



Imagining and Translating the 'Other': Engaging with Contemporary Indian Literature

Concept Note

With India's rise as an economic and technological powerhouse in the last two decades, Indian Literature too has attained global visibility. Whether we posit a complementary or a conflictive relationship between affluence and culture, industry and literature, the fact remains that India now shines brightly in the mirror of World Literature.

Around the turn of the last century and the beginning of the new millennium this glory was thought (mistakenly) to be cornered by Indian writing in English. Happily it is no longer the case. The world now sees, not the tip, but the whole iceberg that lay submerged. The process started with Faber & Faber bringing out, under the editorship of Amit Chaudhuri, a selection of path breaking excerpts in various regional languages. It caught the attention of such World Literature enthusiasts as Francesca Orsini who went on to write an engaged review of the book, entitled "India in the mirror of world fiction" (*New Left Review* January-February 2002).

One way to understand the changed state of affairs is to ask ourselves if anyone would now want to claim, as Salman Rushdie did in his now infamous essay entitled "Damme! This is the Oriental Scene for You" (*New Yorker* 23 June 1997), that the scene of Indian writing in English is more innovative and more vibrant than the scene of writing in the bhasas.

Rushdie's remark had justly drawn criticism from Indian writers and scholars across the world. It was definitely hurt sentiments and injured vanity that drove the riposte. However, countering Rushdie with facts, evidencing the astonishing richness of Indian writing in the bhasas, seemed a somewhat remote possibility then, especially in the absence of a sizeable body of work in Indian languages strategically positioned through translation on the national and world stage. And Rushdie had in fact queered the pitch a little by raising a question about the quality of translations in English being produced in India at the time.

Anyone surveying the scene of Indian Literature in English translation of that time would unfortunately tend to have misgivings. Where were the works that showcase the astuteness, strength and agility of Indian writing in the national and global space? There was no *Indulekha* (trans. 2005) or *Chha Mana Atha Guntha* (trans. 2005) or *Seva Sadan: House of Service* (trans. 2005) or *The Poison Tree* (trans. 2005) or *Home and the World* (trans. 2005) on the horizon then. Even if we take these to be works from the golden era of Indian literature, which Rushdie himself admitted into the pantheon of the greats, it has to be acknowledged that these works have never ceased to lose their recentness, with their contemporary relevance and resonance bolstered by translations, sometimes by retranslations of the same work, as in the case of *Chha Mana Atha Guntha* (trans. 2005 [University of California Press]; trans. 2021 [Aleph]). These works never rested within the safe confines of the past and always entered into productive dialogue with the current literary scenario, helping to define a robust Indian imaginary that newer, postcolonial writings in the bhasas were

mapping. The latter, to be sampled in works such as *Shekhar: A Life* (trans. 2018) by Sachidanand Batsayan Agyeya, *Harijan* (trans. 2021), *The Dynasty of Immortals* (trans. 2015) by Gopinath Mohanty, *Mother of 1084* (trans. 2015) by Mahasweta Devi, *A Time Elsewhere* (trans. 2009) by JP Das, *Phoolsunghi* (trans. 2020) Pandey Kapil, *Basanti: Writing the New Woman* (trans. 2019) by a group of nine writers from Odisha, *Battles of Our Own* (trans. 2022) by Jagadish Mohanty, Benyamin's *Goat Days* (trans. 2012), *The Upheaval* (trans. 2002) by Pundalik Nayak, *The Bronze Sword of Tengphakhri Tehsildar* (trans. 2012) by Indira Goswami, *Saraswatichandra* (trans. 2018) by G.M. Tripathi were simply not available in the national and global space in the late 1990s.

The scenario has radically changed now. Not only are the works published by prestigious publishers like OUP, Penguin, Aleph and HarperCollins; the translational vehicles through which they are being delivered are also sturdy, strong, sleek, not to mention subversive. One might want to cite here the ongoing series being brought about by Aleph, showcasing the 'greatest stories ever told' in their regional distribution through English translation. And lest one should legitimately wonder if English leaves the door open for 'Englishing' or 'anglicization', the following observation by US-based Indian writer and translator Jenny Bhatt is instructive: "Anglophone writers and translators are always seeking new ways to bring the music and traditions of our non-English languages into our English works" (fivebooks.com). Time is ripe now to make explorations into Indian Writing and to ask questions regarding what constitutes its unique identity. Or maybe we can speak of a series of distinctive identities. While it has to be accepted that multilingual diversity (a point made by Aijaz Ahmad) is an indispensable aspect of modern Indian literature, are there other aspects such as national allegory, partition narratives, Dalit self-assertion, indigenous tribal and oral narratives, the woman question and so on, which can be said to be the driving forces of Indian literature as it exists now.

The Department of English, Central University of Odisha, Koraput announces a three-day National Seminar during 20-22 March 2023 to explore these themes. It seeks to investigate how the new global visibility of Indian Literature—and this includes Indian English Literature—is a function of the joint strategy of imagining the 'other' and of postcolonial translating. Indian literature foregrounds the regional and the local, as no other literature does. Even in mainstream works, obviously the work of privileged writers, there is a critique of privilege. In works by marginalized sections there is an open centre-staging of gender, caste and class disparities. The seminar will look at the whole range of subject matter that have animated modern Indian literature, thereby helping to build bridges across regions and imagine a nation which is truly unified in its diversity.

The seminar will invite presentations on the topics listed below, although related topics not covered here, may also be explored. Presentations can be on authors, translators and individual texts, but ought to give some sense of a theoretically thought through context of Indian society, culture and literature.

Topics:

- Imagining the 'Other': in areas of caste, class, gender, sexuality and biology
- From region to nation/ and to the world: the translational route
- Postcolonial Translation
- Interface between Indian Bhasa writing and Indian Writing in English
- Regionscapes in Indian Literature
- Country- City dialectic in modern Indian Fiction
- Tracing the Gender subaltern in Indian Writing

- Nature and Ecology in Modern Indian Literature
- Interface between Oral and Written texts
- Indigenous and Folk voices in Indian Literature
- Global Literary Movements and how they have impacted Indian Literature
- Dalit Aesthetics and Dalit Writing
- Indian Literature in Theatre and Cinema
- Interrogating the oeuvre of Modern Indian Translators in relation to any of the above topics would also be welcome

Guidelines for Submission

- Soft copy of the abstract and full paper should be sent as an email attachment to cuo.dell.con2023@gmail.com
- For abstract, author's name and the term "abstract" should be mentioned in the subject line of the email
- For full paper, author's name and the term "Paper" should be mentioned in the subject line of the email
- Abstract must be within 250 words and should be attached with a brief bio-note of the author
- Research papers should be formatted as per MLA (8th Edition)
- Scripts should be sent as MS Word document (font: Times New Roman, font size 12)
- Word Limit of the full paper 2500-3000

Important dates

Last date for Abstract submission : 15 February 2023
 Acceptance Intimation : 21 February 2023
 Payment of Conference Fee : 01 March 2023 (on or before)
 Full paper submission : 15 March 2023

Link for the Registration: the link will be available on the University Website shortly

Registration Fee:

Fee for	Students	Research Scholars	Faculty members	Foreign Delegates
Participation	250	800	1500	USD 70
Participation and Presentation	250	800	1500	USD 70

Certificates will be issued after the Conference only to the registered participants.

Account Details: Bank Account details will be available on the University Website shortly

Patron of the Conference : Prof. Chakradhar Tripathi, Vice Chancellor, CUO, Odisha
Director of the Conference : Prof. Himansu S. Mohapatra, Visiting Professor in English
Convener of the Conference : Mr. Sanjeet Kumar Das, Head, Dept. of English, CUO, Odisha
Keynote Speaker : Prof. Harish Trivedi, formerly Professor of English, Delhi
University

Members of the Department of English Language and literature:

Prof. Himansu S. Mohapatra
Mr. Sanjeet Kumar Das, HoD
Dr. Manoj Kumar Tula
Ms. Barkha Verma
Dr. Maitrayee Misra