

Search for a Third Space: A Postcolonial Reading of the Bilingual Writer in Indian Literary Scenario, through Manoj Das as a Case Study

Amarjeet Nayak

In spite of the apparent heterogeneity of the literary scene in India, it is now increasingly perceived in terms of just two literary traditions – Indian Writing in English and Regional Language Literatures. In such a scenario, the bilingual writer in India who writes in English and a regional language is not considered holistically as his literary outputs in the two languages are evaluated in exclusive terms. This paper, through Manoj Das as a case study, attempts to present a model of holistic reception of the bilingual writer, taking recourse in postcolonial theory, especially Homi Bhabha's concept of 'hybrid third space'.

Keywords: *Indian Writing in English, Regional Language Literatures, Bilingual Writer, Third Space*

Even though literatures in several languages, including English, flourish in India, the multilingual Indian literary scenario is marked by the existence of Indian Writing in English (hereafter, IWE) and Regional Language Literatures (hereafter, RLL), the two literary traditions that are often seen as binary opposites. This oppositional framework between IWE and RLL leads to the strange predicament of the bilingual writer (who writes in English as well as in one of the several regional languages in India) where s/he is perceived as a dual personality with his two identities as an Indian writer in English and a regional language writer not being seen to complement each other, but instead as two mutually exclusive categories.

In this paper, my contention is that a holistic approach is needed by which the complete oeuvre of such a bilingual writer can be assessed where IWE and RLL are seen as complementing each other in various ways. Here I would like to look at this issue of IWE and RLL working in an oppositional framework from within the framework of postcolonial theory since it has important implications for it. Using postcolonial theory is imperative for the current study which deals with a bilingual writer who writes in English and a regional language, since one of the concerns of postcolonial theory is the relationship or power dynamics between English and regional languages. Hence, it is my endeavor to use postcolonial theory to see how it has looked at this binary opposition and how it may be used to examine the work of a bilingual writer. I shall use Manoj Das, a bilingual writer from India who writes in English and Oriya as a case study for this purpose. Here, it is pertinent to explain the choice of Manoj Das as a case study. Das is a prolific bilingual writer writing for about five decades now and has almost an equal number of works in both English and Oriya. Apart from writing original pieces in both languages, he also keeps translating his works from one language to another with great regularity. Hence, he comes across as a representative bilingual writer in the Indian literary scene.

The fact that an unequal power relationship exists between the two languages of the bilingual writer's choice contributes in no small measure to the creation and sustenance of the binary. It is pertinent to note here that 'power' is a major concept in postcolonial discourse. According to Foucault, 'discourse' is a system of statements

within which and by which the world can be known. Discourses are ways of constituting knowledge together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations that inhere in such knowledge and the relations between them. Power too is a relation and gets exercised within the discourses. Postcolonial discourse includes postcolonial theory, literary criticism, as well as their academic institutionalization, all of which are implicated in the power dynamics between two languages—English and a regional language. So, when the unequal power relationships between two languages or literatures lead to privileging one over the other, then that leads to the formation of not just a binary opposition, but a hierarchical one at that. Foucault defines power thus:

The multiplicity of force relations, imminent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization, as the process by which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies. (1990: 92)

This clearly shows how unequal power relationships get strengthened by institutions, state mechanisms, etc. In the case of the Indian literary market place, state-sponsored institutions like Sahitya Akademi have supported this sort of power equation, whereby they have made deliberate attempts to give the bilingual writer the identity of an RLL writer, completely ignoring the fact that s/he is a practitioner of IWE as well. For instance, except for Kamala Das, all the other bilingual writers have received their Sahitya Akademi awards exclusively for their RLL output.

Furthermore, the unequal power distribution between the first world colonizers and the third world colonies also leads to an unequal power relationship between the language of the colonizer and the language(s) of the colonized such as the regional languages of India. The Nobel Prize, for example, is given either to the writers writing in English or those whose work has been translated into English, eg. Rabindranath Tagore. This is just one example of the status enjoyed by English with respect to the other languages used in third world countries like India. Significantly, postcolonial discourse also valorizes English literatures produced in the former British colonies like India.

Postcolonial scholars such as the authors of *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) term such literatures “english literatures”, characterising this set of literatures not just as aping British English literature in language and literary tradition, but also as having their own unique identities. While talking of the various ‘englishes’ in the former British colonies and the english literature produced in these countries, Bhabha’s idea of ‘mimicry’ needs to be brought in. According to Bhabha, ‘mimicry’ designates a gap between the norm of civility as presented by European enlightenment and its distorted colonial imitation. It can act as a sly weapon of anticolonial civility and is a mixture of deference and disobedience. This idea of mimicry is an imitation which is only outwardly and therefore can undermine colonial supremacy. (Bhabha 1994: 86)

Thus ‘mimicry’ of English by ‘englishes’ is not a straightforward homage. Ania Loomba clarifies Bhabha’s idea of ‘mimicry’ thus:

But is mimicry an act of straightforward homage? In a series of essays, Homi Bhabha suggests that it is possible to think of it as a way of eluding control [...]. Bhabha suggests that colonial authority is rendered ‘hybrid’ and ‘ambivalent’ by this process of replication, thus opening up spaces for the colonized to subvert the master-discourse. (1998: 89)

The various ‘englishes’ and the literatures produced in these languages may be seen as such ‘mimic’ productions that have started competing with British English and are challenging its supremacy. The ever-increasing number of Booker Prize winners from various former British colonies is a testimony to the growing stature of ‘english literatures’ and the challenge they pose to the dominance of British English literature. A look at the nationalities of the Booker winners since its inception in 1969 will help in understanding the growing status of ‘english literatures’ vis-à-vis ‘English literature’ coming out of Britain. The first Booker went to the British novelist P. H. Newby. In the 1970’s, out of the eleven winners (including co-winners in the year 1974), there were eight from Britain and three from ex-British colonies or settler colonies, which shows the dominance of British English literature, but also the emergence of ‘english literatures’ in this decade. It is in the 80’s that one can see a discernible power shift as far as the status of ‘english literatures’ vis-à-vis ‘English literature’ is concerned. Out of the 10 winners, five each belonged to Britain and ex-British/settler colonies. In the 90’s, it is almost the same as out of the eleven winners, five were from the ex-British colonies or settler colonies. And in the first decade of the twenty-first century only two winners, Alan Hollinghurst and Hilary Mantel, are from the British main land. This clearly shows the growing stature of ‘english literatures’ in the world scenario. Thus, the language that was imposed upon the people of the colonies by the colonizers has now become a weapon in their hands to challenge the supremacy of British English and its literature. N’gugi elucidates this point further:

The leader of a revolution, C. L. R. James has stated in his book *The Black Jacobians*, is often one of those who have taken advantage of the language and culture of the oppressor. This is because he knows all the contradictions inside the language and culture of his captors. He was being trained to be a good Macaulay’s man, carrying the mind of the English in his black body, but instead he is translating reality from the standpoint of the minds of the dwellers in the cave. He is a double spy. (1998: 84)

Thus, these mimic productions, through their act of resistance to British English literature are seen by postcolonial theory to challenge the dominant discourse. But in the process, their own power and status has increased manifold, because in a globalised consumerist world, the fascination with awards and international recognition ensures the popularity and hence the public demand for more production of ‘english literatures’ in these countries. Thus with the world dominance of English language and with it the dominance of “english literatures” including IWE, RLL is in the position of a subaltern within the literary market place. Just like a Spivakian “subaltern”, RLL tries to speak loudly

through its various proponents, but the lack of a microphone does not allow it to announce itself loud and clear among a host of IWE practitioners who are provided with more loud speakers than they can manage by their publishers and marketing strategists. Hence, RLL ends up just ‘talking’ and not being able to ‘speak’ as its voice does not get heard in the literary market place, relegating it to a subservient position vis-à-vis IWE. Spivak clarifies this difference between the subaltern ‘talking’ and ‘not being able to speak’ in one of her interviews in *The Spivak Reader*: “By ‘speaking’ I was obviously talking about a transaction between the speaker and the listener.” (1996: 289) Thus, RLL is not allowed to ‘speak’ as nobody listens to it and hence in a global postcolonial world, RLL is perceived as mute.

This market reality of the Indian literary scenario where the position and power associated with IWE has grown manifold in recent years has widened the gulf between IWE and RLL in terms of power, recognition, and visibility leading to an antagonism between IWE and RLL, and fostering a binary opposition between these two. Though postcolonial discourse is premised upon the idea of resistance to a dominant discourse in terms of language or culture, postcolonial theory has contributed to this binary opposition through its stress on ‘english literatures’ and its almost complete sidelining of RLL produced in the former colonies. For instance, the 925-page voluminous *An Anthology of Colonial and Postcolonial Short Fiction* (2006) has no English translations of any story coming from any RLL. Amazon.com website clearly states this fact on its website:

Regional introductions thoroughly interweave history and literary history to help students delve into each region's short fiction with the background they need. A wide representation of authors introduces students to internationally recognized authors such as Chinua Achebe, Margaret Atwood, Jamaica Kincaid, Salman Rushdie, and Keri Hulme, as well as lesser known but equally important writers—all of whom wrote their stories originally in English. (<<http://www.amazon.com/Anthology-Colonial-Postcolonial-Short-Fiction/dp/061831881X>>)

This is one example of several such instances where anthologies of postcolonial literature completely ignore RLL and their English translations, thus helping foster the English literature / RLL divide. Similarly, postcolonial critics such as Edward Said and Benita Parry are mostly concerned with english literatures in their works of postcolonial literary theory. All this has contributed to the IWE / RLL divide in the Indian literary market place. Thus, the ‘postcolonial’ itself becomes implicated in the power dynamics that postcolonial discourse concerns itself with. The locational politics of the postcolonial critic contributes significantly to this end. As Harish Trivedi points out:

The postcolonial still bears the white historical burden of colonialism [...]. Apparently the postcolonial is at home either in the metropolis (to which he has written himself back, or up, or away) or in diaspora but never where he comes from. Home for him is where he himself isn't but probably was sometime ago, until he became a postcolonial, after which all he needs is a location. The ‘unhomed’ of (un?)Homi Bhabha inhabit, as we know, an interstitial Third Space

which becomes available presumably when one has come out of the Third World. (1999: 269)

Postcolonial theory is engaged with conceptual abstractions such as conflicts between cultures, nationalities, etc. as found in works of Edward Said (*Orientalism*) and Homi Bhabha (*Location of Culture*). And it is mostly due to the postcolonial critic's politics of location that when these works talk about postcolonial reality, they draw their examples from 'english literatures,' sidestepping regional literatures produced in the former British colonies.

Postcolonial critics, thus, come across as valorizing english literatures or placing it over RLL, and in the process further reinforcing the binary opposition between these two sets of literatures. As discussed earlier, this sort of binary creation and encouragement to its existence from postcolonial theory, among many other things, places the bilingual writer in a strange predicament where he is either slotted into the regional language writer category or branded as a minor writer in the field of IWE. However, my contention is that a proper evaluation of the bilingual writer is also possible using postcolonial theory. Postcolonial theory can intervene in the proper evaluation of the bilingual writer by acknowledging the need to grant a hybrid third space to the writer by showing the futility of stereotyping literatures on the basis of some fixed notions of nationality, culture, etc. By thus deconstructing the existing canon, it can create a new space for the bilingual writer instead of trying to fit him into either of the two pre-existing canons.

However, while trying to deconstruct the existing canon shaped by colonial discourse, an antagonistic approach of trying to reverse the power dynamics is not a very helpful approach, as it will still allow the existence of hierarchy, albeit of a different type. Leela Gandhi, in her book *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*, says:

A related focus on postcolonial pedagogical practice addresses questions arising from the apparent discrepancy between the antagonistic worlds of the colonial text and the postcolonial classroom...Rather than permit students to pursue a mystified 'love of Shakespeare', postcolonial pedagogy undertakes to historicize the received curriculum and inherited literary affections with a view to revealing what Viswanathan describes as 'imperialism's shaping hand in the formation of English studies'. (1998: 146)

Leela Gandhi points out that an African writer such as N'gugi was in favour of including English literature in African universities only so far as it gets a marginalized place so that it does not get to dominate the cultural and literary scenario in Africa. Similarly, in India, M K Gandhi was against English education as he felt it would create a divide between the English educated elites and the masses who are not English educated. Leela Gandhi sums up N'gugi's and M K Gandhi's attitude towards English thus:

English literature would find a place within this new disciplinary schema, but in keeping with its brief enrolment in African history, it would be accommodated where it belonged—at the margins of African literature. In colonial India, Gandhi's regular invectives against English education revealed a similar belief in

the legitimate cultural primacy of Indian literatures and languages. In anticipation of post-independence India, where English would remain the privileged language of administration and the ruling elite, he objected with some fervour to “the harm done by this education received through a foreign tongue [...] it has created a gulf between the educated classes and the masses. (147)

This shows that some anti/post-colonial thinkers have held an anti-English stand for reasons that are not just political, but also literary and cultural.

With both M K Gandhi and N’gugi we see an overwhelming desire to identify the ‘indigenous’/ ‘native’ languages with the nation (Indian/African) and then identify English as ‘the colonizer’s language’ and hence see it as a dangerous colonial imposition. However in the current Indian scenario, the literature produced in this language (IWE) is seen as a representative Indian literature. Even the use of the word “Indian” in IWE shows a desire of literary critics to give it a national character as opposed to the ‘regional’ nature of the RLL. But with both sets of postcolonial critics, the thrust is on privileging one language or literary tradition over another. Hence, this sort of binary opposition has led to a split reception of the bilingual writer (someone who writes in English and a regional language), where one identity of the bilingual writer is privileged over the other depending on the critic’s own place in a particular tradition.

Significantly, a major reason for the sustenance of the binary opposition is the fixed identities thrust upon both IWE and RLL. The identity of each literature is defined by some stereotypes about the content and style of the two sets of literature. However, any sort of fixedness of identity or stereotyping is fraught with dangers in a postcolonial world. Bhabha gives a compelling reason as to why stereotyping of any sort needs to be avoided:

The stereotype is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation. (1994: 75)

This sort of stereotyping leads to a split between IWE and RLL. But even then and in spite of the stereotypes and the ensuing split, “it is recognizably true that the chain of stereotypical signification is curiously mixed and split, polymorphous and perverse, an articulation of multiple belief” (Bhabha 1994: 82). A postcolonial critic needs to be aware of the inherent ambivalence in all such splits and stereotypes, because it is the ambivalence that makes intervention possible:

The ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority enables a form of subversion, founded on the undecidability that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention. (Bhabha 1994: 112)

Therefore, the postcolonial critic has to first understand the incorrectness of assigning fixed identities based on fixed stereotypical notions of nation, culture, etc. Once s/he is aware of the pitfalls of such stereotyping, he can then try to understand the inherent ambivalence even in this sort of stereotyping. So, a postcolonial understanding of the place of a bilingual writer in the Indian literary scenario has to show an awareness of

such ambivalence which will then lead the critic towards a search for an identity that is not seen in terms of the self-other binary, but as an identity that is fluid, an 'in-between one' which is outside the discourse of essentialist identities, neither colonial nor simply anti-colonial. For that to happen, the postcolonial literary-critical discourse has to forego "Gandhi's and N'gugi's uncompromising textual/cultural inversions." (Leela Gandhi 1998: 147) This is possible only when the postcolonial critic avoids an antagonistic and oppositional framework such as the IWE-RLL binary.

The postcolonial critic needs to be aware of the fluid nature of all such identities in the current postmodern postcolonial world. S/he also needs to acknowledge the fact that it is the bilingual writer whose very linguistic choice deconstructs the notion of the mutual exclusivity of IWE and RLL. Manoj Das is one such writer. He is a Sahitya Akademi award winning bilingual writer from India who has almost equal number of works in English, and Oriya, a regional language. In this paper, I shall try to show how a postcolonial reading of such a writer can be done so that the bilingual writer is not stripped of his bilingual identity and instead both his identities, those of an IWE writer and an RLL writer are brought in conversation with each other.

But before that, a look at the four book-length critical books on Manoj Das will be instructive to explore the language politics of critics belonging to different literary traditions. In *Many Worlds of Manoj Das* (1993), a critical work on Das in English, P. Raja mentions Das's high status in Oriya literature. He mentions the fact that even when he was only in his twenties, an Oriya literary magazine called "Dagora" counted Das as one of the major Oriya writers of that period. Thus P. Raja acknowledges Das's place in RLL. However his lack of knowledge of Oriya language and literature prevents him from bringing Das's works in the two languages into conversation with each other. His lack of knowledge of Oriya language and Oriya literary tradition compels him to put Das squarely in IWE tradition. An example of this can be found in his comparison of Das's short story "Mystery of the Missing Cap" with Arun Joshi's short story "The Only American from Our Village". Raja says that the comparison between the two stories is on the basis of their dealing with the theme of a man's inability to keep his conscience clear amidst a change in value systems in the world around him. Raja's passing remark that Das's story "reminds us of "The Only American from Our Village" by Arun Joshi" (8) puts Das firmly in the IWE tradition. However a reader of Oriya literature may easily compare Das's "Mystery of the Missing Cap" with a story such as "Daka Munshi" by Fakir Mohan Senapati, which also deals with a similar theme where a major character fails to hold onto traditional values after an induction into Western education. Thus lack of awareness of both literary traditions can be seen to be a handicap for a monolingual critic like P. Raja in evaluating Das holistically.

Let us now turn to the work of a bilingual critic of Das: Sarbeswar Samal. In his book on Das, *Manoj Das, A Critical Study: In Reference to His Oeuvre and Style* (1998), Samal mentions all of Das's English short story anthologies and some of the journals and magazines in which Das's writings have been published. But he does not mention that some of these stories are translated from Oriya by the author. (8) Samal mentions the name of one Oriya short story by Das, "Samudrara Kshudha" in Oriya and writes its English title "The Hungry Sea" in parenthesis. (6) However, even though he mentions that it was originally written in Oriya, he does not place it in the Oriya literary tradition. Furthermore, he seems to be almost apologetic for mentioning this story. He tries to

justify the inclusion of this story because of its “theme and technique” (35) “although...written in Oriya”. So, unlike a monolingual reader like Raja, Samal in spite of being in a position to be able to place the bilingual writer in both traditions, chooses to place him in just one tradition, while ignoring the other. Both Raja and Samal, have tried to place Das squarely in the IWE tradition, just because they both are writing back into the same tradition. Hence, both the critics contribute to the bilingual writer’s split reception.

Just as the IWE critics categorize Das as an IWE writer, similarly his Oriya critics tend to put him solely in the tradition of Oriya literature. For instance, in his book on Das in Oriya *Manoj Dasanka Galpare Manaba Jeebana*, Manindra Meher tries to distance Das from the English literary tradition. He writes:

Even though many Indian story writers have been influenced by European philosophy and literature, Das has not accepted any writer from America, England, France as his idol [...] Fakir Mohan Senapati, father of Oriya literature, is a primary influence. (45)

Thus, Meher attempts to show Das as primarily belonging to the Oriya literary tradition.

Unlike Meher, Satrugna Pandav, in his book on Das in Oriya, *Kathashilpi Manoj Das* (1994), does refer to comments of some critics such as Chandra Sekhar Rath and John Harvey on Das’s English works. While these comments show this critic’s awareness of the critical work on Das in both IWE and RLL traditions, nowhere has he taken these comments a step further and placed Das in the IWE tradition as well.

So, the critics of a bilingual writer like Das have mostly seen him as belonging to either IWE or RLL tradition, usually determined by the tradition to which the concerned critic belongs. In opposition to such critics, I argue that instead of fixing a bilingual writer’s identity, a certain amount of fluidity needs to be granted to him and his work. For instance, in the case of an IWE writer, a fixed national identity is thrust upon him, whereas in the case of an RLL writer, a regional identity is given to him. In both cases, a specific geographical/cultural/political identity is being given to a literature. It is pertinent to note that a fixed national identity is thrust upon the concerned literature by the very coinage of the term to describe the literature produced in a language. This paper challenges this sort of fixity of identities and proposes an alternate way of looking at both IWE and RLL, where they are not seen to have some fundamental differences in theme, structures, etc. based on some fixed preconceived notions. While talking of one such forced identity, that of ‘nationality’, Bhabha points out that “The nation is no longer the sign of modernity under which cultural differences are homogenized [...]. The nation reveals, in its ambivalent and vacillating representation, an ethnography of its own claim to being *the* norm of social contemporaneity” (1994: 149). So, instead of an essentialist view towards both sets of literature, one needs to understand that the differences or similarities ascribed to them are fluid and any attempt at a comparative study of IWE and RLL needs to take into account the “cultural and historical hybridity of the postcolonial world” (Bhabha 1994: 21).

In a postmodern postcolonial world, any sort of identity, be it cultural, political or national, is a fluid one and is in a constant state of flux. So, instead of assigning a particular identity to a writer, the postcolonial critic needs to be aware of the fluidity of

identities and the constant mingling of identities which leads to an “in-between” identity that challenges the notion of an authentic national/cultural/literary identity. It is when such a postcolonial perspective is brought forth that the importance of a bilingual writer in a multi-cultural and multi-linguistic framework like India’s can be properly understood. The bilingual writer, by his very linguistic choice is a testimony to the postcolonial experience of hybridity that deconstructs the notion of polarities and binaries and embodies the existence of a ‘third space’ (Bhabha 1994: 37) that is not limited by historically ill-informed identity politics. It is only when we stop assigning fixed identities that focus on exclusivity and differences that we can try to see commonalities between these differently perceived identities. However, even while focusing on the commonalities, the postcolonial critic must be careful to avoid the pitfalls of ascribing any fixity to them—the IWE and RLL identities—and deriving any sort of essentialist identity for the bilingual writer.

It is pertinent to explore here whether a monolingual reader or critic can possibly avoid a split reception of a bilingual writer. He can do so by first acknowledging his “privilege” as a “loss”. Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean, editors of *The Spivak Reader* throw light on Spivak’s notion of acknowledging one’s “privilege” as a “loss”:

Unlearning one’s privileges by considering it as one’s loss constitutes a double recognition. Our privileges, whatever they may be in terms of race, class, nationality, gender, and the like, may have prevented us from gaining a certain kind of Other knowledge. (1996: 5)

One can very well add language to the list of privileges here. Hence, a reader familiar with only English needs to be at least aware that his/her lack of knowledge of a regional language is a loss. So, while reading a bilingual writer, s/he should have this lack of knowledge of another literary tradition at the back of his/her mind as a loss. The realization that one’s understanding is partial is the best way for a monolingual reader to appreciate the worth of a bilingual writer. S/he may ideally even try to develop some understanding of the other language and tradition for a holistic appreciation. For a bilingual reader / critic, on the other hand, an awareness of both literary traditions, apart from the familiarity with both the languages, does allow the consideration of texts from the two traditions side by side. Through this process, s/he can put both identities of the writer into conversation with each other. Spivak talks of her experience of teaching *Kim* and *Gora* in the English literature classroom “to explore the differences and similarities between texts coming from the two sides which are engaged with the same problem at the same time.” (1990: 73) On similar lines, IWE and RLL texts of the bilingual author can be studied in conjunction, especially self-translations of the same text in the two concerned languages. A comparative study of Das’s Oriya story “Aboo Purusha” and its English version, “Sharma and the Wonderful Lump” can be instructive in examining the lack of awareness of the IWE tradition on the part of a monolingual RLL (Oriya) reader, or even a bilingual reader unaware of the literary traditions of IWE. In either case, this lack of knowledge becomes an impediment for him in being able to place the text in the IWE tradition, even when the English version of the text apparently seeks such a reading.

“Aboo Purusha” is the story of a man’s physical deformity being turned into a profitable affair by the self-centered people whom he meets. Mr. Sharma, the protagonist

of this story goes to America for an operation on the lump on his head, but instead of performing any such operation, everyone, including the doctors, wants to make the lump a profitable venture by showcasing this ‘wonder’ to the world. Gradually, even Mr. Sharma is made to believe that the lump is not a deformity but a blessing, and when he does get rid of the lump, albeit unwillingly, he wants to make the whole affair a materially profitable one as well. The story is a comment on human folly and selfishness.

Let us now examine some of the differences between the two versions in terms of additions, changes, etc. to see how well Das has tried to integrate his story into not just two languages, but two literary traditions, and how any reader unaware of the literary traditions of both IWE and RLL will fail to see the significance of these changes. In the English version, the protagonist Sharma takes pain to explain the lump as “aboo”, thus exoticizing the whole affair. If his only interest was in getting rid of the lump, or even to help the doctors in examining and understanding it, then he would have no interest in explaining what it was called in his own language. At different times, Sharma tries to both market and exoticize his lump. He says, “Doctor! Haven’t I placed my *aboo* – that is what we call it in our family – at your disposal?” (1990: 107) At another instance, he says:

But doctor, I have a fond desire. At home, we call a growth of this kind an aboo. Everybody had a fascination for it when it was small. As it grew bigger, it inspired varied emotions: awe, amazement and ridicule. Now that it is going to be famous, I would like it to be known by its old name...the word would earn certain respectability and the languages of the world will get a common new word. (108)

The entire paragraph quoted above exists only in the English version. At the plot level, this seems to show Sharma as a person who is keen to exploit the marketability of his “wonderful lump”. Since this request is present only in the English text which is a part of IWE tradition, we can also see that in Sharma, Das has formed a character who is, in a way, mocking at some of those monolingual IWE writers who, through exoticising their homeland, are attempting to sell its geography. This is a charge by many nativists against IWE writers. Writing mostly for a western audience, such IWE writers need to explain Indian terms in English. But they do it not by having only the English word, but by having the indigenous/regional language word, and then explaining it. In the process, their text becomes comprehensible to their western audience, and at the same time the usage of the Indian word exoticises their language. One such instance can be found in Rushdie using a phrase like “dia-lamp” in his *Midnight’s Children* to serve both the purposes. The word ‘lamp’ explains the Indian word ‘dia’ in English and the use of the word ‘dia’ exoticises the author’s language. (1995: 115) This is exactly what Mr. Sharma, the protagonist of Das’s story does. He deliberately uses the word ‘aboo’ along with ‘lump’ to serve a similar purpose as an IWE writer such as Rushdie does in the aforementioned example. Only a reader having an awareness of the IWE tradition can access this interpretation of Das’s English text whereas for a reader unaware of the IWE tradition, this is a loss.

The afore-mentioned example is one such instance where the need for a reader to be conversant with both IWE and RLL traditions and to be aware of their expectations, differences, etc, is very crucial. Only then can he do a comparative study of both the texts. However, if he is a monolingual reader, then s/he may not be able to put the text in

its proper perspective, unless, as pointed out earlier, he learns to acknowledge his “privilege” as a “loss”. To illustrate this point further, let us take the example of Das’s Oriya novel *Akashara Ishara* (1997), self-translated as *The Escapist* (2001). In *The Escapist*, the protagonist Padmalochan goes through several experiences. And it is through these experiences that he undergoes a psychological and spiritual transformation. The novel is not much concerned with the outer world; the focus is on the internal world of the protagonist. For a monolingual IWE reader, the theme of this novel might resonate with the themes of some other IWE texts such as Arun Joshi’s *The Apprentice* or Anita Desai’s *Voices in the City* which also deal with the internal psychological transformations of their protagonists. But a bilingual reader will not only place Das in the above-mentioned IWE tradition, but will also put him in the long tradition of Oriya novelists such as Bibhuti Pattanayak and Pratibha Ray who are concerned much more with the internal psychology of their characters than external realities. However, even if a monolingual reader is not able to read Das’s novel in the regional language, if he can acknowledge that the text is a translation, then he can avoid the pitfall of placing the writer entirely in the IWE tradition. Thus, even without having access to both linguistic traditions, a monolingual writer can still avoid a split reception of the bilingual writer. At the same time, he can also attempt a holistic reading by making an effort to understand the other literary tradition. For instance, a monolingual IWE reader of Das, instead of placing him solely in the IWE tradition, may try to understand the Oriya literary tradition so that he can place him in the Oriya literary tradition as well. The following example will help to illustrate this point.

Let us take the example of Das’s short story “Letter from the Last Spring” which is a self-translation of his Oriya story “Sesha Basantara Chithi”. The story deals with the relationship between a little girl and a retired professor who begin to care for each other, even without getting to know each other very well. Both of them, in their own loneliness, begin to empathise with the other’s loneliness. If an IWE reader who does not know Oriya reads Das’s short story “Letter from the Last Spring”, then he first needs to acknowledge that he is reading a translation. Secondly, he should try to read Oriya stories in English translation. This will help him see the bilingual reader in both IWE and RLL traditions, instead of placing him in just one tradition. In this particular case, if the monolingual IWE reader reads the Oriya stories available in English translation in *The Harper Collins Book of Oriya Short Stories* (1998), he will come across a short story titled “The Old Bangle Seller” by Laxmikanta Mohapatra. This story is very similar in theme to “Letter from the Last Spring” which talks about the bonding between a little girl and a retired professor, and has the same underlying current of pathos in both their loneliness and the death of the girl’s mother which she is oblivious of. Similarly, in “The Old Bangle Seller”, we see a bond between people who have a big age difference, between an old bangle seller, and a young newly-wed bride. The old man, who is lonely, finds genuine love and the warmth of human relationship from the young girl, but soon finds himself consoling her, since she is inconsolable after losing her husband.

Placing these two stories side-by-side would allow even a monolingual English reader of Manoj Das to appreciate his work in relation to the Oriya RLL tradition. Thus it is only when a monolingual reader reads a bilingual author without assigning him a fixed monolingual identity that the first step towards recognizing the bilingual writer’s bilingualism can be taken. Acknowledging his loss, he can try to make up for it by

reading the bilingual writer's works and the works of his fellow RLL writers (or, IWE writers, depending on the kind of 'loss') in translation.

To sum up, it is through such a postcolonial reading that the bilingual writer in India can achieve his rightful place which is neither exclusively in IWE nor only in RLL. Instead of categorizing him as either an IWE or RLL writer, one should accept him as a postcolonial who, in the words of Bhabha, creates for himself a 'third space'. This 'third space' is a hybrid one reflecting the complexities involved in a multi-cultural and multi-lingual postcolonial literary scenario like that of India where literatures of several languages, including English, co-exist and hence come in close contact with one another leading to a situation where everything is in a constant flux. Aijaz Ahmed defines the idea of this 'hybridity' "as a critique of essentialism [that] partakes of a carnivalesque collapse and play of identities" (Mongia 1996: 286)

To understand this hybrid third space, first and foremost, rigid boundaries need to be blurred. Bhabha explains this blurring of boundaries thus:

The margin of hybridity where cultural differences 'contingently' and conflictually touch, becomes the moment of panic which reveals the borderline experience. It resists the binary opposition of racial and cultural groups, sipahis and sahibs, as homogenous polarized political consciousness. (1994: 207)

However, in the case of reading the bilingual writer, this blurring of boundaries has to be done for exclusively literary reasons. Meenakshi Mukherjee gives an interesting example of the non-literary factors that may play a role in dismantling the boundaries in *The Perishable Empire*:

[...] there is a tendency to see these writers (in English and Bhasha) in opposed camps, partly out of an awareness in the disparity of their fame and fortune – not necessarily in proportion to the disparity of talent. But surprisingly, *Desh*, the magazine of the Bangla literary establishment, of late has been very enthusiastic about claiming some of these novelists who have earned fame abroad, perhaps partly out of a regional chauvinism, because many of the new writers have names that mark their Bengali origin. (2000: 178)

Such embracing of IWE writers by the RLL establishment for purely market reasons parallels the packaging accorded to the regional language work of a bilingual writer like Manoj Das where some recognition is accorded to his English language reception also. In either case, such ostensible blurring of boundaries does not challenge the IWE – RLL oppositional framework in any meaningful manner.

Questioning of boundaries needs to be premised upon a recognition that boundaries curtail the freedom of a writer. As Nabaneeta Dev Sen, a bilingual writer points out in *Authors Speak*:

Well, there are so many boundaries to our lives. Different canons, different myths, old and new, that work as the LOC (line of control) - curtailing our freedom. (2006: 219)

Boundaries, therefore, need to be made flexible to the extent that they become permeable and no longer remain the rigid markers of identities. Once the boundaries are dismantled or blurred, then an effort can be made to bring the two seemingly separate identities of the bilingual writer together and see them as part of a larger whole. To achieve this goal, a holistic approach is needed in which the complete oeuvre of the writer should be taken into account where IWE and RLL are seen as complementing each other in various ways. A comparative study of the original text and its translation by the author is just one way of looking at the bilingual writer holistically. However, for the reader who is not conversant with one of the two languages or someone who chooses to read the text in just one of the two languages, the reception of the text will be a more informed one if the concerned text is not seen as belonging to only that linguistic literary tradition, but as belonging to an altogether different literary tradition that is outside the binary and belongs to a hybrid 'third space'.

The implications of placing the bilingual writer in the hybrid third space are manifold. Firstly, it undermines the binary opposition between IWE and RLL. Instead of dealing with IWE and RLL in an oppositional framework, it highlights the mutually constitutive relationship between IWE and RLL. Moreover, such a holistic reading of the bilingual writer by placing him in the third space questions the hierarchy implicit in this binary where one literary tradition is valorized over the other. Thus a holistic reception of the bilingual writer can become instrumental in redefining the Indian literary marketplace that has so far been characterized by the hierarchical binary opposition between IWE and RLL.

At the same time, it is pertinent to remember that even though this identity of the bilingual writer does not confine him to either the IWE or RLL tradition, the location of the writer in the 'third space' is not bound by demands of a 'national' identity. In other words, a holistic reading of the bilingual writer does not entail viewing him as an 'Indian' writer whose literary oeuvre, by combining IWE and RLL, becomes representative of some putative 'national' identity. Instead, the 'third space' that is thus accorded to the bilingual writer may best be seen in locational terms as 'glocal', as a position marked by the intersection of the global and the local. Looking at the marketplace realities associated with IWE and RLL, it is possible to see IWE as a 'global' product whose reach extends to the metropolitan centres across the globe, while RLL appears to be primarily a 'local' product that is primarily valued within a specific region and / or amongst those who speak the language associated with a specific region. In neither case, however, is their marketability governed by any 'national' boundaries. The bilingual writer, therefore, whose literary productions bridge IWE and RLL functions precisely at the intersection of the global and the local, ie., the glocal. A holistic reception of the bilingual writer is thus only possible by placing the bilingual writer in this glocal 'third space'.

References

ASHCROFT Bill, GRIFFITHS Gareth, TIFFIN Helen, eds. 1989. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*. London: Routledge, 1989.

- BALDWIN Dean, QUINN, Patrick J., BALDWIN, Harry Jr., eds. 2006. *An Anthology of Colonial and Postcolonial Short Fiction*. London: Heinle, 2006.
- BHABHA, Homi K. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- DAS, Manoj. 1982. Aboo Purusha. In *Aboo Purusha O Anyanya Kahani*. Cuttack: Grantha Mandira, 1982, pp. 36 – 74.
- . 1997. *Akashara Ishara*. Cuttack: Friends Publishers, 1997.
- . 1988. A Letter from the last Spring. In *Story Time*. Ed. D. K Ray. Cuttack: Kitab Mahal, 1988, pp. 118 – 123.
- . 1990. Sharma and the wonderful lump. In *Bulldozers and Fables and Fantasies for Adults*. New Delhi: B. R. Publishing House, 1990, pp.100–18.
- . 1981. Sesa Basantara Chithi. In *Manoj Dasanka Katha O Kahani*. Cuttack: Friends Publishers, 1981. pp. 346–50.
- . 2001. *The Escapist*. New Delhi: MacMillan, 2001.
- DESAI, Anita. 2001. *Voices in the City*. New Delhi: South Asia Books, 2001.
- DEV SEN, Nabaneeta. 2006. Without Remorse. In *Authors Speak*. Ed. K. Satchidanandan. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2006.
- FOUCAULT, Michel. 1976. *History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume I*. London: Vintage, 1990.
- GANDHI, Leela. 1998. *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- JOSHI, Arun. 1993. *The Apprentice*. New Delhi: Orinet Paperbacks a division of Vision Books, 1993.
- LANDRY, Donna, MACLEAN, Gerald, eds. 1996. *The Spivak Reader*. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- LOOMBA, Ania. 1998. *Colonialism / Postcolonialism*. New York: Routledge, 1998.
- MEHER, Manindra Kumar. 1999. *Manoj Dasanka Galpare Manaba Jeeban*. Bargarh, 1999.
- MOHAPATRA, K., MOHAPATRA L., MOHANTY, Susandhya, eds. 1998. *Harper Collins Book of Oriya Short Stories*. New Delhi: Harper Collins India, 1998.

MONGIA, Padmini, ed. 1996. *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. London: Hodder Arnold Publication, 1996.

MUKHERJEE, Meenakshi. 2000. *The Perishable Empire: Essays on Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000.

PANDAV, Shatrughna. 1994. *Kathashilpi Manoj Das*. Cuttack: Friends Publishers, 1994.

PARRY, Benita. 2004. *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique*. London: Routledge, 2004.

RAJA, P. 1993. *Many Worlds of Manoj Das*. Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, 1993.

RUSHDIE, Salman. 1981. *Midnight's Children*. London: Vintage, 1995.

SAID, Edward. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage, 1978.

SAMAL, Sarbeswar. 1998. *Manoj Das, A Critical Study: In Reference to His Oeuvre and Style*. Cuttack: Kitab Mahal, 1998.

SPIVAK, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1990. *The Postcolonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*. New York: Routledge, 1990.

TRIVEDI, Harish. 1999. The Postcolonial or the Transcolonial? Location and Language. In *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 1999, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 269-72.

WA THIONG'O, N'gugi. 1998. *Penpoints, gunpoints, and Dreams: Towards a Critical Theory of the Arts and the State in Africa*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Amarjeet Nayak

Assistant Professor
School of Management and Social Sciences
Thapar University
Patiala – 147004
Punjab
India

n.amarjeet@gmail.com

In *SKASE Journal of Literary Studies* [online]. 2010, vol. 2, no. 1 [cit. 2010-04-14]. Available on web page <http://www.skase.sk/Volumes/JLS02/pdf_doc/03.pdf>.