

# EFFECT OF BILINGUALISM, MULTILINGUALISM, TRANSLINGUALISM ON LITERARY TEXTS OF RUSSIA AND INDIA



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**Abstract:** Linguistic plurality in Russia and India reflects through the ages in various forms. From proximate form, it gradually shifted to integrative form. Initially, the integrative form of bi/multilingualism was observed amongst the elites, but gradually it became a characteristic feature of the common man too. With the rise of Nation/State theory, in the 20th century Soviet Russia and India, a necessity to determine a common/official language for consolidation, emerged. Speaking L2, at times L3, for daily purpose of life became a common trait of the people of these lands. The aforementioned linguistic pattern reflects in the literary text too. Bi/multi-lingual texts are found in India and Russia since ancient times. In ancient texts it served as a medium to assert the caste and class distinction. Multilingual and bilingual works of the 19th century Russia and India evolved due to the strong influence of Western language and culture. Such bilingual works were either evocative or satirical. In 20th century Soviet/ Post- Soviet Russia and India, the common /official language served as a platform for the writers to reach a broader audience. Thus, the period witnessed the evolution of translanguing writings on one hand and translation of regional writings on the other.

**Keywords:** India, Russia, bilingualism, multilingualism, translanguing, literary texts.

**L**anguage is more than simply a means of communication; it constitutes a world- view by splitting up and arranging the sense of social reality in humans into meaningful units. Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orative and literature, the entire body of values by which men come to perceive themselves and their place in the world. <sup>1</sup>

Bilingualism or multilingualism may be defined as a linguistic phenomenon. It is a way of expressing oneself through two or more languages as a "combination of codes"<sup>2</sup> for effective communication. It could be studied from various perspectives. In the present paper, the focus will be on societal bilingualism/ multilingualism. It will explore the various situations in which

linguistic plurality evolved in Russia and India, and had left its impact on literary texts.

Linguistic and cultural diversity is an inherent feature of both nations, Russia and India, which complicates the process of defining its language, culture and literature from a single or one-point perspective. There are hundred-odd ethnic groups in Russia, and more than hundred languages and dialects are spoken, belonging to different families: Indo-European, Altai, Ural, Yukagir-Chuvan, Kartvelian, Abkhaz- Adyg, Nakh-Daghestani, Sino-Tibetan, Semitic, Eskimo-Aleutian, Chukchi-Kamchatka, Yenisei, Austro-Asian, and others. Besides Russian, the other official languages recognised within Russia's various constituencies are Ossetic, Ukrainian, Buryat, Kalmyk, Chechen, Ingush, Abaza, Adyghe, Cherkess, Kabardian, Altai, Bashkir, Chuvash, Crimean Tatar, Karachay-Balkar, Khakas, Nogai, Tatar, Tuvan, Yakut, Erzya, Komi, Hill Mari, Meadow Mari, Moksha, and Udmurt.<sup>3</sup>

India too is known for its diverse linguistic and ethnic features. As per the record of Anthropological Survey of India, the total number of Indian languages and dialects sums up to 325 which includes the languages of non-Indian origin too, like English, Arabic, Chinese and Persian. Twenty-two amongst them are listed as official languages.<sup>4</sup> The Indian languages belong to five families: Indo-European, Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto- Burman and Andaman-Nicobar.

Linguistic assimilation in the specified countries took place in different forms and under various circumstances. In Russia, it is traced in the ancient period- Tsarist, Soviet and post- Soviet period. In India, it took place all through the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial times.

Russia's conversion to Christianity under the influence of Byzantine in 988 brought about new linguistic features. The Byzantine Christian theologians, St.Cyril and St.Methodius, created the oldest known Slavic alphabets, the Glagolitic and Cyrillic alphabets, for translating the Greek Bible into Slavonic. It resembled the Greek letters. The influence of Greek was not only limited to the scripts, but also the loan words of biblical motifs, names of different disciplines, art, music, medicine, politics, as well as, things of everyday life. Few of the examples are *ikona* (icon), *Evangelie* (thegospels), *monach*(monk), *monastr* (monastery), *logika* (logic) *matematika* (mathematics), *istoria* (history), *filozofiya* (philosophy), *geometria* (geometry), *melodiya* (melody), *symphoniya* (symphony), *tragediya* (tragedy), *demokratiya* (democracy), *anarkhiya* (anarchy), *analiz* (analysis), *bakteriya* (bacteria), etc. The Slavic became the language of the upper class in Ancient Russia, whereas the common folk spoke in vernacular language. Later, Mongol conquest was responsible for the influx of Turkic words in Russia, like *bashmak* (shoe), *baklazhan* (egg plant), *chugun* (cast iron), *sunduk* (chest), to name a few.

Linguistic plurality in India dates back to the ancient period. The linguistic diversity of the Indian soil significantly contributed to its pluralistic character. In the early ages, the use of Sanskrit was restricted to men of higher social order whereas Prakrit was the mode of expression for men and women from the lower strata of the society. Consequently, the prevalent language norm had its imprint on the texts of that period. Linguistic assimilation was responsible for the advent of various languages and texts in India. The hybridity of Dravidian and Sanskrit languages brought Kannada, Malayalam and Telugu. Later, with the invasion of the Mongols, the influence of Persian culture gave birth to the hybrid style of Urdu. Words from daily usage of

Persian origin like, *sheher* (city), *taaza* (fresh), *roz* (everyday), *khushi* (happiness), to name a few, were extensively used in Hindi, Bengali and other Indian languages.

Lexical influence of European languages on Russian, mainly German and Latin, is observed ever since the reign of Peter the Great. The various reforms carried out by Peter 1 in the field of science and culture, the military reform etc. demanded new vocabularies to define them. Several words of German origin, like *lager* (camp), *graf* (count), *strafe* (punishment), *schlagbaum* (barrier), to name a few, became a part of Russian expression. Words, defining consumer goods, like *butterbrot* (sandwich), *kartoffel* (potato), were also borrowed from German.

However, the influence of the languages mentioned above in Russia was negligible in comparison to French. France had left a powerful impact on the socio-political and cultural arena of 18th century and 19th century Russia. Initially, Empress Catherine II facilitated in promoting the works of the French philosophers of the Enlightenment period like Denis Diderot, Voltaire, and others in Russia. Later, France became the cultural and intellectual hub, and French became the mode of communication for the Russian nobility. Therefore, it is not surprising that the doyen of Russian literature, Alexander Pushkin, wrote his first few verses in French. Pushkin penned "Stances" ("Stanza") and "Mon Portrait" ("My Portrait") during his student days in Lyceum. Lev Tolstoy's novel "War and Peace" highlights the multilingualism of the Russian gentry using German and passages in French. Out of 437699 words and expressions in the Russian novel, 15040 are French, and 682 are German.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, in India, with the advent of the East India Company, the impact of English language on Indian languages, literature and culture was immense. At the beginning of the 19th century, the Company decided to spread education through the medium of English. Consequently, a strong influence of the English language and culture was visible amongst the elites of India, specifically of Bengal.

The impact of French on the Russian nobility and of English on the Indian (especially Bengali) intellectuals was immense. It brought in a new form of bilingualism- the elite bilingualism. It is defined as elite because the language acquisition was restricted exclusively to the elites. The culture of elite bilingualism initiated the process of literary or textual bilingualism- the usage of two languages simultaneously in a text. The eminent writers often used words and phrases of the receptive language in their works, along with the expressions from their native language. There are numerous examples of this trend. For instance, in the novel "Evgenii Onegin", the author uses both Russian and French for commenting on his female protagonist, Tatyana's acquaintance with Trike poetry:

**“Трике привез куплет Татьяна**

**На голос, знаемый детьми:**

*Reveillez - vous, belle endormie*.”<sup>6</sup> (Wake up-you, sleeping beauty)

In Tolstoy's epical novels "War and Peace" and "Anna Karenina", the French dialogues between the nobilities enable one to get some insight into the world of elites. The characters of Mary Bolkonsky and Julie Karagina correspond only in French since communicating in French was

considered a status symbol. The other character, Prince Vasily, uses a mixed code of Russian and French. French quotations were widely used in 19th and early 20th century prosaic and poetic works of Russia. The title of one of the collected works of Valery Bryusev, a 20th-century poet, is *"Urbi et orbi"* (To the city and the world: a phrase denoting a solemn blessing). The poems in the volume are in Russian.

Analogous traits were observed in India too. Along with the colonialization of India by the British, English gradually became the favourite mode of speech for the liberal intellectuals in few parts of 19th century India, especially Bengal. Communicating in English became a status symbol for many. The introduction of the English language in various parts of India created a significant impact on its art and culture as well. The bilingual text, penned by writers of that period, is a proof to how language acquisition was occurring. The following extract from Tagore's novel *"The Home and the World"* is one of the many examples of literary bilingualism in Bengali literature. Recalling the poem of Browning, which he cherished along with his old friend, the protagonist of the novel, Sandeep, states: Browning, ওহে নিখিল, তোমার শেলফে বরাউনিং নেই? ....সেই যে--('Oh Nikhil don't you have Browning on your shelf ?....That one)

*"She should never have looked at me,  
If she meant I should not love her!"<sup>7</sup>*

Bilingualism took a new turn in post-Revolutionary Russia at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Soviet Russia, enriched by the inclusion of various Republics along with its language and culture, made a particular emphasis on preservation and development of the regional languages by implementing a new language policy of 'language construction'. The aim was to work on those languages which were not adequately developed or did not have proper scripts. In February 1918, the Communist regime declared that all local languages could be used in the courts and for official purposes. At the same time, they started taking measures for making Russian, the official language. The decision was put on record in 1938 decree of the Central Committee of the Party and Soviet of Peoples Commissars: "On the compulsory instruction of the Russian language in schools of the national (ethnic) republics and oblasts"<sup>8</sup>, bringing in a drastic change in the language policy of the Soviet state. At that point, many felt that multilingualism is losing ground due to Russification, i.e. dissemination of Russian language.<sup>9</sup> In this context, Lenore.A. Grenoble observes that it is difficult to assess the impact of the deliberate policy of Russification. The author further adds that while several analysis points to an attempt to Russify the Soviet population, there is little direct evidence to support this claim in the early Soviet period.<sup>10</sup>

This newly implemented measure left its impact on the literary world too. Gradually, the Soviet literature was dominated by texts penned mainly in Russian. One could indeed interpret this as the game of politics of language, but at the same time, one cannot ignore the fact, as observed before, that many of these languages did not have a script. Moreover, there was a need for a common language for establishing communication. Russian served the purpose.

The language politics in India did not change with the turn of the century (20th century). English continued to be the dominant language. Like Russian in ex-Soviet Republics, English was used throughout the country for official communication, overshadowing the geographically specific

native languages, which probably did not leave space for some local languages to spread beyond day-to-day communication.

In the field of literature, too, one could trace the impact of the changes as mentioned above. Soviet writers from various Republics chose Russian as one of the mediums of expression. It was the need of the time as Russian was the most widely accepted language. The literary landscape, as per Chase Mowery, was being cultivated in that manner since it was a medium for reaching out to a broader audience.<sup>11</sup> The present scenario gave birth to many translingual writers from various Republics. The most prominent amongst them, undoubtedly, is Chingiz Aitmatov. Aitmatov authored his works in Russian and Kyrgyz languages and placed Kyrgyzstan on the literary map of the world with his fictions. Other than Aitmatov, Y. Rytke, V.Sangy, the poet from Dagestan Rasul Gamzatov, Timur Pulatov, Anatolii Kim, a writer of Korean origin from Kazakstan, Chingiz Guseinov and Fazil Iskander of Abkhazia-Iranian origin are some of the regional writers who presented their works in Russian. The significance of these writers lies in the fact that they tried to enrich their Russian texts with a taste of the local flavour of their respective lands.

A similar development is observed in the Indian literary arena too. English was imbibed in the system in such a way that its effect continued to be immense in post-Colonial India as well. Regional writers like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan, Raja Rao, Manjeri Isvaran chose to pen their works in English. R.K.Narayan's "Malgudi Days", "Guide", Mulk Raj Anand's "Untouchable" are favourites not only in the periphery of the writer's native land but across its borders too. Undeniably, one of the aims of using English in India as a medium of expression was to reach out to a broader audience. This is primarily the reason that the tradition of writing in English in India was carried forward not only by the writers alone but also by the representatives from other fields, the freedom fighters, the politicians, who likewise chose to put their speeches on record in English. Amongst them, some noteworthy personalities are Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Dadabhai Naoroji, Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Surendranath Banerjee, Subhas Chandra Bose and B.R.Ambedkar.

These widely accepted regional writers and activists from Soviet Land and India expressed their thoughts in a dominant language. They used their national status and the national platform for presenting the socio-political and cultural specificities of their 'little Motherland' to the outer world. They discussed various problems of life through the depiction of history, traditions, practices and cultures of their soil. For example, in the course of the discussion of the vital issues of his time, Aitmatov's works take its Russian readers to the land of Kyrgyzia-its oral lores, the aul, the lake Issak kul. The Abkhazian writer, Fazil Iskander, acquaints the Russian readers with the beautiful customs of his land.

Similarly, the women-oriented novel of Bankimchandra, Rajmohan's wife, introduces the reader to the customs and worldviews of a Bengali Hindu society, or R.K.Narayan's Malgudi Days presents the South Indian culture.

The diaspora writers have further widened the horizon of linguistic plurality and translingual literature. Many emigree writers, especially those from contemporary times, have adopted the language of their country of domicile for the literary mode of expression. The content

nonetheless continues to revolve around their respective homeland. The well-known Russian émigré writer, Vladimir Nabokov, wrote in Russian in his initial years of literary career, and later shifted to English. Dina Rubina and Sholem Aleichem, the writers of Jewish origin, compose their works in Hebrew, as well as in Russian. From the younger generation, Vladimir Kaminer, a resident of Germany, writes in German whereas Andrei Makin writes in the language of his place of domicile, i.e. French.

Likewise, the works, which gained enormous popularity amongst Indians in the recent past, are that of the diaspora writers of Indian origin. Jhumpa Lahiri, Amitava Ghosh, Anita Desai and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni among others are the few names from the whole range of Indian English Writers who have adopted the medium of expression of the country they stay in for crafting their thoughts on India and Indian culture. Shumona Sinha writes in French. These writers, undoubtedly, have broadened the boundary of literature by highlighting the regional culture in a non- native language on the one hand and bringing the foreign language into the regional culture on the other hand.

The language scenario in Russia once again changes after the breakup of the Soviet Union. With the fall of the 'iron curtain' and easy access to the Western world and the United States, the interest of the Russians in the Western culture grew manifold. English began to play a significant role in the process of further linguistic assimilation. It is noteworthy that English loanwords in Russian are found since the time of Peter the Great. Subsequently, a fair amount of English words were borrowed in the early twentieth century during the period of industrialisation. However, in comparison to previous times, the influence of English became manifold after the perestroika period. The whole range of new words with English root, or suffix, became a part of the popular lexicon. Words like broker, dealer, distributor, manager, management, makeup, sandwich etc. are a few out of the thousand examples. In the field of literature, too, literary bilingualism with English loanwords and expressions became a trend of the time. The following titles of the works of Vladimir Makanin and Victor Pelevin are apt examples of this trend: "An Underground, or the Hero of Our Time" («Андеграунд, или Герой нашего времени»), "Antileader", "Generation "П", " and "S.N.U.F.F."

In India, English words gradually penetrated the drawing rooms of the common man into the conversations in regional languages, and this was responsible for the emergence of Hinglish (a blend of Hindi and English). A similar tendency is observed in other parts of India too.

The other notable trend after the perestroika and the breakup of the Union is the revival of indigenous languages in Russian territory. The reason behind this lies that consequent to the collapse of the socialist ideology, the natives of Russia, and other CIS countries, fell back to their roots, their respective languages, literature and culture for support in times of identity crisis.

The issue of indigenous languages and literature in India evolved with various discussions and debates on defining Indian literature. The biggest dilemma and a subject of polemics were whether Indian literature should be perceived as one whole, or whether it should be considered as an amalgamation of various regional works in multiple languages? Expert like Gurbhagat Singh 'does not accept the idea of Indian literature as such but opts for the designation of literatures produced in India.'<sup>12</sup> The very attempt of putting literature of India in one cluster may

overshadow the specificities, highlighting only the commonalities. Sahitya Akademi is doing an incredible job by presenting the regional texts to the broader audience through translation. The contribution of bilingual and multilingual authors too cannot be ignored.

Considering all the factors discussed, it's clear to conclude that linguistic plurality in Russia and India reflects through the ages in various forms. From proximate form, it gradually shifted to integrative form, wherein the inhabitants not only encountered other languages but also actively used them. Initially, the integrative form of multilingualism was observed amongst the elites, but gradually it became a characteristic feature of the common man too. With the rise of Nation/State theory, in the 20th century Soviet Russia and India, a necessity to determine a common/official language, for consolidation, emerged. Speaking L2, at times L3, for daily purpose of life became a common trait of the people of these lands. The trend of communication through the official/working language brought in translanguaging. The writers of indigenous languages and culture used the official/working language as a medium to represent their respective culture. On the other hand, a rise in exhibiting the language and culture of indigenous regions is observed in these two countries in the latter half of the 20th century.

The aforementioned linguistic pattern reflects in the literary text too. In the bilingual texts of Ancient India, two languages coexisted and served as a medium to assert the caste and class distinction. Sanskrit was the language of upper caste, and Prakrit, the language of women, as well as men from a lower caste. Ancient texts of Russia too follow the similar pattern. It asserts the role of language in propagating the class distinction. Slavic was the language of the nobility whereas the common folk used the vernacular language. Lomonosov's "Theory of the Three Styles" exhibits the distinction of the language of the nobility and common folk. The work of low style, meant for the common folk, was devoid of Slavic words. Multilingual and bilingual works of the 19th century Russia and India evolved due to the strong influence of Western language and culture, French in Russia, and English in India. Such bilingual works were either evocative, i.e. the texts evoked the language and culture of a foreign country; or satirical, i.e. critiquing the blind imitation of the foreign culture. In 20th century Soviet Russia and India, the enforcement of an official/working language generated debate on hegemonic approach to literature, yet one could also not ignore the fact that it became a platform for a confluence of different cultures and ideologies through the works of bilingual authors and translations. The common /official language served as a platform for the writers to reach a broader audience. Thus, it is not surprising that the period witnessed the evolution of translanguaging writings on the one hand and translation of regional writings on the other. The writers/translators chose to write/translate in a more widely accepted common language and through it, they represented their culture, their landscape. They served as a bridge between cultures, opening avenues for inter-literary, intercultural dialogue.

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