

KOODAL BOOKS

INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH: IS THERE ANY WORTH IN IT?

Prof. T.V. Subba Rao comes of Andhra peasantry. After his Tripos in English and Anthropology in 1961 at the University of Cambridge, he joined the English Department of Madras Christian College as Lecturer and continued in that position till he became Post-Graduate Professor of English at Thiagarajar College, Madurai, in 1967. Since the very beginning of his career, he has been a Leavisian crusader against the crib-teaching of English literature in colleges and universities in India. As early as in the early sixties he saw clearly that, given the history of modern Indian education, the University teacher in English is helpless against his limitations except that he makes up for his failure by getting degrees and adopting novelties from America. Now that makes English teaching still worse, for him.

For over a decade he has been engaged in a larger work on the condition of the contemporary Indian mind following the Western impact on India: once again he sets his face firmly against what he terms de-Indianisation and provincialism which, as he shows, are now a greater threat to the Indian civilization than anything before in its long history. The question for him is how to be Indian against their pull or what can offer that inwardness to the present Indian mind mediated by the modern education, so that it can remain Indian. In answer to this question, he believes that only by being vitally related to one's own language, Sanskrit, and Indian Classical music, can one be inward and Indian bearing the distinction of the Indian civilization. According to him what has kept us from a vital relation to them in modern times is, more than anything else, the ever-growing powerful trend of the progress-mongers since the middle of the 19th century.

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KOODAL PUBLISHERS

Madurai – 625001 India

1976

T.V. Subba Rao 1976

Printed in India

At the Vaigai Achagam

Madurai – 626001

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**INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH:
IS THERE ANY WORTH IN IT?**

**"Si ces pensees ne plaisent a personne, elles
pourront n'etre que mauvaises; mais je les tiens
pour detestables si elles plaisent a tout le
monde."**

Introduction

I cannot find anything intelligent in what is said about Indian Writing in English. What one meets in the usual evaluations of it are the interests of someone who is a writer, or of someone who makes use of it, or the incompetence of someone who is enthusiastic about it. There is now a danger that on account of false valuations, it may come to stay with us (as literature of a kind) when, truly speaking, there is no justification for it. Whenever it is discussed in seminars and reviews, there is a naïve acceptance of it, which is very ominous. Here I offer my own valuation of it for what it is worth.

Four years ago, I wrote a paper on this subject and presented it afterwards at the Mysore Conference of Indian Writing in English, held in January 1968. It had some impact on the delegates, most of whom were professors of English literature in various universities in India, Quite a few of them agreed substantially with me, but others were irritated because I said it. The feeling with these latter was that it had better be left unsaid. My friend, Prof. C.D.Narasimhiah, wrote me later, saying that it struck a discordant note; perhaps because, with one or two exceptions, all others dealt with the subject by the handy jargon of literary criticism. Two or three of the not many young delegates were interested in my paper and asked me to permit them to translate it into their languages. At that time, I didn't think much of it. I was keenly aware of its limitations, but, looking over it recently, I believe it might be worth publishing as I see it is not dated. Its significance for me lies in its being my first venture to think against the habits of the educated in general in India. Also I made a start with one or two lines of thinking which can only be fully explored in a far bigger volume.

There was one complaint voiced by everyone against my paper: that my thesis is not backed up by examples. My answer is that I am not aiming at a thesis or an idea as such. I am, on the other hand, recording an experience of mine because it is the result of my thought. It is easier to dismiss it than to disagree with it. I am sensible

of the mischief of turning it into 'ideas' and of arguing, with some persuasive force, against it. The point of it is certainly self-evident, though it is not obvious if one is not false in one's application of mind. I have not written anything which I didn't feel at first, and contemplate later. You may not agree with me, but that is not because I am wrong but because you want things to be different from the way I want them to be.

I haven't made any drastic changes except a very few additions and some alterations in words and phrases where necessary for the sake of clarity. Where again it is necessary, I have added footnotes. I have also added two articles which I published elsewhere, concerning the present corrupt teaching of English Literature in our universities, All I want to say here about the teaching of English is that it is a failure: to me, when an Indian learns English, he looks as if he learns it to obey orders or to show off.

As far as writing in English is concerned, I suffer from the limitations which I show as mental disabilities as much as any Indian. But I believe that: by conveying my pre-occupation, I am able to open up possibilities for a significant change.

T.V. SUBBA RAO

INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH: IS THERE ANY WORTH IN IT? ^φ

In this paper I am mainly concerned with what I am compelled to say (presenting it as personal experience) not in praise of, but against, our writing in English.¹ If we take it for granted because there has been, for over a hundred years, some writing in existence, we will make a bad start with unwarranted assumptions, though we can approve of or attack it with plausible arguments. But if we question its existence, and look into the conditions of its origination and continuance we may arrive at an appraisal of it in accordance with the habits of the educated class in India, to which we belong. Both ways of dealing with our writing in English are popular amongst us. And both ways lead us to a false valuation of it. It may be useful, on the other hand, to ask at the outset, why do our authors write in English? and what is the relation of their writing and of its public to the interests of our life?

For a worth-while discussion of the two questions we must be clear about our relation to English and modern education, and about the habits of the educated class; and a real answer to the questions enables us to look at our own writing in English as Indians. Everything depends upon the kind of answer given.

The real problem, then, is not whether we can write in English like the English, but whether we cannot do better in our own languages. We are confused because most of us know English to a certain extent and have confused ideas and impressions about its real role in relation to our life. We put on the same footing both learning it for one purpose and using it for every purpose. Arguments, which hold good for the continuance of English for the sake of benefiting from its use where we cannot do without it, ought to be different from arguing for its continuance in the same way as it has been with us. We have suffered from one mode of doggedly arguing in favour of English in which we find different opinions with little value of the differences. Our writing in English raises a

^φ Original title: Indian writing in English and Prof. Rajan's merits, 1967

¹ I cannot help regarding discussions as to whether Indian Writing in English should be christened as Indo-Anglican literature etc., as red herring.

serious problem for us as long as English is 'the language' of the urban rich and the educated classes, in association with a kind of life, I call it the unIndian life, to which all of us aspire by the nature of our present ambitions and hopes. Our present ambitions and hopes arise from the present opportunities for success. And in line with them our mind is formed by our modern education. Our approval or disapproval of our writing in English depends very much on whether or not we can show that it is necessary in the interests of our life. What happens is those who defend it overlook the conditions of it, and those who disapprove of it do so on the single ground that English is not our language.

Those interested in English have become a body of people with certain interests, with certain dispositions and with corresponding arguments for defending its continuance and the writing in English produced by us. Our writing in English is intimately connected with the habits of the educated, and it is from this class our reading public for it is formed, which knows English without knowing its literature. We must not forget that our point of view must be a point of view in the interests of our life. Not that English must not be used but that, I hold, it must not be used in accordance with the interests its long use by us has created. We have now a prejudice in favour of English and its advantages, which is so deep-rooted that the indispensability of English for us is an article of faith for the educated. It may be suggested summarily that the mind of the educated, in the wake of the dominant trends of our recent history, is formed on the basis of a liking for English, of ideals to reform our life, of determination to change it, though we evade its true claims because we are more keen on personal success. In this disposition of our mind are inherent the ideals of European Liberalism and the Enlightenment.² Such a mind stands opposed to the value of our languages, of our religion, our metaphysics, our great rituals, our music and our folk-spirit, in short, our life. I am not mistaken. By modern education we do not learn in real contact with the major experiences of our life, and it addresses itself to us at a low cultural level, apart from what is valuable of our past to our mind, making a dead set against our life.

We have not benefited from any relation between our present education and our life, a relation in which education ought to send us back to our life with an enriched

² Here, let it be noted briefly that the true effect of the European liberalism and the Enlightenment on us is nothing more than our false relation of animosity to our life and our false relation of attraction to the West.

mind. Our education includes as its major part, the teaching of English. We learn English more for speaking it and for its usefulness than for benefiting from the study of it as literature. The point is that there is nothing wrong in learning English as a foreign language for the purpose for which it is intended, but it is wrong to learn it as such and to use it as the social and literary medium of the Upper classes, and of the educated. The consequence is that our knowledge of English is too inadequate for the mind to be really useful as regards thinking in it. We fail of thought in the only language in which we are trained to think by our education. And we believe our English is good enough and we want to retain it. Besides, English is a social attraction with us. It is interesting to note that many of the educated not only manage with bad English but with minimum knowledge of our own languages. What I want to stress is that there is no public rich in inwardness with adequate mastery of English for a serious writer in English, no public which makes serious demands on the author for a real literary work.

When the mind fails in the language in which it is counted a great value to be successful, we will have false standards of success - and also false standards of mental development - because it is not our language, in which we may never be successful. For one thing, we can never write it well (as regards literary writing) because we have no spoken English. The limitations in our command of English are actually mental disabilities which we can never overcome. Any artistic representation must include not only that which the artist knows but also that which the artist cannot 'express' but can communicate.³ And such a representation is possible for a genius only in his own language and not in any other. So much so, the difficulty of saying a thing properly in the idiom of the English language is solved by Indians by adopting a set phrase or a set expression, by some affectation or Englishism to make what is stated in English look like idiomatic English. I am sure we can, with the help of a sound knowledge of English, think in our languages better than we can think in English. If an Indian trained by modern education expresses himself in English, I see two things clearly, first, an attempt to conceal his inability to express idiomatically, and, secondly, an act of memory in picking on some set expression concerning the phrasing of his sentences in order to

³ What I mean is that the ordering of experiences and its powerful expression are not possible in a language not one's own.

appear to be idiomatic or to be in command of good English. Instead of conceding the necessity of learning English and limiting its use to the purpose for which it is essential, we have taken it up in place of our languages. It is a historical blunder.

When you use English, it will be external to your thought if you have really something worth saying, having your mind not so formed in your life and your language, but if you have a mind not so formed and have learnt to use English earlier in life, you may express yourself well in English but then your English is not the real idiom of the language. However, I am aware of the argument, of which I am not convinced, that while one's mind may be formed in one's language and life, one can still use English naturally and without the habits which cannot conform to the idiom of the English language. I believe that literature is produced in the idiom of the language (in the idiom, I include the inseparability of the spoken language from the life of the people of that language), and a writing like ours in English cannot have a claim for the distinction of a literature.⁴

We suffer from the undeveloped mind in using English and, equally, we suffer from the uniformed mind in our languages if we do not know English. And it will be the case so long as we learn and use English as our medium at the expense of our languages. I do not like to overstress the usual charge against our writing in English that English is not our language and hence that our writers cannot express their deepest sentiments and inmost thoughts in it. In fact, some writers I have read have no such sentiments and thoughts to offer, which are really foreign to them as English is foreign to them. What I wish to suggest is that the experience of the insurmountable difficulties facing us in our using of English must be borne in mind, and that a consciousness of these difficulties should remind us of the great achievements of our sensibility in the past, and of the kind of mind which achieved them through its characteristic relation to our languages and culture; it follows that we cannot, in English, have that relation to our culture, and make it a medium for the expression of our sensibility.⁵ The upsurge of a feeling and its duration in the state of one's mind when one says something in English will not bear the same relation to one's own culture as when one expresses oneself in one's own language.

⁴ As for our writing in English, there is no need to remind the reader that I am questioning its quality as much as its legitimacy.

⁵ We cannot be in the same relation to our culture while writing English as when we are using our own languages.

The value of literature as the expression of our culture must be the standard of judging our writing in English.⁶

My terms of evaluation are different from the terms of judging merits or demerits of our writing in English according to the 'standards' of literary critics. I evaluate it from the interests of our life and in this respect I have no use for critical vocabulary. If you think I am looking at it from a non-literary point of view it is because it is not a literature in relation to our life. Suppose, you prove to me that there is a literature in it, I would say it is a 'literature', then to the limited public in a language, not their own. It is possible to regard our writing in English as an achievement only when we are insensitive to the achievements of our mind in our languages.⁷ What I see clearly is that there is no necessity (I mean, any cultural pressure) for such writing in English as is produced by our writers today. I have another reason to disfavour it. It is not only because our authors write in English with disabilities which they cannot overcome but their writings are intended for those of us educated to the habits of unIndian life. (Remember that modern education does not allow any pressure of our culture to act on us.)

In any race, one hasn't much time to give for its literary or religious achievements for forming one's mind by their cultivation, but then, one lives that kind of life suffused with their spirit. What we are denied, now, is the real relation between our mind and our life.⁸ To learn English is justifiable but to use it for those purposes for which our languages are naturally the right ones cannot be justified. Continuance of our writing in English implies the continuance of English and our present education, which throw us into a false relation to our life. If we can form our mind on the basis of the achievements of our sensibility in the past to which every thing we have to do and learn can be subordinated, we will have a central principle, a rallying point, for organising experience. If we look carefully into the experience of our education or into the matter of the educational thinking of our rhetoricians, we see that we have had no point of view which

⁶ By this I mean, first of all the standard of ability to use English in recounting any aspect of our life in which the author is interested.

⁷ Of the modern young men and women of our urban life, who are writers or who aspire to be writers, it is true to say that they know next to nothing about the achievements in our language, especially the achievements in the pre-British period.

⁸ Isn't it true that one can't live our life if one has to spend most of one's time in English as regards important matters?

is ours, and it is by this education that the alienation of our mind from our life produced in us the unIndian bent.

To say that Indian writing in English is not good is hardly an argument against it, although it is obvious that is not good, for we can hope that it may be good or even better at some other time. I am more interested in showing, as a race with a distinct civilization from that to which Great Britain belongs (note the folly of comparing ourselves in our relation to English with the Australians, New Zealanders or Americans in their relation to the English language), we should under no circumstances, adopt English for all purposes as the educated have hitherto tried to adopt it, but, at the same time, we must not forget that it is essential and profitable for us to know it. I feel that we must never attempt literature in it or religious and philosophical thought.⁹ To learn English well and to express ourselves in our own languages is one thing which we should do, but to learn English at the expense of our own languages and to express ourselves in it is quite another thing which we have been doing and which we must now stop doing.¹⁰ To learn English well without the desire or the vanity of expressing ourselves in it is of great help to our own languages. I find I cannot read our writing in English without noticing on the writer's part the vanity of writing or composing in English, and on the reader's part the vanity of reading English, though it is true that some, having learnt English earlier, betray no vanity, writing and reading English being habitual to them.

The idea that our training in English and in modern education is hostile to our life does not lead me to propose that our writing in English is essentially bad, though I question its legitimacy, but it so happens that, being trained in English, and by modern education, our activity as writers and the reading public in English is an activity which affects the status of our languages and our life adversely. So that, I condemn it less on the grounds of merits or demerits than those of its legitimacy. In the first place I disapprove of such activity, secondly I am afraid I am not able to see any merit in it. You may ask me as to what must be done with the body of writing in English left to us by our forefathers, but I think it is not necessary to remind ourselves of what the Englishman, to-

⁹ Any such attempt in the latter case must justify itself by the result, I mean, by the quality achieved.

¹⁰ I should like the next generation to be prepared for doing everything in our languages though it must not shut out the study of other languages.

day, does with the writing for more than three centuries in Latin of many distinguished English authors. I do not think we ought to feel disturbed if we find that we esteemed unduly our writing in English. Just as it happened that we used English, it also happened that we thought we did well in it. It does not matter, both facts will be part of our recent history. We have done what we cannot help doing.

I should like to be understood and judged by a sense for the difference between an author who is really great, having a mind formed not only by his preoccupations with the life of his own people, but also by his mastery of the subtleties of the human experience of his own literature and language, and who expresses that sensibility which is his own, the result of the mind formed that way, and an Indian author in English, on the other hand, informed by our education with a rag-bag of reformistic or modernist opinions, and a tolerable but crudely inadequate mastery of English, expressing himself in fiction or poems in English, under the influence of a vain impulse, of a fashion or a trend, and of some technique or under a false enthusiasm for 'revolutionary' or stunt effects. Our writing in English is an unrelated activity. We may, if we want, keep it up for the class of the educated just as we have the industry of cosmetics for the women of the upper classes.

It may be argued that since Indian writers in English deal with Indian life and themes, my objections are pointless. I grant that they deal with Indian life and Indian themes, but still my objections are valid because on the one hand they deal with them with a mind formed by our modern education (What else can any one find in our fiction except a hotchpotch of reformism, liberal enlightenment, maudlin idealism, and more important, imperious attacks on our society, its conventions and traditions, and petty humour?) and, on the other, they do not deal with them in the real interests of our life. Our life has become a 'commercial material' for writers especially of my own generation as they take it up to turn it as much as they can to account. What they know about Indian life amounts to the fact that they know about it without being interested in it. You cannot feel that our writing in English is literature, though you can argue that it is; and the only point in favour of it is that there is already a body of writing in English of ours and that there are writers who write in English and there are readers for such writing. It is true that we have a considerable newspaper public with some knowledge of English all

over India, but their relation to anything serious in literature is like the relation of a thief to honesty; it is a public which likes to be informed by trends and fashions. In relation to anything else except to the interests of our life it is arguable that our writing in English is meritorious and should continue. We are often convinced about its existence because we do not know what to say against it. Besides, we suffer from false intimations about its quality.¹¹ A good many of those who read Indian fiction in English are those who enjoy the dime novels from America.

The public for our non-fictional writing is very small indeed, unless we think of the popularity of some writings of the great politicians. There are many authors of our non-fictional writing in English whom I admire: they are sincere, honest and at times, noble. We have a very inferior breed of authors of fiction in comparison with the former. But, I cannot help pointing out that again we meet with a failure in non-fictional writings, which we overlook because the purpose of such writing has been too pressing (think of our great politicians of the last eighty years) or because we have too great a regard for such writers to notice their failure in their relation to English. My own impression is that when such writing is political or historical, it is appealing and informative, but again, without thought and that, in all this, I feel something inadequate, something incomplete, in the exercise of the mind as regards English and as regards thinking. It is fair to add that our academic writing in English is incomparably poor, despite an army of research degree holders who came into being in the last twenty years.¹²

The reason for my view of our writing in English is that the authors and the reading public in English claim precedence over the authors and the reading public in our own languages, and, secondly their interests bring into focus certain activities, which, sometimes being connected with society values, may generate in us a superior attitude towards our own languages. Our fiction and poems in English are not literature for me, on whatever grounds you may regard them as literature. Those who write poems in

¹¹ Along with false intimations, we are also happy in drawing false analogies.

¹² There is no researcher with a unifying mind, whose recommendation, as far as I can see, is only a poor inductive ability as research has become a matter of mere academic form for the sake of one's promotion, or of the department's prestige. Some of these degree holders have profited from the academic racket of comparative study. Such a study is not only repugnant to the standards, if we care for them, but also insulting to the poets or authors compared with an eye on the booty. A doctorate in comparative study is worthless, and it must be treated as a disqualification for teaching jobs in English departments; such a degree-holder is our quack in teaching profession.

English wouldn't write if they knew better English or if they had a better sense for the value of poetry. Our writing in English is produced under three conditions which invalidate its claim to the rank of literature. The authors and the reading public, having no spoken English to draw upon, stand in a false relation to the English language; secondly they stand apart from our life and its interests with superior or indifferent attitude; thirdly, by limitations in point of their command of English, the authors scarcely transcend reporting, stating and describing, or they can never achieve freedom completely from affectations and incapacities.¹³ These limiting conditions will always be there for our authors in English. If we write in English we may do tolerably well as far as reporting, stating, and describing go, but there will be a point at which we shy away from many complexities in proportion as we are deprived of the larger and deeper resources of the culture of the language. You cannot hold that our writing in English arises from a sense of deep relations, and hence has a great significance to our mind, once we know the plight of our mind in English. For those who care for literature, a work must make a difference to them, and the real mind will have only contempt for a work which doesn't make a difference to it.

Recently, for the sake of this paper, I read two novels by two young women. It is society fiction governed by society values. They are smartly presented, but when I consider what made the novelists to have taken up such subjects, I feel that their effort of writing novels is something like their effort of wearing a sari fashionably. What they say is very interesting. Those who are not troubled by the questions of knowledge, of experience and of the perception of reality may have something interesting to say, but it is as interesting as a knowledge of different sorts of women's hair styles. When I express my opposition to our writing in English to young men and women of my own generation, I offend particularly the young people of the urban and unIndian life so much that they think I must be insane, and that is because they are not only admirers of some Indian authors of popularity without reading them or without judging them if they read, but also they themselves hope to become writers in English.

¹³ Affectations usually accompany a concealed sense of one's own disabilities or competitive spirit to do one better than others.

We are greatly mistaken in comparing our writing in English with the writing of any author in it whose mother tongue is not English for the sake of defending our writing in English. For instance, you cannot compare an Indian novelist in English with Conrad or Koestler (the latter is popular now with the fashionable set). An isolated Indian writer in English who lends himself to such comparisons (of course, for the justification of our writing in English) is one thing but an Indian writing in English for an Indian audience is quite another thing; there are some blind to this distinction, who fall into smart arguments crying up the merits of our writers by holding such comparisons. I have a colleague who returned recently from the States with a doctorate in English, and who answered to my suggestion (taking it as a challenge) that we cannot write well in English, by picking, I think, six illustrations from Indian as well as British authors, and by testing us if we can tell the Indian from the British.¹⁴ This took place at a seminar, sometime ago. Two of the passages are spotted as Indian writers': it does not matter whether we can spot them or not. His intention is obvious though his purpose is not served. It is his failure to say why, in the first place (or on what grounds) those six illustrations deserve our attention at all; that leaves him defeated utterly in his purpose. It is natural for such an educated Indian, justifying our writing in English, to talk with some emphasis as though we can do what we actually cannot, and as though we have done what we actually didn't.

No Indian author of fiction as far as I know is free from being anxious to earn credit by representing our life in an appealing manner.¹⁵ The common tendency is to retain impressions of our life under the impact of the western trends when we are attracted towards the western ways of living in contrast with ours. In that state of mind some are tempted to novelise their impressions because they feel curious about the contrast and want to make others also curious. I can see that what an Indian writer, who retains, under some stimulus, impressions of our life, suffers from is a naïve enthusiasm to tell everything he knows in as effective a manner as he can regardless of whether the

¹⁴ This testing was acrobatically done in a seminar at Madras Christian College: standing on his feet and raising his hands threateningly, he threw out his counter challenge nervously that we too can write the British English. Such a test was self-defeating. The test, of course, makes him look smart and victorious as long as he goes uncaught.

¹⁵ What I am saying will be evident if you watch an Indian in the company of a European, and his own anxiety to impress on the European, and his own anxiety to impress on the European a pack of lies about our life, or show him the impressive side of our life with a self-important emphasis – a common enough behaviour.

manner is sentimental etc. It is a common failure in any writer to suggest a profound state of mind and to touch off a lively character.¹⁶ At best his work remains an experience of a mere skill or a failure to communicate. I have come across hardly any instance where the author's material deepens itself into the characteristic experience of literature.

I have abstained so far from criticizing a single author or his works in the hope that what I say in connection with Prof. Rajan's merits as a writer and critic will show that I am not treating the subject in hand as a literary critic because, to me, it is self-evident that our writing in English is inferior both to our literature in any of our languages and to the literature of the English language. I feel it ironical when a comparison of an Indian author with a Huxley or a Maugham is a matter of pride not only for the reader but also for the author himself.¹⁷

Prof. Rajan is a self-conscious, distinguished man of letters. He is an excellent improvement on the class of Indians of the older generation before him, who love rhetoric in English, enjoy memorizing purple passages in English literature, who speak fluently without saying much, who love English with the passion of a miser for money, or as they love a favourite dish, and who are Indian in life, whatever ideas they may hold against it. But, being trained as a literary critic at one of the two great Universities in England, he is prone to sophistications in phrasing, and the reminiscence of Eliot's or Lawrence's phrasing is unshakable in him. He knows about our life as you can see in many of his knowing comments in his novels. He is also superior to the third class of the educated which consists of young men and women of this generation with the urban and unIndian life, and the background of the missionary education, and which is complete in its break-up with our life.

Prof. Rajan's handling of critical jargon gets the better of the novelist in him. A knowledge of literary criticism and its vocabulary is dangerous to an ambitious man. Dr. Richards, who is an important critic in this century, turns out to be a failure when, late in his life, he attempts poetry. Prof. Rajan, who is not a critic but who knows the technique

¹⁶ One can only get up something under such circumstances which cannot be true, however interesting or entertaining it may be.

¹⁷ To borrow from, or adopt, the writings of unimportant western writers is so common amongst our writers in native languages and in English that the latter feel proud or flattered when a comparison is made between the two. Western fashions in fiction techniques, and magazine writers, have far more influence over the Indian writers than any real and great work from the West.

of a literary critic, turns out to be a failure as an artist when he attempted, first poetry, and later fiction. Prof. Rajan is an academic success and it is no small reward for his talents. If we cannot appreciate his literary merits, we envy his academic success. That is how he gets his value in India.¹⁸

Prof. Rajan takes chances with writing, more in earnest for success than under compulsion for it, but he is free from the insufferable antics of bohemian artists. Always he falls into a mood, and expresses it in a language closer to the jargon of literary criticism or novelese, in which, I feel, he is being dishonest with the English language, and lacks in a real knowledge of anything he is ambitious to do, which is made up for by the exercise of memory in brocading his expressions. In him we find a man of abilities, whose command of English and knowledge of our life are unquestionable but who wants -- which is unfortunate -- to express his ideas about our life in English without 'living' Indian life.¹⁹ It is difficult for him to know our life because he 'views' it, he seems to have been brought up in the atmosphere of attitudinizing towards our life, and he cannot write in the idiom of English because he learnt the language instead of growing in it. He cannot help being external in his relationship both to Indian life and to the English language. If you read *The Dark Dancer* closely, you will find no experience which is not mediated by his sophisticated pose; in fact there is nothing much besides. I have taken longer time to read it than 'Middlemarch' (Dr.Rajan's novel will be about one-sixth of 'Middlemarch') because it is so bad that I cannot read more than ten pages at a time, and I needed long intervals in between my attempts to finish it. That Prof. Rajan cannot offer much except the experience of his pose need not surprise us when we remember that he comes from one of the few really successful Civil Servants' families, and that those families, specializing in Civil Service, anticipate their children in the next generation to be de-Indianised (de-Brahminised?), as it is inherent in the way they are brought up in the formal education provided for them. There is, and that is important to note here, no correlation between his upbringing and educational training on the one hand, and the strength of our life, of our metaphysics, religion, our great rituals, and of our music and folk-spirit. If he had taken up some branch of technology, he would have settled in

¹⁸ A first class degree is worth an empire for the middle - class Indian, and a gazetted rank in civil service is worth more than an Empire.

¹⁹ It is fair to add that he is de-Indianised by upbringing, if not by intention.

America with a gushing admiration for its fantastic technological achievements without any feeling about the substitution of the American for Indian life.²⁰ It is very difficult for him to be rehabilitated, and none in similar conditions can do better.

No doubt you will get the impression that I am decrying our talent because I have a poor opinion of our writing in English. Far from it, I want to set a purpose and a preoccupation for our talent which is faring badly in English, and which is without a central principle for organizing experience in the interests of our life, and which is now misdirected under certain illusions.

I have provided here some passages from Prof. Rajan's recent critical work on Yeats, and from his first novel, '**The Dark Dancer**'. You may see for yourself when you go through them whether they bear looking into. From the foreword to his book on Yeats:

"In contrast to some recent studies of Yeats this book regards Yeats as a writer firmly and centrally in the tradition of English poetry whose concern is with the fundamental patterns of human experience, whatever may be his means of approach to these patterns. Yeats' achievement cannot but be diminished by attempts to regard him as primarily a metaphysical Irish nationalist, a neo-platonic mystic, an occultist, a symbolist, a nostalgic aristocrat, an exponent of the magic world-view or as anything less than a poet of the human condition. It is because of the depth and inescapable relevance of his concerns that he is successful in creating a language both eloquently public and authentically personal."

Is it really idiomatic English? Let me not pass any comments on it. Here is a version of the same passage redone by an Englishman for the cover jacket. Note the improvement:

"The author regards Yeats as a writer firmly and centrally in the tradition of English poetry. Attempts to regard him as a metaphysical Irish nationalist, a neo-platonic mystic, an occultist, a symbolist, nostalgic aristocrat or a visionary only serve to diminish his achievement. He is essentially the poet of the human

²⁰ The fate of many young men of my own generation who are highly qualified scientists and technologists, is that, first, they become unIndian by education, here and abroad, and secondly, through frustration, are converted to the American way of life, or resigned to it in the States having no prospects in India. For them, it is difficult to have a significant mind, as their experience will never be of something which can refine them.

condition. Only because of the depth and relevance of his concerns is he successful in creating a language both eloquently public and authentically personal.

I am aware of the purpose of the altered version. The point is whether, in alteration, we could avoid or not the awkward, turgid, pretentious English of Prof. Rajan. Let me pick on a passage from the body of the book:

More recently Kenner and Unterecker have persuasively demonstrated that Yeats' Collected Poems ought to be read as an entity and each poem gains in richness and significance by being set among the poems that surround it. The Collected Poems form a consciously shaped universe in which every poem has its place and is illuminated by the place it occupies. Each work contributes to the whole work: but the converse of this recognition is surely that each work has to be seen in its own individuality, its own achieved and largely sufficient life, if we are to see it correctly as part of the community which it helps to create.

What else can we expect from such a critic? (Each-poem-in-its-individuality-with-its-share-in-totality need not be laboured.)

It is equally distressing to read his novel. I thought I might give two or three illustrations of his language, but I think it is not necessary. Instead, we will have one passage of description when Krishnan goes home to his native-place:

Home was for him a more disturbing vacancy without even the expected leap of longing tensing in him to bridge the separation. Home was his beginning, no more than a point of departure. It could have been anywhere and any shape. He was too far from it to come in joyously as if the house were his, a place that had bloomed into a significance around him, an experience he lived in and an affection he wore. He could only come home abstractly, knowing bloodlessly that he had already been there.

Why should he write a novel in that manner? I cannot divine his motives. You could easily understand how I forced myself to finish the novel.

Sometime ago, a university lecturer in English, on knowing my valuation of Prof. Rajan's writings, expressed so great a surprise that he could only tell others that I must either be facetious or perverse, and in order to vindicate his opinion against me, he held

Prof. Rajan's introduction to his annotated edition of the first two books of 'Paradise Lost' as an example of perfect literary criticism. The lecturer obviously uses this edition for his class work, and I don't think he finds anything of any sort useless for his class work. Here is a passage from the introduction, which I read before I met with the lecturer's praise of Prof. Rajan:

To say that any detail in *Paradise Lost* requires all that has preceded it as its context is eventually only to say that *Paradise Lost* succeeds in being a poem. If the remark is considerably more than a platitude it is because the dimensions of *Paradise Lost* obscure its unity or tempt one to seek its character in the local achievements of language rather than in the poem's total structure and growth. In fact as will be suggested later, the style of *Paradise Lost* enacts its unity but it is not the only integrative force in the poem as well as inherited. It is indeed a striking example of tradition transformed by the individual talent or rather reorganized so as to reveal its nature. Yet Milton's originality should not blind us to the fact that a certain awareness of tradition, a certain "given" structure of values and responses are taken for granted by the movement of the poem. Though *Paradise Lost* to a surprising extent, creates or rather revalidates its own terms, it is not a poem which can be read without commitments and one necessary assumption is that Satan is evil."

It could be admired because no other Indian teacher wrote 'better', but that is an untenable criterion, and that, I suppose, is the criterion of the lecturer.²¹ So abstract and pointless a passage shows the usual habit in the author of attempting to do what he cannot do; abstract not only because it is unidiomatic English but also flat and unengaging with very little of substance in it; pointless because it is not about 'Paradise Lost' but about his pet ideas concerning it. I do not say anything about him as a teacher; there, I think he is secure, but as a writer or critic he has no point for us.

²¹ It sometimes happens that, as it would mean looking insignificant to hold no opinions a university teacher is liable to advance some opinion on an author without arriving at it by personal experience, and defend it for the sake of prestige. Such a teacher will resist any argument perversely; and such virtues as self-restraint and self-questioning are indeed alien to the egotism of our university teachers in general, which is hardened and incurable.

To the question 'What about other writers?' the answer is that, although they may be different from Prof. Rajan, they are in no way unexceptionable. If one disagrees with me, I can only point out that no one has come anywhere near being a standard for a true sense of literature or for the experience of value-judging any other Indian writer in English. Again to the question "What standards have I in judging our writing in English?" I can only draw the reader's attention to the controlling purpose of this paper, and to the fact that I bring my sense of the great authors whom I read in English literature to bear upon my judgment.

I cannot, on the other hand, see any relevance in the opinions and arguments of others in judgment of Indian writing in English. I have read the pros and cons at the hands of some reputed scholars who make out a case for Indian authors in English, but they are sickening for one important reason that they do not presuppose a mental base related to the distinction of any civilization. Of course, they are sickening for the inanity of their topic as much as for their jargon of literary criticism. They are not at all arguments in any sense; I mean they are not backed up by discussable assumptions, and they are some times pathetic appeals for recognition, but most often, they are opinions creating strong illusion in us that our writing in English is literature on the basis of the terms of the simpler logic of false analogies or misleading ideas.

TWO

The Study of English Literature in Our Universities*

In our Universities, English literature, for a long time, has been offered as an academic subject for the specialist at the post-graduate level. Its study seems to be warranted by the fact that the available places for the course are filled up every year with a constant demand for more places. So that the teachers in English, who entertain fear as to the continuance of their profession, have no reason to be discouraged. The student who confuses the social status of English with the study of English literature will come to it, so also the student who is innocently interested in it, and finally the student who makes

* First published in The Hindu, Madras, and later in Delhi Career's Digest as its choice from The Hindu in that year. (1965)

a virtue of necessity in choosing it. The three types make up the necessary bulk for the classroom. If it does not pay well to read for M.A degree in English, at least, it would give the candidate the satisfaction of doing a subject which is not within everyone's reach and of displaying the special talent for it. As for the teacher, he enters the profession hopefully but continues in it with resignation for lack of better opportunities. M.A degree course in English, with men, attracts middle-class talent though it has a charm for some urbanised, fashionable young women from upper-middle class families. One does not come to it with great enthusiasm, as it promises no extraordinary rewards. However, there is a great demand for 'good' English, the investigation of which will be an interesting exercise for the sociologist, but there is so little good training as to the teaching of English which must be the educationalists' concern since our education is based on the knowledge of the English language. Let me ask the usual question, why do our students fail to acquire a good command of English? It is difficult to give, in reply to the question, a full account of the right training missed in the study of English literature but the thing I can do here is to point out some conditions leading to the defective training that the student receives in his study of the subject, a defective training which amounts to doing violence to human nature itself. What, actually, I have on my mind is to take the reader through the experience of what it is like doing M.A. degree in English in our Universities.

Let me enforce my point against the present teaching of English literature. What the student attends to in M.A. degree class is either the notes of the teacher, which is made up of passages from various critics or the teacher's knowing and pretentious expounding of psychological theories or of some literary ideas, no matter which. Both ways of teaching are irresistible to him and we need not be surprised when we remember that the usual students' command of English is poor (imaginably for his age around twenty-one); therefore he cannot help being impressed by either way of teaching. For him, those are the only two ways of explaining the text. (A third, intelligent mode of teaching has yet to make its way into our education, but our education can protect itself from any such intrusion!) When, however, the student reads the text for himself, to him, what is taught in the two well-known modes of teaching seems relevant and profitable since he cannot have a reliable experience of his own regarding the text. In view of the

examinations, he need not go beyond a vague sense of the relevance so impressed on his mind. If there is a chance that the student dislikes a teacher it is because he forms an impression of the teacher about his being unimpressive in the one or the other kind of teaching, and not because he knows that the teacher is essentially wrong or ill-trained. But we know a sensitive and intelligent student sees through this farce, but then the intimidating power of the department in a university can easily silence him.

What then is attempted in the way in which the subject is taught is to provide the student with enough matter for reproduction in his examinations without either removing the linguistic inadequacies in him or introducing the subject to him so as to stimulate interest in it. The student's performance in the examinations is the end for the teaching of the subject which presents itself as a text-book knowledge. From the start the student suffers from this uncomfortable awareness of the examinations forming an exclusive interest, and makes few demands on English literature though he refines his sense of elimination from the cumbersome syllabus, getting what he wants by taking down the teacher's notes (for most students, good teacher = useful notes) or getting it, if he is clever, from the books from which the teacher himself takes his notes. By such process, which is the upshot of the academising of literature, the student is fobbed off with academic substitutes for real literature. What bears on his examinations is what he focuses his attention on, which is hostile to the formation of a sense of literature, for which he has to go through phased experiences. It never occurs to the student that he is unable to see the relevance of the subject to his personal life. He does not grow with the study of the subject but becomes clever about the tricks he has to adopt for passing his examinations, as his attention, in the classroom, is never drawn to the organisation within each work of literature with which he is expected to be in touch. There is very little of written work for him to do in the course; in consequence of this, he retains Indianisms in his English and never gets a chance to shake them off by training in thinking and writing. Of course, it is not possible to avoid Indianisms completely unless one is, from the cradle, Anglicised, but it is interesting to note how the student lapses into them because it throws light on his mental reaction to the working of the language when he does not learn it through arduous discipline. The Indianisms which he retains are those expressions, weighty phrases, and idioms which he smuggles into his writing or speech for being

impressive. The presentation of the continuous sense of experience in idiomatic English, free from the interpolations which fail him in precision and in the rudiments of logic, and which irritate the reader or the listener, is an impossible feat for the Indian student; this is partly due to lack of constant exercise in writing essays and partly due to discouragement to read classic novels (I know a person with a First Class in M.A. degree in this University, Madras who told me that he never read a great novel in English for this course). Till we make the study of English literature an effective experience for the student and till it 'works' upon his mind, the student makes very little of his study during the two years. An ability to 'pigeon-hole' experiences and render an account of his own experiences is, at least, the implicit aim of the study of literature but the lesson that is taught is not an experience to the student but a notes of prejudices to be got up for the examinations. The training now given will not enable the student to discriminate and to prepare him for value-judgements which emerge from the experiencing of valuable experiences. There is 'no life of literature' for the student in our Universities, which factor hebetates his mind and corrupts it, disabling him from straightforward dealings in life.

From what has been said above the inference forces itself on us that the teacher is ill-trained, for he was once a student. I have nothing but regard for exceptions. The students' ignorance is the teacher's blessing, and equally, the prescribed text is an immense advantage for him (the teacher). With the prescribed book the teacher is at ease with the class, as he knows how to spend the hour with the students. This delimitation of the course to the texts, which may be single poems or prose selections or novels, seems to have been specially worked out to suit the bent of the Indian teacher. There is not much difference between the teacher lining up his notes for the class and the student preparing for his examinations.²² What improvement you can expect at the most from the teacher is that if he is young he may become fashionable and talkative (*avant-garde*) about literature. Like the student who suffers from obsession with the examinations, the teacher, too, suffers from the sense of being unsuccessful socially. English has a status in

²² Over 75% of teachers in English never think of preparing for their class. They have only vague ideas to talk about and talk about them for hours on end. Those others who prepare for their class dictate notes as though students in the classroom do not exist as living beings. More often, especially if it is a woman lecturer, she lifts a whole chapter from some critic and dictates it solemnly.

India but the teaching of English has none. The social value of the study of the subject and of its teaching is now determining mostly the interest of the student as well as the teacher. Therefore the teacher's encounter with the student is jejune.

The atmosphere of the Faculty is never congenial to the student (to whom, of course, it will be interesting to watch the manifestations of professional jealousy in the staff) and the dullness (presumably) affects him to the extent that the subject does not become for him a living-into and that he reconciles himself, unawares, to the perfunctory nature of his work.²³ In other words, geared to the examinations, the student can be easily overawed by the tyrannical dictation of the lecture notes of the teacher, which cancels out other possibilities of dealing with the subject. Everyone doing his work in the Faculty, appears blameless for this state of affairs, though you sense that what is happening is not right.

The English course for M.A. degree which was instituted after the manner of B.A. degree for the University of London in the 19th century, remains more or less unchanged in our Universities,²⁴ and without radical changes (there are some suggestive hints from the proceedings of the British Council conference on this subject held at King's College, Cambridge, in 1962) in the course itself in the first instance, and secondly, in its

²³ As for the activities of every English association, there will only be an inaugural and a valedictory meeting each year. On either occasion, the speaker will be some local gazetted officer or a local teacher whom the Professor does not dislike. The Professor is prudent and sees to it that no scholar from outside is invited to address his students. The department can be most depressing to the student. But the marvel is that he or she puts up with it.

²⁴ No doubt there are now a few changes made but one regrets them. For instance, the introduction of American and Indo-Anglian literatures, and of comparative studies, in M.A. Degree English Course; which I think is a sheer vulgarity turning away the student from what attention he can concentrate upon his English literature in this less than two years' crowded course. Besides, it is a matter of common sense that they need not be clubbed with English and that each of them by itself, if wanted, can be studied for a separate degree. English literature need not be supplemented. But this novelty serves the teacher's purpose excellently well though it impoverishes the student. The teacher can obtain a Ph.D. in these subjects writing some trash without any trouble and can capture professorship in English with a little pull. This way the U.G.C. is being cheated by a few Professors.

Another novelty is the introduction of semester. It has two advantages for the Professor only: one, he can tyrannize over the students by the lever of internal assessment; two, he can produce 'good' results and get credit. That English literature should not be placed along with other subjects in which semester may have a point would not strike either the Professor or the authorities. What is so shameful is that one boasts of it as a revolutionary measure and further, piques oneself on one's introduction of it.

With these modernist changes, we get the impression that in every instance there is an undeniable improvement, but we are hard put to it to find any such in teaching and learning – in the case of the teacher as teacher and of the student as student. On the other hand, one to whom teaching and learning constitute education and other things, on the contrary, seem unimportant, will be sick at the misfortunes of English literature in Indian Universities.

relationship to the Faculty, we are bound to perpetuate a system which produces bad results. The students' needs, the teacher's training, and the power distribution within the Faculty as regards the subject, must be the main points of attention in case of reorientations.

THREE

The Teaching of English and Our Education*

When I was asked to write for this magazine, I thought I might write on a subject concerning my own profession, which could be useful to the teacher and the student who are, in the institution of education, the most important persons involved. I am interested in this topic because English has been kept up at a level of poor proficiency, owing to the most undesirable way it is taught at present in our Colleges.

Usually, the teacher in English deludes himself that he teaches it well but the student does not learn it well. There may be some teachers to whom this kind of delusion does not apply. But many have no warrant for thinking themselves to be good teachers. To teach English literature without a good command of the language is too obviously the case with every teacher, but we are not aware of it, or we avoid being aware of it. What strikes me, at first, is that, given the ill-training, the teacher cannot help being insincere, but if he is sincere, he cannot help being inadequate. No teacher denies that the teaching of English in general is bad excepting, of course, his own teaching. The illusions of the English teacher are as many as the disguises he wears for impressiveness. Many students do not tell us but they do suffer from the self-importance of the teacher who boasts about his own knowledge. At the same time, it is common that students, having only witnessed poor teaching, mistake vociferating charlatans for scholars; also they mistake the study of a few texts for literature, or confuse real literature with some false impression of literature they have.

On account of the historical importance of English, the social prestige it enjoys among the Upper classes is so high that it is difficult for an Indian to be honest with it, and to be above affectation. Of course, we don't see we are affected because we think we

* Written for the college magazine. I dreaded the very name of 'College magazine'. I never wanted to do anything for it, but at one time, I was pressed for contribution. It, however, turned out to be not so insipid as college magazine articles usually are. (1969)

are producing good effect on others. I mean, although we know we are affected we do not know we are ludicrous. Among certain class of Indians the affectations are too naïve to be tolerable. We suffer from lack of good training and of genuine interest in the subject. It is my experience of the teacher in English that it is the ego and not the mind that develops in him. He has so little knowledge and experience of English literature and yet he feels happy thinking he knows better than others in his profession. The pattern is so well set that the student who studies the subject at M.A. degree level and who wants to be a teacher will soon be like his teacher. Quite a few teachers enjoy their time in the class-room talking about the subject without teaching it. The students can put up with such a teacher because they learn very little even from the teacher who can teach it. As far as examinations are concerned, the distinction between one teacher and the other is made by the student on the grounds of the potted notes dictated by the teacher.

Invariably, Indians are touchy about their knowledge of English. You cannot do better, if you want to flatter an educated Indian, than to say that his command of English is very good or that his English is like that of a Britisher. Equally, nothing can offend him so much as to be told about his poor command of English. There is no demand for good English made either on the teacher or on the student because, the purpose, whatever it may be, for which English is learnt can be served by those who know it poorly. English teaching, honestly, is a farce in our colleges for which the teacher is as much blamable as the student, the University and the Government. The most foolish thing is to put the blame on one of these and leave out the rest.

Learning a subject ought to mean learning it thoroughly whether you learn it for a purpose or for its own sake. No one knows why so many should be educated so poorly in India. There is no hope that the mass production will be checked because no one really favours a different system of education, though it is very common to attack the present system either for consoling oneself or for impressing on others. All that has been said about education in general, or against this education in particular or about probable changes in the latter can be presented as three kinds of opinions; opinions of the school teacher, of the civil servant, and of the stump orator. What is common to the three species is that they want education to train their children for civil service, executive positions or a profession like that of doctors etc., that is, relatively for higher social

positions. In a sense their opinions are rather diagnostic of the mental disabilities we have been suffering from for a long time. They express nothing genuine, nothing serious and intelligent. Besides, there has been a great deal of mealy-mouthed idealism about character, conduct and citizenship whenever education is discussed.

Recently there is a new development in our education, the introduction of various methods. Consequently the study of methodology has become respectable. It must be remembered that methodology in its very nature is external. It may do great harm to us by confusing the superficial with the essential or by substituting ideas and opinions for real thought. Methods can be as useless as many definitions of education.

We accept a very undesirable and harmful education such as ours because we fail to think of our life whenever we apply our mind to education. The most fundamental experiences of our race which are essential for the formation of right disposition, taste, and delicacy of mind, have not only been disregarded in our educational institutions but also denied to the student. We get the student, as a result, with ill-formed mind no matter from which institution he or she comes. It is impossible to create a scholar or teacher out of this education. And I think, in English we have neither a great scholar nor a great teacher who has done anything worth remembering today. In the history of English teaching, there is no instance of even a remarkable teacher who could give a genuine, authentic exposition of a classic with the characteristic ring of personal experience. We all employ the tricks of our trade when we fail to give a straightforward exposition of the text; the trick of some is to give notes and bibliography, the trick of some others to quote profusely, while quite a few others adopt the trick of gossiping about facile theories or ideas. In the past we mistook those who spoke bad English fluently for scholars. Now we deceive ourselves about the merit of one who pretends to knowledge because of his psychological phraseology or philosophical crotchets or of his literary jargon.

It is a pity that the English teacher scarcely feels his own limitations and disabilities. If we feel our limitations one consequence will be that we realize that it is better to have English course in M.A. degree in our mother tongue rather than in English itself. Of course no English teacher will subscribe to such an outrageous and offensive idea! The general illusion that we know, now, good English and we manage with it well, and the panic that, if we replace it by the mother tongue, we will not learn so good an

English and we will do much worse without it, are responsible for the belief that we must continue what we are doing now, if possible, only with certain changes for improvement.

It is interesting to note what happens in the departments of English. One thing common to all Indian teachers in English is that they avoid being exposed by means of subterfuges. Many Heads arrange the activities of their departments so as to keep their subordinates at a respectable distance, and they bother very little about anything else except the time-table of class work. Such is the case with the older generation. As for those Heads of the present generation, they are usually enthusiastic in running a local literary magazine for self-importance or busy with trivial kinds of literary opinions. And they do a bit of pitiable kind of writing. At times, by collaboration with their American friends they publish all sorts of trash. However, the point is that they exercise a great influence over younger teachers, and mislead them to concentrate upon works of little worth and publish the articles they write about them. The result is that every one becomes fashionable in opinions about literary works.

I know a different kind of the most undesirable Head as typical as any, who often wears the mask of humility (a way of the Philistine to get on well), who is unctuously obedient to the higher authorities of the University, approaching them with the look of an errand boy to insinuate himself into their favour so that his incompetence as a teacher may not be exposed, or if exposed, may nevertheless be overlooked, but at the same time, who is stand-offish to his students and subordinates with a mofussil pride, and who keeps everyone in the department busy, first by involving the students mechanically in taking down notes and in assignment work, and secondly by making other teachers work to the tight schedule of, again a mechanical sort of work, including the correction of the students' pitiable writing; all this shows that he is egregiously deficient in conduct and in the mastery of the subject, and yet, dealing as he does with the subject, the students and the subordinates as foreman, he achieves the two intended effects by low cunning and tactics; first the authorities like him, and secondly, the students admire him for at least the first six months (he is considered a great scholar!), although his colleagues know the truth. But there cannot be any opposition to him because the humdrum autocrat makes his power felt with the backing of the authorities. He is a compound of irascibility, boastfulness, and immodest egoism, always attempting to make himself a little precious

by petty reserve and base hypocrisy. The authorities everywhere are never interested in the teacher's ability to teach. If the case is otherwise with the authorities, more than half of our teaching population will have to seek some other jobs, or those who come to teaching because they could not get better jobs will not dare to do so. Very few University departments are free from this sorry state of affairs.

I do not think that anyone is interested in the study of English literature as such, in drawing upon it for purposes other than that of teaching, and of getting a job. It is perhaps not so very easy to be a good teacher in a subject which is sought after with a mind uninterested in anything that a great literature can offer to us. There may be other reasons also why, at present, English is taught so poorly by the teacher and learnt so badly by his victim. There is a brood of teachers now whose habits are so formed that they can only understand anything in terms of theories and they can only explain literary works in terms of theories. This attraction for theories is as great now as the attraction of our predecessors for Dr. Johnson's or Lord Macaulay's English two decades ago. Very often the student, instead of attempting to know his subject and pass the examinations, attempts to pass the examinations careless of whether he knows the subject or not. Likewise, the teacher, instead of attempting to know his subject and teach it, talks about it on the basis of cribbing large passages from unimportant critics. There is something false in the transaction between the teacher in English and his student. The result is that false estimates are very common. Just as a teacher with an itch for quoting and reeling off pseudo-theories and critical opinions or 'important' points makes large claims for his scholarship and gets recognition, so also a student who asks question often in the classroom and who is seen with 'critical' books in his hand is often mistaken to be a brilliant student.

In the case of our education we had no choice at the start. We are made by this education. We do not know how to choose a different education. We prefer to continue what is handed down to us with some difference only, which cannot do any harm to the interests which we are unwilling to sacrifice as a class. We learnt English before Independence in a frame of mind conditioned by an ambition to make a successful living and learnt it from those who came to India in a similar frame of mind. The transaction has been successful as a business transaction; but it is a failure as a communication between

two minds belonging to two different civilizations. On either side there was no interest in the experience of literature and its value to the mind though there had been genial enthusiasm on the one side and plebeian enthusiasm on the other.

All of us know what is wrong with us when we learn English. We do not write and speak well in English, though some of us speak bad English fluently²⁵. The remedy is not more literature but more emphasis on the linguistic exercise so that we may cultivate good habits of forming sentences, and with these habits we may improve in thinking in English to some purpose. But linguistic exercise is a bitter pill to the teacher as well as the student since they can never get over the illusion that their English is good enough and that they have no need for linguistic drills. Hence if you ask the teacher to train the students in such drills, and if you put the student to them, they both feel snubbed. Actually, if you ask them to be more precise whenever they speak and write English, they also feel affronted. There is no doubt that the specialist in linguistics will be of help to both of them. He may help us making his subject more important than what it is; then his help is unwelcome. On the other hand, he may help us leading from linguistic training to greater appreciation of literature: then his help is indispensable. It will no longer be necessary to study English literature without a good command of the English language. Nor need we be swamped with the study of linguistics and forget the value of literature. But the signs are that we may not get out of the mess we have made of the teaching of English till we dispel the educational chaos.

²⁵ I believe that want of translation exercises leaves our students at the mercy of bad, habitual expressions, and also on account of this, there has never been a bracing contact with the spoken idiom on their part.