win, it is because they have asserted their right to imagine a language as a form of global life toward which English has taken them.

**Keywords:** translation; English bhāṣha [language]; R. K. Narayan’s “A Horse and Two Goats”; Raja Rao’s *The Cat and Shakespeare: A Tale of Modern India*; Krishna Baldev Vaid’s “Bimal in Bog”.

**Resumen:** Escribir desde fuera del mundo angloamericano es algo que se aprecia por la vida social que se refleja de mundos ajenos y las rarezas lingüísticas de su elenco de personajes no nativos que producen traducciones muy pobres. Mientras al inglés se le concede con facilidad un poder arrollador de asimilación cultural, las lenguas de las antiguas colonias, los *bhashas* o lenguajes de India, por ejemplo, desde las cuales se supone que se produce este tipo de

traducciones, se las considera débiles y no preparadas para afrontar los exigentes desafíos del los juegos narrativos occidentales. Este artículo ofrece tres ejemplos concretos de ficción en inglés en los cuales sus autores indios nos proporcionan ciertos vistazos de un fenómeno del cual la crítica apenas ha empezado a percibir. Los ejemplos que se examinan en este texto nos muestran como los *bhashas* suenan diferentes cuando se proyectan en el inglés, o cómo el inglés comienza a adquirir una forma de ver de la vida y un estilo inequívocamente indios. Cuando los *bhashas* indios y el inglés se combinan al mismo tiempo, no se puede hablar de una lengua específica desde la cual o hacia la cual se traduzca. Resulta evidente que estos escritores no *indianizan* una lengua de alcance y dominio mundial hoy en día. Para los lectores indios, el inglés es todavía un *bhasha* en proceso de formación, que ni pertenece solo al lejano pasado colonial, ni todavía ha echado raíces plenas en nuestro presente, todo nuestro él, poscolonial y supuestamente pleno. Si los esfuerzos de estos escritores de resistirse a recurrir a la traducción prosperan, sería porque han afianzado su derecho a imaginar un lenguaje que les conecte con el mundo global al que el inglés les ha introducido.

**Palabras clave:** traducción, bhasha inglés, “A Horse and Two Goats” de R. K. Rarayan; *The Cat and Shakespeare: A Tale of Modern India* de Raja Rao; “Bismal in Bog”, de Krishna Baldev Vaid.

**Summary:** Introduction; 1; 2; 3; 4; works cited.

**Sumario:** Introducción; 1; 2; 3; 4; referencias.

## INTRODUCTION

Once we have heard all the interesting stories of the writers’ world at play and at work, we still wonder why their characters speak the peculiar language they do, unmindful of those niceties and proprieties of textbook linguistics. When such stories become brilliant articulations of a new language in the world, we ought to seek new dimension for such time-worn concepts as *bilingualism*, *translation*, *calque*, etc. The strange case of such writers, especially in English-speaking multilingual worlds, is very rarely recorded in literary histories, much less in critical scholarship, unless the writers themselves volunteer to elaborate on this unique experience of *imagining* their varied forms of language in fiction. For a sample, here is Geetanjali Shree, an Indian writer, speaking about *her* bilingualism:

[I am b]ilingual from childhood in a formerly colonized and now formally decolonized part of the world. [Mine] is no ordinary bilingualism. It is not about to-ing and fro-ing from one language to another [...]. It is about to-ing and fro-ing between one mixed, hotchpotch, *khichdi* language to another mixed, hotchpotch *khichdi* language! English-Hindi-dialects mix to dialects-Hindi-English mix! Given that each constituent of these mixes brings along whole worlds and views, what can we seem but intensely confused people? (2008: online)

Writers like Shree would seem less “confused” and confusing to us if we were willing to grant that they can not only see language forming and filling their worlds as beings that reflect the complex fate of linguistic history, but also can anticipate how readers, writers, commentators on this phenomenon might be willing to see themselves as part of that historical process. Shree sees her bilingualism in this light. It sees languages erupting into each other, unforeseen ways sudden languages happen at once.<sup>1</sup>

“The eruption of other languages into an English-language text ...,” observes Tabish Khair, is a complex issue and one that differs from context to context” (2009: 148). Khair’s immediate context is Salman Rushdie but his larger concerns are both creative and critical because he is both a writer of fiction and a literary critic. Most recent studies of Indian English and Indian-English literature seem equally concerned with this “eruption” of our languages into English, a phenomenon that sometimes tends to get needlessly confused with the issues of the continuing legitimacy and uses of English in India. Questions of ‘Standard,’ ‘Dominance,’ and the imperialist power and provenance of English as language and ideology, within India and across an increasingly globalizing world, seem to becloud the scene. I shall begin with two random samples that address these issues politically. First, we have Rashmi Sadana’s observation on the politics of “deterritorialization” of English by writers *from* India now belonging diasporically to Anglo-American worlds:

The English language becomes a convenient medium by which this knowledge [of and from India] is transferred. What gets lost between the politics of encounter and newer transnational frameworks is the way in which English has been transformative for Indians, how the language has been about their modernity but also how English has been transformed by Indians and their other languages in the process. English exists in the world differently now that it is also an Indian language. [...] To recognize that English emerges and exists alongside other languages in an intensely

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<sup>1</sup> For somewhat similar perplexities and challenges of multilingual upbringing and creation we have very distinguished precedents. One such is the life of Elias Canetti whose remarkable panache to “weave in and out of so many languages” is the subject of Marjorie Perloff’s essay on *The Tongue Set Free* (1999), the first volume of the Bulgarian writer’s autobiography in English translation (2016: 102).

multilingual society is to re-politicize and re-territorialize Indian novels rather than read them merely in their transnational 'isolation' (Sadana, 2012: 157-158).

Srinivas Aravamudan's *Guru English* examines this deterritorialization of English in the specific context and character of Indian/Hindu spiritualism abroad both in its reach as transnational cosmopolitanism and as a commercial marketable surplus. What might be of immediate interest to us, however, are his introductory remarks on the four functions of English identified by sociolinguists as the instrumental, regulative, interpersonal, and innovative and how English manages to break past such functions while traversing foreign shores. "To the extent that the English language is seen reductively as the expression of upper class status and perspective alone," observes Aravamudan, "its capacity to represent the larger social whole is found lacking. Appearing to its speakers as a combination of prestige and disparagement, English represents a complicated status for South Asians that linguists have called *diglossic differentiation*, or the continual awareness of a relationship between high and low variations" (2006: 5). The truth of such inferences, as Aravamudan shrewdly suggests, is moot. For the samples of everyday speech and writing in English India, the representation of such in imaginative writing and what, above all, readers make of either in conditions that look alike but sound different in actual situations, might offer conflicting leads in research.

I shall suggest below that it is instructive to look at some passages in Indian-English writing where English and our bhashas<sup>2</sup> happen together. In such instances, English and the bhashas coalesce meaningfully into an idiom perfectly suited for readers to be in the precincts of an Indian felicity. While reading such passages, we are apt to notice two related phenomena. First, when English narrates an Indian episode, its commitment as a medium gets resolutely directed toward a bhasha and its ethos in question. Although our understanding of a language is that it is at bottom 'rule-governed,' and that no one can say anything more than the rules of a language legitimate, we also know that we have broken those very rules all the same with impunity (and sometimes with amazing

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<sup>2</sup> I have avoided using *vernaculars* for the languages of India because they never were the languages of slaves. *Bhasha* is language, a word understood across the Indian subcontinent (and beyond) although it is a Sanskrit word.

effect) and occasionally have had the language take on *our* meaning . Needless to say, there indeed is ‘an’ English, as vibrant as any other, in countries like India that the imperial Anglicist regimes hardly ever recognize as theirs. It is perhaps to this truth that Bill Ashcroft alerts us in observing that “even in the monoglossic settler cultures the sub-cultural distancing which generates the evolution of variant language shows that the linguistic cultures encompassed by the term ‘English’ are vastly heterogeneous” (2009: 145). Secondly, beneath the load of plot it carries in Indian stories, English seems self-reflexive to a fault, narrating its own ‘story’ to the bhashas as it were. Not many Indian writers, however, allow their English to fare so badly, let its guard slip, especially before readers whose bhashas, as the English writers believe, have a clear edge in presenting cultural specificities of our regions. By and large, therefore, Indian-English writers manage their alibi with aplomb, hardly relying on glossaries and explanatory notes that read like errata of conscience, taking special care to see that the ‘failures’ of English are either caught so well, frankly disavowed, or less embarrassingly nuanced by this “most powerful language in the world.” When writers succeed in this, their English hardly suffers any pangs of *diglossic differentiation*, seeing itself now as “authentic” and “superior,” or now as *desi* and “inferior.” Since the salience of this phenomenon (that is, English telling an Indian story with astonishing finesse) is somewhat unique, I have collected three instances from English fiction by Indians. Let us see how directly English and the bhashas engage one another.

## 1

Krishna Baldev Vaid’s *Bimal in Bog* (1990: 76-84) is the story of an Indian writer-English lecturer’s story set in Delhi. The English of this narrative is interesting because Bimal’s ‘story’ is pretty much part of a story English might tell us when it finds itself locked within an arrant intellectual middle-class consciousness from where it longs for freedom. Perhaps the wry, if self-deprecatory, humour of this narrative conceals the unenviable plight of our bhashas among which English finds itself after the country’s political independence. Vaid sharpens the irony of Bimal’s English by publishing the story first in Hindi, and then in

English (as he chooses to do with his stories).<sup>3</sup> Among the Indian intellectuals who recall the history of the country's first ever parliamentary debates, English was supposed to be India's *associate* official language and was destined to be phased out after a decade or so from 1947. That certainly was not to be. *Bimal in Bog* manages a delicate balance between the languages that inform the narrator's reflections (apparently Bangla, and evidently Hindi-Panjabi-Urdu) in English. Quite unmindful of the niceties of plot or argument, passages move relentlessly through pages, *Nightwood*-style, alternating between interior and dramatic monologues. Only fairly large chunks of this narrative will give us some idea of the motive and method English deploys in telling its tale. Hence a sizable portion here as sample:

Let's talk some more about the language problem. Eradicate English. Do you know of any other country where? Every country has its own curse. Let's not cloud the issue by talk of other countries. Let's remain rooted. Panditji stomps out of the staff room. You shouldn't have shoved the forbidden beef before him. You know he doesn't let even his feet touch leather. Lest it be beef? But seriously. The medium is our madness. Instruction be hanged. We have other worries. Such as the stupid system. Of education as well as otherwise. Let's not blame others of our errors. But for English we couldn't have learnt bye-bye. Good night sounds nicer in English than in any Indian language. Same for good morning. Same for all amorous greetings. Such as hey sweetheart. Do you know you can't cavil as well in Hindi as in English? Mummy is more meaty than mere mother. English in fact has become the medium of our morals. English gave us etiquette. Unmade our native manners. Improved our ability to exclaim. Twisted our tongues. Enabled us to quote Coomaraswamy. Taught us

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<sup>3</sup> Vaid has admitted to some "ambivalence" to the medium of his fiction and the language of his larger intellectual make-up, to India and the west. "It [this ambivalence] has given me a double vision," he told a western audience in Stockholm in 1987, "thus enabling me to make a better use of my ironic temperament [;] it has helped me preserve my distinctive sensibility, and it has been a factor in preventing me from choosing English as the medium of my creative writing" (Quoted in Jaidev, 1993: 176). Jaidev considers the implications of Vaid's ambivalence at some length (1993: 176-179) in his *Culture of Pastiche* and concludes that "[Vaid's] *avant-garde* fictions could create an impact only in Hindi fiction, not if they were offered in English" (1993: 178). I limit my observations here to the "English story" of *Bimal in Bog* for the simple reason that Vaid and his persona are indistinguishable in it. There is something to be said after all for Vaid's "ambivalence" when he has chosen to set free that part of the English story that lay uneasily trapped within a Hindi consciousness for long.

respect for time. Curbed our cries. English introduced us to Europe. Electricity. Esteem. Euphoria. Had the English not come the Moghuls wouldn't have gone. Read history. But for the English there wouldn't have been any Anglo-Indians. Nor any Indo-Anglians. The English gave our early freedom fighters balls. Boobs. Ballrooms. Ballbearers. Nightclubs. Nightsuits. Cigars. Pipes. Pubs. Bridge. Bearers. Beer. Badminton. Our ances had English nannies. Our actors are essentially English. We want our wives to be white. The English gave us a sense of our inferiority. Which was necessary for our self-esteem. They gave us some of their guts. Our teaching system owes all its awfulness to them. Our examination system too. Our syllabus system. Our attendance system. The whole works. They let us loot their worst. What do you want now? We want a change. From English to American. ... What is going on? Words. Every occasion has its own outcry. What was this? A mere mot. English let Hindi have its own Romantics. I wish it hadn't. English induced experimentalism. Effete. English gave us our progressive period. A decade too late. How come we can't even crap in our own language? Who says so? We are staring at their leftovers. They master our minds. We treat them like our twin brothers. We still steal from their text books. We chew their cud. We learnt by their rote. But rote-learning is an important element in our outdated tradition. Shut up you shit. We're still stuck in pre-printing age anxieties. When every father used to pass on his knowledge to his sons sitting around his death-bed through last-breath parables. Daughters didn't count. In other words English has nothing to do with our anachronisms (Vaid, 1990: 77-78).

Those who can read *Vimal urf Jayen to Jayen Kahan* will discover (and reassure themselves, as I did) that the above sounds even more (authentically!) craven and dumb than the Hindi, an effect often sustained by the adoption of Hindustani speech-rhythms and tones by English. On the other hand, there are literal translations and borrowings from English that sound inappropriate to a bhasha. The utter resentment and abjection this passage distils are perhaps best served in English because it is English that causes and perpetuates them both in the loquacious narrator and the silent Bimal for whom he (certainly, for the voice is unmistakably a man's, and its fancies insistently male) speaks. How does English enhance Indian self-esteem by making us feel terribly inadequate and lost amidst our languages? What, pray, has been lost in 'translation' when a Hindi self walks through a door English is trying to walk out of? The prose garbage we pass by is hard to ignore either; the real question is which language would make it less offensive to our variously schooled sensoria. And that ought to make us worry less about the anteriority and

posteriority of translated texts, especially of *Bimal in Bog*, technically a translation, but a story told twice, once in Hindi (as if English couldn't tell it), and now retold in English (as though Hindi couldn't speak for English half as well as it would for itself). Later here, in conclusion, I shall comment on this peculiar textual phenomenon with reference to 'originals' that stand in dubious relationship to their 'translations.'

## 2

R. K. Narayan's "A Horse and Two Goats," (1999: 440-462) unlike Vaid's story, is far too well-known perhaps to merit another detailed study today. It has nevertheless managed to conceal, I believe, the secret of its enormous appeal to Indian and non-Indian readers alike. This comic pastoral plays on an idea English has put in wide circulation in colonies where people have been encouraged to find its increasingly appropriate use for "special purposes." Why this couldn't have been otherwise, given the long colonial history of English in many parts of the world, and the Anglo-American ministrations in funding and sustaining ELT programmes all through their initial postcolonial phases in newly emerging African, South-/Southeast Asian countries, has been argued from two different perspectives by Robert Phillipson and Alistair Pennycook. "A Horse and Two Goats" certainly does not sound an urgent alarm against the global language in which it is told, but we cannot help occasionally hearing in it some rumble of a debate centred on the inequalities of access and articulation English occasions in societies that concede its capital power. At any rate, I remind myself of the crucial thesis of a Pennycook essay while reading this story: "The world is in English rather than just English being in the world" (1994: 34).

Since Narayan was averse generally to politicizing his fiction in crude ways, we may not quite see the cultural politics of English India clearly laid out in authorial remarks, but virtually half this story is devoted to keeping the two characters (Muni, and the red-faced man/American) and their worlds aseptically apart. The description of Kritam is rather longwinded and tedious if we happen to know Tamil Nadu villages of the 1960s. When the two men meet, however, English begins to double up as itself and a surrogate for Tamil. We can't be sure that the narrator of "A Horse and Two Goats" subscribes to the free market economic theory of current English Language educators that the



demand for English has exceeded its supply in countries like India, but English certainly will do all the talking in this business. The story's *English*, therefore, is the real asset. It acts as an enabling medium even when it represents Muni's Tamil in a masterfully bizarre *jugalbandi* of sorts when the red-faced man and Muni converse alternately. If anything, the medium is superbly 'enabling' in that not a single idea falls anywhere within the possible range of either speaker's comprehension.

It might interest readers to go through this exchange if only to see how Muni and the American imagine the Other (and his language) and how they grope toward meanings they choose to make— each, it would appear, according to his dire need. If Samuel Beckett's absurd knows itself to be so, though not necessarily to his interlocutors and the audience, Narayan's perhaps demands to be reflected upon by a readership whose understanding of irony has been sharpened by English schools. "Can't you understand even a simple word of English? Everyone in this country seems to know English. I have got along with English everywhere in this country, but you don't speak it," begins the American who later wishes he had had his tape-recorder at hand: "Your language sounds wonderful. I get a kick out of every word you utter, here'— he indicated his ears— 'but you don't have to waste your breath in sales talk'" (Narayan, 1999: 453-454). Muni now answers the American's earlier question on his ignorance of English, but what kick *that* would have given the foreigner is anybody's guess:

'I never went to school, in those days only brahmins went to schools, but we had to go out and work in the fields[,] ... and so I don't know the *Parangi* language you speak, even little fellows in your country probably speak the *Parangi* language, but here only learned men and officers know it...' (Narayan, 1999: 454).

There is much, however, they exchange: news, local gossip, and loud thoughts about the world. None of these they would have shared, had they indeed shared a common language. But that *bhasha*, Muni's Tamil here, for all its classical status, will never be a multibillion dollar business *English* today is, and globally facilitates. Had Muni known English, the American wouldn't have heard his "sales talk;" what the American imagines to be Muni's "sales talk" is hardly that. American business abroad is better done without such talk. It certainly is no less significant that the red-faced man plans ahead and sees immediate gains

in future while Muni slides back always into history, local myth, legends and gossip. The colonial eloquence *versus* the subaltern silence in Indian narratives has been noticed before. In the context of the colonial Gothic and Otherness, Tabish Khair comments most shrewdly: "...Gayatri Spivak's ... 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' is also limited by its insistence on language as the only mode of expression, resistance, contestation. For of course, as Spivak notes, the subaltern cannot speak because language does not belong to the subaltern: it is (partly; some might say 'largely') language that creates the subaltern" (2009: 108).

That we do business badly with the white races is made plain and certain when Narayan's metaphors direct our attention to business English and the business of English in India. Perhaps the latter is an Indian writer's gripe as well, having to write for a small readership comprising mostly students of advanced English in our colleges and universities. In a passage like the following, it is difficult to say which of the bhashas (English or Tamil) is grateful to the other for favours:

'We can do anything if we have a basis for understanding.'

At this stage the mutual mystification was complete, and there was no need to carry on a guessing game at the meaning of words. The old man chattered away in a spirit of balancing off the credits and debits of conversational exchange, and said in order to be on the credit side, 'O honourable one, I hope God has blessed you with numerous progeny. I say this because you seem to be a good man, willing to stay beside an old man and talk to him, while all day I have none to talk to except when somebody stops by to ask for a piece of tobacco (Narayan, 1999: 458).

I have been fascinated by our students warming themselves, rather unbidden, to the allegory of "A Horse and Two Goats." They see in Muni at seventy a picture of India before the British; in the Big House a replica of our feudal past; in the old statue of the horse and the rider/warrior an image of modern India's ill-kept museums and libraries, etc. Hardly, however, do we see English serving a much older (and classical) Tamil so devotedly as in this Crown story (the narrator pauses to remind us that *kritam* is "coronet") unless we begin to appreciate Narayan's art in aligning English with a bhasha, two domains of unequal force and political significance which, as an Indian writer in English, Narayan understands only too well. How well does this writer know that mighty

history favours the mighty, that trade and commerce will only further the Empire of English signs.<sup>4</sup>

### 3

*The Cat and Shakespeare* (Rao, 1971) is another story. Its cast includes characters whose language is Malayalam and those who use the same as a second language in Travancore. Its narrator is a Konkani whose Malayalam is proverbially odd-sounding and incorrect to the Malayali ear but rather charming and endearing for that very reason. In subtitling this as “A Tale of Modern India,” Raja Rao imagines English to be a bhasha that alone could tell this tale to the other, rest of, India. His choice of English, in other words, is determined by his urge to share a larger truth about languages and cultures where English helps an Indian story-teller for whom it can be no less than a bhasha that will tell that truth more honestly and dispassionately. In order that English shed its colonial overbearingness and hegemonic appurtenance, and truly appear in its modest garb in an Indian locale, Raja Rao makes his narrator speak it with as much naïve simplicity and inadequacy as his other second language, Malayalam. Raja Rao’s English thus makes no ambitious bid to *translate* a Malayalam story (for that would mean that he could read and write Malayalam, a language he could barely understand) but bids English tell a Malayalam story as if it were presently in exile, like Ramakrishna Pai, in Travancore, amidst Malayalees who chatter away only in their language or play with Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* in a ration shop, as Govindan Nair does when he literalizes the classic’s “play’s the thing” in his affected highfalutin bashi. Wouldn’t that English sound odd? It does, but certainly not anymore outlandish than Pai’s Malayalam

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<sup>4</sup> This old allegorical engine, once started by inexpert hands, tends to overwork. I discovered this while working with our current batch of first-year M. A. students. Some of them wondered whether the continuing political debate on the 1-2-3 nuclear deal in India sounds rather like the Muni-American conversation. What “deal” was, or was not, struck with the U. S., and who might that benefit? The “headless chicken” imbroglio, they argued, nevertheless focuses on the blur of this “deal” regardless of its own ambiguities, and perhaps on all deals negotiated with a country like the U. S. *in English*. How else could plain English divide the educated Indian elite into three or more warring factions on such an important issue of national security and sovereignty? How, again, could it reunite the parliamentarians in their bid to arraign the Indian diplomat who appears to have told all the truth but told it with a particular slant?

and Nair's Shakespeare to a Travancorean. Pai's relational status to the medium he adopts as his –this quite oddly English, to one way of thinking– has sometimes seemed to me to suggest a pun his surname invites– the geometrical  $\pi$  that indicates the numerical value of the ratio of circumference to the diameter of a circle, one among the many concentric famously drawn for World Englishes by Braj Kachru (1985: 12).

If Rao did not translate anything into *The Cat and Shakespeare*, the story has since then appeared in Malayalam, a *tour de force* in retelling an English story of which I can cite no parallel in Kerala. For K. Ayyappa Paniker's *Poocayum Shakespearum* (1980) is not so much a translation as a close retelling of *The Cat and Shakespeare*, a brilliant restoration (perhaps a rehabilitation) of a tale that had gone astray, had gone away to another place and time, as it were. Told in Pai's Malayalam, it reads exactly as it ought to be told, were Rao writing Malayalam, instead of English. Pai's words come home as though in a postcolonial restitution of sorts. They belonged to pre-Independent India, the Travancore of the 1930s when Pai lived and spoke his Malayalam.

If most readers of *The Cat and Shakespeare* find it “difficult,” the reasons for its inaccessibility are often, wrongly in my view, ascribed to its heavily symbolic motifs, and the heavier pattern of Indian metaphysics that underpins them. I should imagine that the real reason for this “difficulty” is its peculiar English that negotiates the linguistic folkways and mores of the language spoken in erstwhile Travancore. I discovered this by comparing passages from Rao and Paniker. One significant difference I noticed here was in my experience of reading the two languages (not the texts) differently. While the English of *The Cat* demands to be read as a printed text, the Malayalam of *Poocayum* treats one to a narrative pleasure that is aural / oral. I began listening to the characters more naturally as though I was in their very midst. When Pai speaks, his Malayalam is just what it might be if I heard him directly, in person, an effect hard to imagine in *The Cat*, whose English captures “the Malayalam speech effects,” so to speak, in a complicated word order and pattern, texturally different from the English readers are used to. It might be easier I think to illustrate this from Govindan Nair who, according to Pai, speaks “a mixture of *The Vicar of Wakefield* and Shakespeare” (Rao, 1971: 10) but let me cite a passage of Pai's, the tale's narrative standard, where this is seen to happen more egregiously:

Normally the story should have stopped there. But is life normal?

...

A child for a woman is always her own child. All children belong to her by right. Who made the world thus? I say you made it. Whoever said it was made, made it. Otherwise how can you say it was made? Making itself is an idea born of the world. When making seeks making in making, pray, who sees a world? You say World, and so making comes into existence. Is one the proof of the other? Are you my proof, I ask of you, whoever you may be? Suppose I were to take you to a lonely island and say, coo. The whole island will say coo. Then you say the whole island says coo, forgetting that you said coo. And when you said who said coo, you seek your breath and you know breath said coo. Did you see the origin of your breath? And did you see him who knows you breathe, etc., etc.? It is not so simple as all that. No question is simple. So no answer is normal. Yet must I have stopped where I left off? But I must give you other news. I must prove the world is. For Love is where happening happens as nonhappening. What can happen where everything is, etc., etc.? (Raja Rao, 1971: 109-110)

In Paniker's telling (1980b: 60-72) all this is rendered as though a gift is being exchanged between selves that commune and intuit meanings. When represented in writing, the intuitive quotient of this understanding will occupy more time and place than when it simply fills the mind. The words in Malayalam roughly equal those in English but the gift of Malayalam weighs more in resonance than that in English. Let us recall here Walter Benjamin's very significant remark that the narrative is a gift. Pai's reflections at this point begin with a roundabout explanation as to why his narrative doesn't end there, contrary to normal expectation, but the normal, says Pai, is more assumed in life than when it is really lived. That leads to an oblique reflection on making and giving, giving and taking, the story told and the storeys built. (It may be too fanciful to suggest but true nevertheless that the three levels of reality Raja Rao proposes for *The Cat* tale correspond to the three realities of the *bhashas*: the regional/local Malayalam; the allegorical Sanskrit of the Upanishads, Adi Śankara, and the *Aṣṭāvakra Gīta*, etc.; and the transcendental 'beyond' as it were of Shakespeare's English.) Hence the gift. Nothing passes for a narrative unless another narrative answers it as a courtesy, a reciprocal generosity in equal measure. Not all stories by Indian writers

in English have had the distinction of appearing in the bhashas; indeed we have had only very few translations from Indian English to the bhashas. Paniker's *Pooccayaum* is perhaps that gift, gratefully returned to English that deepens and enlarges its own riddle in a bhasha whose protocols receive and give differently.<sup>5</sup>

#### 4

One last observation is in order. From the near and the far, readers of contemporary English fiction by Indians have been noticing the peculiarities of its English, especially its trademark oddities that seem wilful or its deliberate cussedness that dishonours the bounds of English idiom and grammar. Shrewd commentaries on this “vernacularization” of global English such as Rashmi Sadana's *English Heart, Hindi Heartland* (2012) and Aamir R. Mufti's *Forget English!* (2016) rightly attribute this phenomenon to writers like Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy who relentlessly seek to align their fictional with the social geography of English access. Mufti however goes a little further in recognizing that the heterogeneity of India's Anglophone fiction is owed substantively to the plurilingual world from where it draws its discursive sustenance. “English ... in Asia and Africa,” as Mufti observes, “is never written or spoken out of hearing range of a number of its linguistic others— a heterogeneity that often gets packaged within the form of itself as one of its supposedly exotic pleasures ...” (2016: 160). While Sadana and Mufti take us thus far, they do not seem to notice how English had often, even before Rushdie and Roy, proved itself to be as expressive as any Indian

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<sup>5</sup> Ayyappa Paniker has written on his translation as well as on *The Cat and Shakespeare* based on his conversations with Raja Rao. I shall therefore avoid another summary or explication of the mystical/metaphorical import of “realities” that Paniker addresses directly in his Malayalam or indirectly in his English articles. I shall, however, briefly mention here that my discussion on *The Cat* and *Pooccayaum* with Raja Rao and Ayyappa Paniker on two or more separate occasions with them has been most beneficial to me. At Dhwanyaloka in Mysore (December 1985) I asked Raja Rao whether any of his novels has appeared in an Indian language. He seemed surprised that I wanted to know this. “Why would anyone want to read me in an Indian language?” he said. When I reminded him that *The Cat* has already had another life in Malayalam (and perhaps deserves eight more in other bhashas), he conceded that “That Travancore story needed to be told in Malayalam... Have you read it? Of course Ayyappa Paniker is different... but I don't allow translators to... Paniker, yes... he has told it in Malayala, *for me*, that is...He knows” (1979: 14-18).

bhasha. G. V. Desani and R. K. Narayan are both cited by Mufti as exemplars, eminent Indian precursors to Rushdie's Anglophone fiction. (2016: 163).

In none of the narratives where English tells its story, the writers concerned have tried to *translate* in any usually understood sense. At any rate, no translation under a familiar regime of source-target binary would have helped matters when English turns a bhasha. Nor do the two (or more, as in Vaid) languages in question lock themselves up into a ferocious combat for articulatory dominance. When English enters the kinship zone of bhashas, it is not only the "Indianness" it seeks to inhere; the expansiveness of its medium, the possibilities of its new articulation, the resilience of its of epistemic idiom are all open to test and trial in variously aligned cultural situations where English is required to play variously aligned and amiable multilingual roles. Ashcroft prefers to see in such disparate fictive domains across languages a "metonymic gap" open up which creative writers like Edward Kamau Brathwaite fill up with "unglossed words, phrases, or passages from a first language, [or with] concepts, allusions or references that may be unknown to the reader..." (2009: 174-175). Far deeper if subtler effects, therefore, than filling up a "metonymic gap," or mere "translatory effect of Indian-English writing... embedded in the concrete relation of English to the Indian languages" (Dharwadker, 2003: 261), are in evidence in the passages I have examined above.<sup>6</sup> In a slowly emerging/ evolving phenomenon called "English bhasha," I do not see a discrete language being translated into another (Hindi/Tamil/Malayalam into English, for example), or one resisting such translation. Perhaps it is helpful to imagine its ontology as what Wittgenstein calls "a form of life," a bhasha-in-the-making, one whose "original" must yet be found before we

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<sup>6</sup> Dharwadker observes that besides being a medium for creative expression, English "also has to serve as a medium of *translation*" for the Indian writer in English. "In this specific sense," observes Dharwadker, "Indian literature in English is as much an original literature as a literature of translation..." (2003: 260). While I would only partly agree with his view, I find a couple of his later observations in the same essay pretty much along my line of thinking: "[The] intertexture of the Indian languages and English, however deeply mediated by other factors, is not a mirage... [;] the highly crafted 'English' of Indian-English literature is full of the long shadows of the Indian languages. The indigenous languages are among the social, political, and aesthetic elements that have penetrated the English language in its alien environment on the subcontinent... [;] they have leaked continuously into this literature through the aperture that opened inside it two hundred years ago" (2003: 261).

begin to think of its “translation;” one whose translation must yet be found before we begin to think of its source.

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