Fighting the Body of Authenticity: Legitimisation *vs*. Delegitimisation in Indian Postcolonial Literatures

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> The English language is nobody's special property. It is the property of the imagination: it is the property of the language itself. (Derek Walcott in *Hamner 77*)

Résumé: *L'auteur essaie d'analyser quelques stratégies de légitimation politique et culturelle théorisées dans les études postcoloniales, visant tout d'abord la culture indienne. Les concepts d'authenticité et d'identité nationale acquièrent des nouveaux traits dans une nation multiculturelle, comme est celle indienne, où les nombreuses variantes dialectales et les littératures nées au sein de cette culture font impossible la légitimation d'une littérature unique. Une des stratégies proposées est d'avancer l'hypothèse de la langue anglaise comme langue indigène.*

Keywords: *re-/de-legitimation, subversion, cultural synchronicity, liberation linguistics, hybridity*

Colonial literature has long tried to find strategies of cultural and political legitimisation mainly relying upon different representational and linguistic modes of constructing nations and national identities. The attempt to authenticate the colonial discourse was materialized in three consecutive stages recorded by theorists of Postcolonialism, each with its particular strategies of legitimisation. The first phase, represented by travel accounts which depicted remote landscapes and exotic native traditions, imposed patterns of representations that engendered stereotypes and biased national constructs; the second stage corresponding to the literary works written by imperial representatives and highlighting the differences between centre and periphery relied upon an entire arsenal of representational binary oppositions and "vocabularies of power" that perpetuated colonial/ imperial cultural and political hierarchies. This linguistic exercise of power was represented by the foregrounding of a standardized metropolitan language that relinquished all native linguistic variants to the background and produces a strange effect of "linguistic alienation". The third phase is the one represented by the "imperially licensed" postcolonial literature represented by native authors writing in the spirit of the metropolis yet already containing the first elements of anti-colonial discourse (see Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin, 2002).

The postcolonial world has always been interested in authenticity and purity and has tried to deconstruct them and expose the artificiality of such cultural constructs long before the European poststructuralist attempt to destroy the hegemony of such concepts as authenticity, authorship and purity; the general movement was that of counterbalancing Eurocentricity with new perspectives that might have destroyed the old dichotomy opposing the Western metropolitan authenticity and the native inauthenticity of the colonial reality susceptible to be authenticated only through metropolitan discourses. When discussing the problems of authenticity and authentication, the postcolonial critics now tend to eliminate the traditional oppositions established between authenticity and historical contingency, authenticity and hybridity or eclecticism: "The question of authenticity has to do not just with identity but with a certain attitude to identity. In other words, authentic identity is a matter of choice, relevance and a feeling of rightness. In other words, authenticity also means ruling out certain options as incorrect or inappropriate" (Radhakrishnan 755). The attempts to break the Eurocentric hegemony and ascertain national diversity have embraced different forms and experimented with different strategies of delegitimisation of the metropolitan discourse and relegitimisation of the postcolonial discourse.

The strategies of de-legitimisation usually recorded are directed towards the disruption of the Western modes of description which try to squeeze the Orient into fixed patterns of representation, through the use of subversive strategies of rewriting from postcolonial perspectives, undermining the Western idea of history and authenticity by recurring to imaginative escapes, magic realism and irony, mimicry of colonial discourses and subversion of their authority, the inscription of difference and Otherness within major narratives, the destruction of monocentrism and the embrace of plurality, hybridity and eclecticism triggering to the recuperation of pre-colonial cultural experience.

The recurrent strategies of de/legitimisation of metropolitan discourses characterize almost all postcolonial literatures but they acquire particular features in specific national and cultural contexts. Many of these strategies have been submitted to a critical discourse analysis that made them fall into several categories: strategies of dissimilation emphasizing national and cultural differences and strategies of assimilation, stressing similarities and sameness. Trying to create a larger theoretical framework for legitimizing strategies, Cillie, Reisigl and Wodak spoke about all the means used for emphasizing national and cultural discourses and identities. The *constructive strategies* are meant to create a sense of national identity and belonging through acts of reference and devices reinforcing the feeling of belonging to a community; they include *legitimizing strategies* within the larger category of *perpetuation and justification strategies* that attempt to build a sense of continuity and are mainly directed against any foreign, possibly diasporic influence, thus sometimes leading to nationalism and xenophobia. *Transformation strategies* deal with discovering new meanings for national identities whereas *deconstructive strategies* attempt their demythologisation and liberation from stereotypes. These discussions brought forth the opposition between the pre-colonial indigenous purity treated as an epitome of authenticity but in fact ignoring many aspects of the social, political, historical context and the contemporary postcolonial hybridity deemed inauthentic and anti-nationalist. From this perspective the gap sometimes created between

resident and diasporic voices becomes even larger when authenticity vs. inauthenticity is analysed in terms of inside vs. outside, home vs. away; hence the politics of diaspora are dealt with in terms of "peripatetic transgressions" and "alienated spatiality" (Radhakrishnan 763) and representatives of the diaspora are accused of deracination and loss of national identity.

India used many of the strategies theorised by postcolonialism, considerably helped in its continuous struggle to assert an authentic, legitimate claim to national and cultural identity by its long tradition of cultural synchronicity and inclusiveness, its preference for plurality and hybridity and its general politics of engulfing any type of influence beneficial to its evolution, something that Rushdie calls "take the best and leave the rest". Gandhi's metaphorical image of a free India, that of a house with open windows letting the fresh breeze in, comes to suggest the Indian preference for hybridity and diversity but also the danger of having the house blown off altogether. This equation between hybridity and inauthenticity leads as in many other cases to the fake dichotomy pre-colonial authenticity vs. postcolonial inauthenticity. India chose to deal with the problem of authenticity mostly in terms of linguistic legitimation.

Authenticity and legitimacy in India's case become very confusing matters due to the impossibility of authenticating a unique national culture and literature. The multitude of languages and dialects, of literatures thus engendered and the profusion of writings published in English render this problem even more complicated by mainly raising linguistic problems. If authenticity only meant unspoilt pre-colonial indigenous experience culturally rendered in native languages, then India would have to come back to its literatures written in Urdu, Hindi, Bengali, Punjabi, Malayalam, Gujarati, and Kannada that would make impossible the existence of a unified, coherent national culture. The twentieth century theorists – Srinivasa Iyenegar, Krishna Kripalani, Suniti Chatterjee, Kumar Das – acknowledge the inappropriateness of the term "Indian literature" unless it refers to an essential Indian culture or to the unity of local literatures, denying Nehru's claim in 1939 that "Indian literature is one though written in many languages", when political and ideological strategies were disguised as cultural legitimation. The beginnings of cultural decolonisation brought along the awareness of the artificiality of abstract nationalistic and cultural constructs and the necessity to find new means of defining authenticity and of legitimising it. The pursuit of cultural and political autonomy, of authenticity and of a pluralistic organic national whole came with "the apprehension of the 'mayic' or illusory sovereignty of the colonial regime [that] required the interiorization of the authentic reality and deeper structure of an organic whole expressive of and rooted within the perceived universality and humanism of Hinduism" (Goswami 257).

> In the name of India we loved Europe, and therefore we fed our fancy not upon Indian but European ideals, European arts, European thought, European culture. We loved the abstraction we called India, but yes, we hated the thing it actually was… The one great good that the social and religious reactions of the last twenty years have done is to cure us … of this old, this unreal, this imaginary and abstract patriotism. Love of India now means a loving regard for the very configuration of this continent […], a love, as Rabindranath Tagore put it the other day at the Classic Theatre, for the muddy

> weed-entangled village lands, the moss-covered stinky village ponds, and for the poor, the starved, the malaria-stricken peasant population of the country, a love for its languages, its literatures, its philosophies, its religions. (Pal in Goswami 242)

The linguistic problem characterising part of the former colonies found diverse solutions for linguistic unification and legitimation since linguistic recognition was deemed to mean political and cultural legitimation even if sometimes linguistic and political identities could not be equated. "These questions make reference to the ongoing debate on (linguistic) multiculturalism and the limits of its translation in policy, reserving the right to believe that a double standard or dissociation of spaces does not put a strain on the existence of a political community. A (linguistic) community allegiance does not have a necessary and direct translation into the political domain" (Busekist 90). Baj Kachru analyses the stages in the passage from metropolitan English to "world englishes" starting with the linguistic unification of English around 1707 in the British Isles followed by a colonial and diasporic stage of spreading in different parts of the world (Canada, USA, New Zeeland, Australia) and ending with the *Raj phase* corresponding to the transformation of English into a new hybrid language (South and Southeast Asia, Africa and Philippines). Years of colonisation and encounters between English and other major languages of different continents – Dravidian and Altaic languages in Asia, and Bantu languages in Africa – provoked linguistic mutations and identity transformations with political, demographical and social implications. Many native languages underwent a process of Englishization whereas the English language was faced with nativization and acculturation engendering localised varieties of English that gradually became "englishes" (see Kachru 136–138).

Much of the debate in the case of Indian culture was provoked by the ambiguous question of authenticity and the extensive use of English at the expense of the sixteen official native languages which were relinquished to the background and not given the proper attention. The difficulty of establishing whether authentic Indianness lies with the Hindi, Muslims, Punjabis, Kashmiri or Parsi, enhanced national and linguistic identities to the level of fetishised entities. For certain Indian critics writing in English is still considered to be treason and sanctioned for the fault of "always perpetuating the lack of authenticity" (Rushdie 2002: 149). The merit of Indian culture is that of finding a particular way to solve the problem of linguistic unification by using the metropolitan language as a means of leveling divergences and clearing misunderstandings. Linguistic purity was by turns associated either to native languages or to English, if we were to cite Macaulay's words: "a single shelf of a good European library is worth the whole native literature of India or Arabia" (Macaulay in Kachru 140).

Playing with pragmatic power, the Indianized version of English has gradually become the proper tool of authenticating a people and its culture. The new attitude towards linguistic innovations and language combinations, termed *liberation linguistics,* envisaged the variants of English as *interlanguages* meant to provide the proper transition between a metropolitan language felt as imposing, dominating and stifling and a reincarnation of the same language reshaped after the rhythm, structure and metaphoric patterns of the native language. The Indianized English was the solution found against the perpetual dichotomy opposing

pre-colonial recuperation and postcolonial syncretism (see Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin 29) and the opposed danger of getting stuck and isolated into a revived pre-colonial past ignoring the contemporary multicultural reality. Since cultural hybridity was offered as a solution against fanatic purism and purity, as an acceptance of difference and plurality, in the same way linguistic hybridity modeled by "code-switching" and "vernacular transcriptions" (Ashcroft…45) was offered as a means of conciliating national divergences. Monoglossic societies (using English as a native language), diglossic (bilingual) societies and polyglossic nations (Caribbean) show that what we generally take as unified English language is in fact "a continuum of 'intersections' in which the speaking habits in various communities have intervened to reconstruct the language" (id., 39) through appropriation, abrogation and remoulding.

These new analyses and theories related to the re-invention of English under so many influences and circumstances reject and undermine traditional linguistics mainly based on ideal speaking situations and abstract speaker-hearer relations, shifting the stress upon language as vivid organism, in permanent transformation so that "the whole mystique of native speaker and mother tongue should probably be quietly dropped from the linguists' set of professional myths about the language" (Ferguson in Kachru 141). Linguistic liberation has also led to an opening of the canon triggering profound changes in world literature and the reception of new literatures in English.

The manipulation of English, its mongrelisation and adjustment to national purposes could be considered an attempt to achieve a different type of decentralisation and legitimation by challenging the central position of the colonial language and offering instead a multiplicity of "Englishes" remoulded on the pattern of their native idioms.

> We can't simply use the language in the way the British did; (that) it needs remaking for our own purposes. Those of us who do use English do so in spite of ambiguity towards it, or perhaps because of that, perhaps because we can find in that linguistic struggles taking place in the real world, struggles between the cultures within ourselves and the influences at work upon our societies. To conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free. (Rushdie 17)

The neutrality and malleability of English, making it perfect for transformations and adaptations to indigenous languages ("indigenization", "creolisation", "pidginization", "Indianization" and relexification) was initiated by such writers as R. K. Narayan, Desani, Raja Rao, Bharati Mukherjee, Uma Parameswaran and many others. Along many other voices advocating the adaptation of English to native linguistic needs, Raja Rao praised the flexibility of English giving it the same sacred status as Sanskrit claiming that "the important thing is not what language one writes in, for language is really an accidental thing. What matters is the authenticity of experience, and this can generally be achieved in any language" (Rao 147). Anita Desai spoke about the "patchwork of languages" that might facilitate the linguistic and cultural cross-over due to an "expanded" version of English (Desai 87) whereas Sudha Rai spoke about a particular type of Hinglish used in India. For Salman Rushdie, following perhaps

R K. Narayan who saw English as the proper medium of cultural exchange, this language makes possible the dialogue with the world. Narayan used to say that "we are not attempting to write Anglo-Saxon English. The English language, though sheer reliance and mobility, is now undergoing a process of Indianization in the same manner as it adopted U. S. citizenship over a century ago, with the difference that it is the major language there but here one of the fifteen" (Narayan 22). Meenakshi Mukherjee analysed the differences between Indian novels written in Indian languages and English lying in the sense of Indianness being more present for the ones written in English and usually taken for granted for those written in native languages (see Alter 14).

> In a sociological sense English has provided a linguistic tool and a socio-political dimension very different from those available through native linguistic tools and traditions. A non-native writer in English functions in two traditions. In psychological terms, such a multilingual role calls for adjustments. In attitudinal terms, it is controversial; in linguistic terms, it is challenging, for it means molding the language for new contexts. Such a writer is suspect as fostering new beliefs, new value systems, and even new linguistic loyalties and innovations." (Kachru in Ashcroft…1995: 294)

The overall effect is that of *cultural distance* defined by Bill Ashcroft as originating "not in the inability of language to communicate" but represents "a product of the metonymic gap installed by strategies of language variance." (Ashcroft in Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin 302) Violation of Standard English is achieved through code-switching, word-associations, "vernacular transcriptions", shifting the stress from the post-Saussurean emphasis on linguistic theoretical models to language as "human behavio*ur*", culturally determined and sometimes ideologically biased. All the subversive strategies (glossing – translations of native words introduced in the body of the text, use of untranslatable words, as a means of "cultural distinctiveness", inter-language – combinations of native and Standard English words, syntactic fusions – obeying two syntactic systems at the time) challenge the Western, canonical discourse, rediscussing its values from a marginal position.

Due to its specific historical and political conditions, India chose as its favourite strategy of legitimation what Angela Carter used to call "the buggering" of the English language, "the ultimate revenge of the colonised" (Carter 208) which, together with eclecticism and inclusiveness helped it achieve a sort of idiosyncratic "creative bricolage". The continuous debates on such dichotomies opposing "authentic indigenity" and inauthentic postcolonial discourse counterbalanced by the image of postcoloniality viewed as "enlightened eclecticism" (Kapur in Dayal 129) transformed the whole issue into what Rushdie called the "bogy of authenticity" subverted by attempts of legitimation through transgressive, deconstructive strategies, alternative traditions and hybridity. All these discussions about national and cultural authenticity transform postcolonialism into an increasingly more complicated field sometimes equated to postnationalism and postethnicity going towards a post-representational era of identity and authenticity.

> Truth, said a great Indian sage, is not the monopoly of Sanskrit language. Truth can use any language, and the more universal, the better it is. If metaphysics is India's primary contribution to world civilization, as we believe it is, then must she use the most universal language for her to be universal […] And as long as the English language is universal it will always remain Indian… It would then be correct to say as long as we are Indian – that is, not nationalists, but truly Indians of the Indian psyche – we shall have the English language with us and among us, and not as a guest or friend, but as one of our own, of our caste, our creed, our sect and our tradition. (Rao 143)

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