

# Emerging Trends in English Studies in India: An Overview

Jyothi

Assistant Professor, Department of English, University College of Science, Tumkur University, Tumkur-572103

**Abstract**— *Though English emerged as a discipline towards the end of the nineteenth century, it has been the center of academic debates in the country of its origin. The rise of English studies is a process motivated by social rather than intellectual ends, with the discipline being promoted as uniquely suited to a mission of national cultivation. Then onwards, English has polarized its position on its function in education; from single standard language to recognition of varieties, from emphasis on writing to attention to speech, from dictionary definitions and grammatical rules to flexibility of usage, from canon of great works to open for no canon, from national curriculum to local syllabus, from single dominant cultural identity to multicultural differences and from national views of the subject to conceptions which are at once more regional/local and more international/global.*

*India is one of the most important countries in the world as far as the development of English Studies is concerned. The issues discussed here are; alienation in the teaching of English literature; cultural baggage that the English literature carries; the need for introducing Indian Literature and reducing our focus on British literature; resisting mono-lingual and metropolitan bias by taking advantage of bilingualism and traditional culture in our approach to the practice of the discipline; lang-lit debate, so on and so forth. But few studies have paid close attention to understand research trends in English studies. Of course, research in English Studies is relatively a recent phenomenon. So it would be a fascinating study to analyse the different trends prevalent in English studies in India. One clear observation shows that there is clear shift in research interest from literature study to language study. In this context, the present paper takes an overview of emerging trends in English studies in India.*

**Keywords**— *Discipline, Language, Literature, Research.*

The emergence of English as a discipline across the globe is an interesting story. Though it emerged as a discipline towards the end of the nineteenth century, it has been the center of academic debates. Over the past two centuries, it

has travelled far and wide across the globe due to some historical and political factors such as Colonialism and Globalization, among others.

Before we look into the status of English studies in India, let us have a glance at the growth of English studies as a discipline in the country of its origin. To start with, the concept of discipline, as Joe Moran (2001) states is a particular branch of learning or body of knowledge. The function of universities was to lay open the whole body of learning and expound both the principles and the foundations of all knowledge. The nature of the university as a relatively closed institution contributed to the consolidation of the disciplines. The emergence of a new academic subject always depended partly on internal factors; elite universities recognizing it through the creation of separate departments, sufficient students and lecturers being recruited to study and teach it, learned societies and journals forming around it and recognized career structures developing, usually based on the acquisition of a PhD in that subject.

Hence, it is important to note that English as a non-specialized subject and its object of study is accessible in a way even outside the academic set up. As far as literature is concerned, it is about life in all its diversity and this is hard to accommodate within the narrow parameters of a discipline.

Meanwhile, Raymond Williams points out the original meaning of literature, which has been central to the formulation of English as a discipline. Until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century it referred to all types of writing, scientific, autobiographical, historical as well as fictional. The notion of literature as a specialized, highly valued kind of writing which deals with the imaginative or creative as opposed to the factual or practical is largely as invention of the post-romantic period.

At the same time, Brian Doyle (1989) argues the rise of English studies is a process motivated by social rather than intellectual ends, with the discipline being promoted as uniquely suited to a mission of national cultivation. He sees the establishment of academic English as part of a wider social movement developing between the 1880s and the 1920s, identified with events such as the publication of the Newbolt Report and the founding of the

English Association which sought to renew cultural leadership by disseminating a sense of tradition, culture and national pride.

It is also crucial to note that Terry Eagleton describes Matthew Arnold as a central figure in the construction of English as the subject best equipped to provide the social cement. The institutionalization of literature was not a simple, unified process, but a piecemeal development that happened for different reasons, and at different stages in the different educational establishment that existed in England at that time.

Further, Brian Doyle's analysis in which the rise of English studies in the higher education system is described as the result of national process of institutionalization.

Similarly, Chris Baldick's (1983) focusses on five major critics Arnold, Eliot, Richards, and the Leavises and their attempts to claim a wider relevance for English. He argues that academic institutionalization of literary studies was secured by three factors: the needs of the British Empire, the movements for adult education and the need to make specific provision for the education of women. These factors ensured literary study, in particular of English literature, a permanent place in higher education and moulded the theory and practice of English teaching.

More to the point, A J Palmer (1965) asserts that New Universities like King's, Nottingham and Manchester encouraged the study of literature as an agent for social mission much before the subject was admitted into syllabuses at Oxford and Cambridge. Then John Churton Collins led a campaign to have English literature as an academic subject at Oxford. He believed that if literature was to enter university syllabuses, it had to do so on the same grounds as other newly professionalized disciplines, it had to demonstrate that it was marked by objective methods of enquiry and a concern for accumulation of knowledge for its own sake, possess a recognized structure that would map the student's progress from novice to expert through a succession of lessons, examinations and qualifications. Oxford's insistence on the canon's centrality was countered by Cambridge's more liberal attitude towards the body of texts that constituted literature.

In particular, Pamela McCullum (1983) claims that Eliot's concept of order, Leavises' critique of popular culture and Richard's belief in the importance of literary study as an indispensable agent of social cohesion. Eliot's criticism offered a number of methods and philosophies to academic departments of English. Its early insistence on rigour and impersonality and on the importance of critical method, gave implicit support to the subject's claims to disciplinarity. According to Leavis, students of English are essentially learning what reading is and what thinking

is. Likewise, Hayden White (1977) highlighted that modern literary critics recognize no disciplinary barriers, either as to subject matter or to methods.

In addition, The Newbolt report of 1921 sets up English literature as the prime source of national culture, argues that it should take the place of classics as the central humane discipline and even expresses the hope that it will assume the sacralizing role of religion in a primarily secular society.

Along similar lines, F R Leavis suggests that English should be repositioned as pivotal subject forming a center of attraction and point of liaison for all other disciplines within the university. Leavis regards English as necessarily interdisciplinary, since the work of the great writers which form its syllabus inevitably encompasses a much broader interest in life, society, civilization and thought. His sketch for an English school aims to focus all academic study around the English faculty and strengthen the power base of his own subject. Leavis was engaged in a struggle to consolidate the new dominance of English in relation to classics and philosophy. Leavis felt that the rift between culture and society can be mended through the integrated study possible within a university discipline. In any period it is upon a very small minority that the discerning appreciation of art and literature depends, Leavis sees the discipline of literary study as the safeguard of this minority culture. He observes that the literary critics' task is to make a kind of strategic retreat from society in order to form an academic discipline which will eventually achieve an interdisciplinary synthesis and a transformation of society. So Leavis' PhD dissertation on the relationship of journalism and literature became the foundation for cultural studies. Positioning cultural studies challenges the disciplinary identity of literary studies by dissolving the category of literature into the more inclusive notion of culture.

To put it in a nut shell, Robert Eagleton (2000) asserts that English is a system which is interrelated and bound together overtime and space and people by certain principles of coherence. But at the same time it is a system which is open, always in the making, never closed and never finally made. English has polarized its position on its function in education; from single standard language to recognition of varieties, from emphasis on writing to attention to speech, from dictionary definitions and grammatical rules to flexibility of usage, from canon of great works to open for no canon, from national curriculum to local syllabus, from single dominant cultural identity to multicultural differences and from national views of the subject to conceptions which are at once more regional/local and more international/global. So, English has emerged as both embracing and to some extent being displaced by cultural, communication,

composition and media studies as well as a wide range of other more or less interdisciplinary studies like women's, postcolonial and environmental.

### English Studies in India:

The origin of English studies in India can be related to the famous Macaulay's Minute. It declared that it was necessary and possible to make natives of this country, good English scholars and that to this end our efforts ought to be directed. Even Lord Bentinck asserted that the great object of the British government ought to be the promotion of European literature and science among the natives of India and all funds appropriated for the purpose of education would be best employed on English education alone.

Due to this initial administrative support, 'English' in India has occupied a prominent position both as a language and as a discipline. As N. Krishnaswamy (2006) rightly notes, "The story of English is fascinating story of power and resistance, of invasion and absorption, and of authority and subversion; it is absorbing as any historical novel" (v). In India, we have witnessed several problems related to English as a medium of instruction at all levels; problems related to linguistic nationalism, English being seen as part of elitist and cosmopolitan identity, so on and so forth.

More to the point, C D Narasimhaiah (1993) says that the very emergence of India and other erstwhile colonies of Great Britain as free nations coincided with the cessation of British influence on English studies outside England. Likewise, in America a major national literature emerged, though hidden behind the broad back of Great Britain. Australia too initiated a counter-romantic movement in its poetry and in fiction its writers were seized of their immediate problems. Similarly, in India assertion of national and racial identity started and felt the urge to give something of their own. So Indian academics began to talk about the indigenous writers and they infiltrated English departments and became respectable in the eyes of students and teachers. Undergraduate students began to demand that an Indian novel be prescribed under general English in place of an English novel. Indian writers found favour with research scholars. Interestingly Indian universities responded to Indian writing faster than American universities responded to their own literature. In late seventies Commonwealth literature caught attention of research scholars. As a result comparative approaches to criticism became inevitable. Revival of interest in traditional Indian poetics due to the awareness of the relevance of cultural criticism given birth to creative work as well. Consequently the Indian student discovered the benefit of working in a pluralistic and highly rewarding milieu.

Along similar lines, Meenakshi Mukherjee (1993) says that perpetual framework of post-colonial India continues to be conditioned by the original impulse that formulated English studies in British India. Even now a concealed academic hierarchy that places literature in English above the literature of any other Indian language.

It is crucial to recognize that, India is one of the most important countries in the world as far as the development of English Studies is concerned. It has generated stimulating debates in the academia. Some of the issues discussed in the debates are the problem of alienation in the teaching of English literature; the issue of cultural baggage that the English literature carries; the need for introducing Indian Literature and reducing our focus on British literature; resisting mono-lingual and metropolitan bias by taking advantage of bilingualism and traditional culture in our approach to the practice of the discipline; lang-lit debate, so on and so forth. Further, several conferences and papers more often than not have debated on the issue of teaching of English as a language at the tertiary level; the relevance of teaching English to culturally diverse groups; curriculum design debates, some of which argue for teaching English for employability purpose, etc. These issues, especially questions regarding English Studies, have been investigated by several scholars and here we can undertake a review of some significant debates on English Studies. Some of the most important studies in this mode are by Gauri Vishwanathan (1989); Swathi Joshi (1991); Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan (1992); Sara Suleri (1992); Sudhakar Marathe et al. (1993); and Susie Tharu (1997).

One of the major works is that of Gauri Viswanathan's (1989) *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* which argues that the literary curriculum was introduced in India not to demonstrate the superiority of English culture but to "mask" the economic exploitation of the colonized India. The author argues that the literary text functioned as a mirror of the ideal Englishman and became a mask of exploitation that camouflaged the material activities of the colonizing British government. It contends that in the postcolonial situation when there are several regional literatures available, English literature need not be single agent of imparting universal human values. It speaks of the role of British Colonial rule in shaping the institution, ideology and practice of English studies. It emphasizes the fact that cultural domination through language and literature eases the way to conquest by force. It demonstrates the fact that the discipline of English came into its own in an age of colonialism, as well as to argue that no serious account of its growth and development can afford to ignore the imperial mission of educating and civilizing colonial subjects in the literature and thought of England, a

mission that in the long run served to strengthen western cultural hegemony in enormously complex ways.

Even more specifically, Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan's (1992) edited work, *The Lie of the Land: English Literary Studies in India*, also questions the relevance and validity, social functions, institutional contexts, pedagogic and publishing practices of English studies in India. This book seeks to show up the sorts of conservative orthodoxies, bureaucratic power structures, fossilized thought processes, unacademic institutions, colonial worldviews, outdated theoretical frameworks, gross cultural premises and crassly commercialized situations which frequently define what it means to study and teach English literature in India.

Likewise, Swathi Joshi's (1991) edited book, *Rethinking English in India* explores the problem of English Studies in India, by highlighting the necessity to assimilate the native culture in post-colonial society. The book speaks about how British administrators used English in the formation of the urban middle class and the ideology of colony and empire. The book relates to the role of English in the formation of the nation. It addresses the beginnings and institutionalization of English literary studies in colonial India by focusing on the political, ideological, cultural and social imperatives that governed their installation in the first place. These assumptions have remained largely intact in the ways in which English studies are taught as English continues to exert its force as the language of power and social mobility in postcolonial India. These essays press the need to revisit English studies in Indian Universities.

It is crucial to note, how Susie Tharu (1998) in her edited book, *Subject to Change: Teaching Literature in the Nineties* reflects on the debate about the relevance of English literary studies. The book emphasizes the demand for making vernacular medium of instruction in Indian Universities. It speaks about the necessity to study and develop Indian literature. The ultimate purpose of vernacular medium of instruction is to use it as a medium to teach Indian and English literature. Tharu argues that vernacular education would achieve the objectives more efficiently.

More to the point, Sudhakar Marathe et al edited (1993) *Provocations: The Teaching of English Literature in India* debates the relevance of the study of English literature in post-colonial Indian context. The book deliberates on the cultural baggage that English literature brings to Indian psyche. The book explores the necessity of indianization of English departments. The departments need to constantly reappraise syllabi, course-content and teaching and learning methods.

Meanwhile, Narayana Chandran (2006) in his insightful essay, "On English from India: Propositions to Post-

Positions" speaks about literature and language debate. He emphasizes the role of English teacher in Indian class rooms in bringing about exciting and challenging function for English in the post-colonial scenario and save it from becoming a reckless industry. He believes that English as an academic discipline was a subject of discussion in India much before the western criticism. National leaders were worried about its effect on our culture, traditions and regional languages. But our regional languages have grown with English since independence and also created a class of creative and critical writing in English. He regrets that curricular reformers in India not initiating any public debates on Indian higher education and the role of English in the university curriculum. Indian students need training in English in undergraduate and post graduate levels. Poor mastering of the language is affecting the discipline to a large extent. The place of English literature as a discipline is put in a question mark as many don't consider it as a part of social sciences. He suggests that it would be better to keep regional literature intact, not by translating everything into English and expose our cultural essence to the west. If they want to know it, let them take pain in understanding it in its original language. Bad translation to English is also an issue to be focussed here.

Realistically speaking, however when we look at these studies, we understand that above mentioned studies certainly engage with several vital problems, from pedagogic questions to ideological and cultural questions. It might be argued that, few studies have paid close attention to understand research trends in the field.

Under these circumstances it is crucial to recognize some important comments by Gokak (1964) on research in English Studies that our research degrees in English language and literature need some consideration. English literature has been an inter-continental subject of study and an over-tapped area for research, with the result that research students in our universities frequently spend their years in preparing theses which are hardly anything than a collection of available critical data and a contribution not to knowledge.

It is also worth noting, the only paper that directly deals with research in English departments in Indian universities is Shastry's (1993) article "Objectives and Meaningfulness of Research", which narrates personal observations about the status of research in English studies. He examines that there are certain areas neglected in research like Influence Studies, Translation Studies, Lexicographical Studies, Comparative Aesthetics and Travelogue.

Yet, this lack of focus on the analysis of the research aspect of English studies actually is not to be seen as a gap in the field nor a serious lacuna, because research in English studies has gained momentum very recently in

India. To save the phenomenon, the history of English Studies justifies such a marginalization; it was a natural outcome of the historical milieu. Earlier, just doing MA in English was enough as it met the professional demand. Research in the humanities in general and in English studies in particular was limited to the universities. There was neither condition created nor the professional demand to carry out research.

So the major issue discussed above is the interpretation of English literary texts and need to come out of colonial mindset. There is also the need to form Indian theories of literary criticism like Rasa, Alankara, Dhvani etc, instead of structuralism, deconstruction. Reader response theory etc. the main propagator of this Post-Colonial thought is Edward Said. He emphasizes that there is political subtext of the mainstream western writing. Similarly Gramsci talks of literary texts as inducing the conquered to accept the ways of thought, beliefs, culture and the system of values of the conqueror. So many literary scholars feel the need to decolonize our English studies by judging English literary texts not by just European critical theories, but also by Indian critical theories. They also feel the need to remove certain colonial English texts from the syllabi of Indian universities as these texts were used to subvert us, naturally made us feel inferior. Many of these texts are irrelevant in the context of Indian culture and society.

But excessive emphasis on Indian response to English literature should not make us feel isolated from the rest of the world in this era of globalization. C D Narasimhaiah (2002) believes that Indian writing in English cannot and must not replace English literature. It should be inclusive of all literature and let Indian writing in English share in a major way with the best efforts of English literature.

So, we can't afford to remain aloof from the latest developments in the field of world literature. We may stand against English literature, but not against English language as it is the global language. It is the language of research works in major fields of study. So English should be taught without any western or eastern prejudices. The study of English language and translation from world literature in addition to vernacular literature should be discussed in the Indian Universities.

#### **Research Trends in English Studies in Indian Universities:**

To begin with, Ravindra B. Tahsildar (2004) in his survey of 'Research Trends in English Studies in Indian Universities', examines that British literature enjoys the privilege place in Indian Universities till today. English studies in India is more than 190 years old and has been a topic of discussion in the last decade of the twentieth century through seminars and conferences. These discussions centred on teaching experiences in postgraduate departments in English in recognized

institutions in Indian Universities. Though some universities started offering non-British literature like Indian Writing in English, Indian Literature in English Translation, American literature, Commonwealth literature, but as optional papers only. Literary criticism is a core paper in most of the Universities in India. Indian poetics is hardly touched upon still. English linguistics is introduced in some universities due to the recommendations of various committees. With globalization, English language teaching, spoken English, communication for business, and English for specific purposes are introduced. With increased enrolment of girl students to post graduate programmes, women's writing and gender studies are introduced. However Translation Studies and Aesthetics are neglected areas. Interestingly Shakespeare is finding his way slowly. Recently, we find unorthodox papers like Indian Diaspora writing, Literature and Gender, Film and Literature, Postcolonial perspectives on Texts, English Studies in India are included. Culture studies, Film studies and Media studies are the new interdisciplinary papers included. Globalization has opened new opportunities for English studies. And it has made English studies a utilitarian one like management and technical education. Decline in the enrolment to traditional post graduate courses, has brought this change in curriculum to make the course job market friendly. So communicative skills in English is the latest subject which most students opt for. Of late, some universities have introduced research related papers like, research writing methods and writing for academic and professional purposes. These application related papers have overtaken the place of literary studies.

Until now, we had an overview of the discipline of English Studies in India. It is clear that research in English Studies is relatively a recent phenomenon. Now, the number of doctoral scholars is being increased and doctoral education is becoming a crucial factor in higher education. Given the account of English Studies in India, which focuses on pedagogic problems, doctoral studies has not been a subject of critical scrutiny. Since one line of thought is to see research and teaching interconnected, there is a need for throwing light on the practice of research to complement what has already been discussed in English Studies. However, there are certain other aspects of English studies to look into, in addition to what should be taught in the English.

Indeed, when we look back at research activities in English departments in Indian Universities we could see a pattern of varied interest areas among the scholars. Initially, British English literature was the main focus of interest among the research scholars. Then came American literature, commonwealth literature, and indianization of English department. Vernacular literature

in English translation grabbed attention of scholars after Independence. Post-colonial India tried to Indianize University Departments slowly. Impact of English literature on vernacular literature was also an interesting study. Whether to follow English model for the study of our own literature or develop our own model was much debatable question. So departments moved from English literature to literature in English. Indian writings in English translation also attracted the attention of the research scholars. Comparing English works with vernacular works became very popular field of interest among research scholars in English studies.

To conclude, one clear observation shows that there is clear shift in research interest from literature study to language study. Globalization has put language in limelight and made it simplified. English language learning and teaching became the new area of interest for the students, research scholars and professors in the field of English studies. It not only encouraged research activities in English language but also the emergence English language labs and training centres. These are some of the emerging trends in English studies in India.

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