

Postcolonial South Asian Literature and the Quest for Identity

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Abstract

In the present world of globalization, the question of identity has assumed new and critical dimensions. In this paper I have explored the theme of identity with reference to postcolonial South Asian literature. The notion of identity has been critically investigated across a variety of perspectives such as psychological, historical, sociological and literary. This gives present study a multidisciplinary character. Notwithstanding the advent of decolonization that began in the 1940s, South Asian literature is still in the formative phase of its identity. I have given a comprehensive account of identity found in the diverse range of literary compositions by the Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi writers. The South Asian writers seem not only fully alive of the challenge and necessity of identity; they have also forged different responses to this challenge. The question of canon and acceptability also occupies the central space in the identity debate. I have also dealt with the thorny issue of the choice of English as a medium of literary expression. Various literary debates centering on such issues as nationalism, neocolonialism, globalization and migration form the backdrop of the discussion. Whereas some of the older writers see the modern day globalization as a neocolonial onslaught; the younger writers are thrilled by the opportunities and promises it offers. The South Asian writers settled abroad have also been taken into account as their contributions form an essential part of what has lately been called the diasporic literature. While the reclamation of identity still remains a formidable task for the South Asian writers, many a writer has already produced sterling texts indicative of identity consciousness.

Keywords: *identity, representation, narrativity, voice, postcolonial*

Identity—Some Definitional Considerations

The question of identity has always intrigued humans since time immemorial. Over the last few decades, there has been a veritable explosion of books, articles, journals, reports, websites devoted to the subject of identity and still more work is in the offing. Each one of us has a self-conception premised upon our individuality and a sense of belonging. We view ourselves both as a *person* (thus having a private persona and therefore possessing a *personality*) and in relation to other persons (thus having a public persona). There are different aspects of identity such as

race, ethnicity, religion, gender, culture, and nation. In cognitive psychology, the term identity refers to one's capacity for self-reflection (Leary & Tangney, 2003, p. 3). Within this cognitive-psychological perspective, Peter Weinreich, professor of psychology at University of Ulster, speaks of a totality of identity and gives a composite and inclusive view of it (1989). If cognitive psychology founds identity on the *self*, social psychology speaks of an identity negotiation process by which we learn various social roles through personal experiences and come to an understanding of ourselves vis-à-vis our fellow humans. We define our identity with various experiential markers socially acquired and subjectively internalized.

As regards the definition of identity, it has to be said that it is notoriously difficult to formulate its definition and William James rightly warned us that the notion of identity is "the most puzzling puzzle with which psychology has to deal" (James, 1890, p. 330). Etymologically, the term identity originated from the Latin *idem* (same) and *identidem* (over and over again, repeatedly). Subsequently, it also came to denote such implications as *likeness*, and *oneness* (Owens, 2006, p. 117). Thus, identity can generally be defined as "categories people use to specify who they are and to locate themselves relative to other people" (p. 208). John P. Hewitt, professor of sociology at University of Massachusetts, Amherst, has given another valuable definition of identity: ". . . the person's biographical sense of relationship to the others with whom he has been and is customarily associated" (2011, p. 205). Hewitt has further elaborated the word *biographical* by positing four meanings for it. First, humans harbor memories of the past based upon their victories, failures, hopes, and roles which are transfixed in time and space. Second, the memories are used by humans to situate themselves with reference to others. Third, humans define themselves by constantly evoking these memories. Last, humans' biographies are created not only by themselves but also by the people and circumstances that surround them (p. 207).

In addition, the question of identity has also been systematically treated by such diverse writers as William James, Charles Cooley, William Thomas, G. H. Mead, Don Martindale, and, more recently, Howard Gardner. William James' incisive contributions were followed by Charles Cooley and William Thomas. Both of them dealt with the issue of identity in a sociological paradigm. However, a more philosophical treatment of the question of identity had to wait for G. H. Mead who, subscribing to his objective relativism, conceptualized the question of personality and consciousness as objective properties of nature which appear only under particular sets of conditions (Blumer, 2004). Nevertheless, more rigorous work on identity did not come into existence until the second half of the

20th century when Don Martindale (1981) gave it a more systematic and empirically-rooted expression. The ground-breaking work of Howard Gardner (1985) also made sterling contributions to the discussion of this question and approached it largely through the perspective of cognitive psychology.

With reference to the definition of identity, it is also pertinent to mention here that William James and G. H. Mead drew a distinction between “I” and “me” i.e. between the self as a subject and as an object (i.e. as a knower and as known). To him, “me” represents the social self and “I” stands for the creative self. This is a well known phenomenon commonly known as *reflexivity* which implies a uniquely human ability to conceptualize oneself as an “object capable of being not just apprehended, but also labeled, categorized, evaluated, and manipulated” (Owens, 2006, p. 110). This reflexivity largely hinges upon the use of language and a psycho-social interaction. It also enables humans to view themselves from a distance and with a degree of detachment i.e. from an external perspective as other people might view them. Through this unique ability the self can reflect back upon itself.

Despite numerous theoretical intricacies attached to the definition of identity, it remains a topic of avid and continuous interest in a wide array of subjects, such as postcolonialism, international relations, history, philosophy, social psychology, cultural anthropology, and literary theory. It is one of the deepest yearnings which compel us to conceptualize our existential experience in some individualist way on the one hand and to relate it in some meaningful way with the members of our group. When it comes to identity, we all have an intuitive awareness of its existence and significance. It is a product of a complex and multiple set of historical and geographical circumstances. Therefore, identity is as much relational as contextual and is characterized by a wide range of disparate components that cannot be separated without tearing down the whole.

Identity, Self and Society

We have our bodily mass inasmuch as our memories. We are extended not just in space but also in time. This brings us an understanding of our identity. With respect to our temporal and spatial extension, one of the most influential accounts of identity in the 20th century was advanced by the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur whose notion of narrativity is a landmark contribution in this regard. According to Ricoeur, our identity is a story (a narrative) and we ourselves are its protagonists. This story links all our actions and thoughts coherently (1992). In Ricoeur’s view, the self and the society are twinborn and both collaborate in a seamless way:

Personal identities serve as the pegs upon which social identities and personal biographies can be hung. If an individual could not be recognized from one occasion to another as the same person, no stable social relationships could be constructed, and therefore there would be no social identities at all. Both types of identification are vitally important in the process of human interaction. (as cited in McCall & Simmons, 1966, p. 65)

Historically the question of identity has been of paramount concern to philosophers and thinkers. Over millennia people have been grappling with these questions: Who are they? What constitutes them? In other words, what *makes* them? Individually, at one time or the other, all of us are occupied by such fundamental questions: Why am I here? What does my life mean? Where did I come from? Am I a good person? Am I capable of change? Am I loved? Can I love? Do I love? And what makes me, *me* and you, *you*? All of these questions imply a conscious self capable of a subjective experience.

Even apart from these abstract questions, a sense of identity is intrinsically self-satisfying and we are instinctively aware of it. Our identity not only guides our behaviors but also defines our notions of reality for us. We know intuitively that we have some kind of bodily as well as psychological continuity. We continue to *be* in many recognizable ways in spite of all the flux and strife around us. Furthermore, identity has the bearings of multiple interpersonal as well as intrapersonal experiences/processes. We all seek to make some kind of impression on others. We control images that we project in the society or, at least, seek to control them. We perceive ourselves in some distinct way and it is essential to keep our *beings* intact and not to let them submerge under the corporate and collective vogues and drifts. Our self-concept is inextricably linked with “I— the totality of an individual’s thoughts and feelings about a particular object—namely, his or her self” (Rosenberg, 1979). This self-concept has an emotive side to it as much as a cognitive side. Thus, our identity is both an object of perception as well as an emotional response to that perception—an emotional objectification of that perception.

Identity, with reference to a society and its literature, necessitates some kind of collectivity—some kind of *sharedness*. For example, in the societies which are marked by considerable cultural diversification such as India, Canada and the United States, the shared national identity is based upon common values and beliefs. These three countries have been diversely exploiting their reservoirs of history to underpin and crystallize their national identities. Obviously this is true of all the nations as every nation has its own reservoir of history which serves to feed its culture and

shape its identity. Although identity is marked by considerable flux and change, there are a considerable number of relatively stable factors/structures which persist over time. Individuals operate within a complex of cultural and historical identities. Moreover, identity is situated at the cross-section of subjectivity and objectivity. The objective pole of identity invests it with stability; whereas, the subjective pole keeps it dynamic and vibrant. Objectivity is essential to make identity worthwhile and subjectivity is essential to make it a living thing and not a fossilized relic of the past.

Beside history and geography, identity is also a question of genetics, gender, discourses and narratives. Small wonder it remains an ultimate site of flux, contestation and strife. Literary narratives construct identities in myriad ways, only to deconstruct and reconstruct them. At present, in terms of identity, an omnipotent Euro-Americanism seems to reign supreme. This Euro-Americanism is largely responsible for shaping new discursive practices and distributing them across the globe. Such discursive practices, backed by the powerful Anglo-American publishing houses, result in highly complex and multilayered discourses of identity. These discursive practices have led to the creation of an Indo-European context which has yielded profound consciousness to the modern writers who find their identity fractured due to various waves of colonial and neo-colonial onslaughts. Moreover, the powerful discourse of postmodernity and globalization are presenting new challenges to the task of identity formation.

Finally, the role of literature in the construction and articulation of identity is also of fundamental importance and this fact is recognized by as diverse writers as Paul de Man, Michel Foucault, Edward W. Said, Homi Bhabha and Terry Eagleton. Homi Bhabha, for example, uses the image of a mask for an identity of “no presence”—a trope of “unrepresentable identity” (1994, p. 290). By employing this trope, Bhabha, in effect, is pointing to a loss of identity present all around the literary scene (p. 294). He contends that literature can play an important role in investigating the question of identity. To him, the study of world literature implies approaches whereby different cultures can identify themselves through their projections of otherness (p. 296). Edward W. Said in his seminal work *Orientalism* (1978) has interrogated the Western scholarship and its long standing literary lore which constructed a highly textual and stereotypical identity of the Orient. Confronting the Western formulaic notions about the Orient, he says:

No one today is purely one thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are not more than starting-points, which if followed into actual experience

for only a moment are quickly left behind. Imperialism consolidated the mixture of cultures and identities on a global scale. But its worst and most paradoxical gift was to allow people to believe that they were only, mainly, exclusively, white, or Black, or Western, or Oriental. Yet just as human beings make their own history, they also make their cultures and ethnic identities. (1994, p. 78)

Besides, within the realm of literature too we find a very visible foregrounding of and a preoccupation with the issue of identity in the works of such literary giants as Fyodor Dostoevsky, Franz Kafka, Joseph Conrad, Hermann Hesse, to mention a few.

The Question of Identity and the Paradox of Language

Having dealt with some of the technical and definitional issues of identity, now I will discuss it with regard to South Asian postcolonial literature. The issue of language with reference to identity has always been a topic of passionate argumentation among the postcolonial South Asian writers. The Indian writer R. K. Narayan describes this culturally dislocating side not only of the English language but of the whole scheme of colonial education:

. . . from the Sanskrit alphabet we passed on directly to the first lesson in the glossy primer which began with "A was an Apple Pie". . . and went on to explain, "B bit it" and "C cut it." The activities of B and C were understandable, but the opening line itself was mystifying. What was an Apple Pie? (1965, p. 120)

This is Narayan's account of his school days in Mysore, a historic city in the present-day India. Narayan is, in effect, describing the culturally alienating consequences of a language as well as an education brought by the colonizers to the Indian Subcontinent. Besides, it also conveys a sense of an affiliation which, in this specific case, is born of Narayan's early contact with the language of the colonizers. What Narayan has said, has been felt and articulated by other South Asian writers as well. Ever since the Independence, the crucial debate has been about the legitimacy of English as a medium of literary expression and the status of indigenous writings in English (Iyengar, 1984). After the Independence, the issue arose as to whether a foreign language, rooted in a faraway literary tradition and which was learnt mainly from books, could ever be tuned adequately and delicately to the task of representing indigenous experience (King, 1987).

In line with W. B. Yeats' maxim that "no man can think or write with music and vigor except in his mother tongue," the Bengali writer and

poet Buddhadeva Bose said in 1963 that “to the great majority of Indians this admonition was unnecessary, but the intrepid few who left it unheeded do not yet realize that Indo-Anglian poetry is a blind alley, lined with curio shops, leading nowhere” (as cited in Lal, 1971, p. 5). An overstatement as Bose’s opinion might be, we just need to recall the emotionally tense period through which the Indian literature was going at that time. Besides, to some extent, Bose’s opinion is characteristic of the mid-twentieth century Indian literary mood (as cited in King, 1987). Nevertheless, an utterly opposite view came from Purushottama Lal, a Calcutta-based Indian poet, essayist and translator, who not only declared that English was an appropriate vehicle for literary expression, but also maintained that Indo-Anglican poetry is “a part of the Indian literary spectrum” (1971, p. xxxi). Bose and Lal marked two opposite ends of a wide spectrum and, ever since, most of the subsequent writers have tended to gravitate to one of these two antipodal positions. Many like Bapsi Sidhwa, Nissim Ezekiel and Kamala Das wrote happily in English, but everyone was not as enamored about the use of English (Shamsie, 2007).

On the other hand, people like A. K. Ramanujan came with a more blunt estimation who maintained that the issue was not whether the South Asian writers should or should not write in English but “whether they can. And if they can, they will” (as cited in Lal, 1971, p. 444). This is how purely linguistic considerations emerged and problematized the question of appropriate language for their literary expression. However, a large number of writers were prepared to write in English with increasing self-assurance and an admirable poise. At the same time, some of the writers also employed and/or bent the English language while maintaining a love-hate relationship with it. The Indian novelist Sujata Bhatt (1988), for example, confidently lays claim to the English language:

Which language
has not been the oppressor’s tongue?
Which language
truly meant to murder someone?
And how does it happen
that after the torture,
after the soul has been cropped
With a long scythe swooping out
of the conqueror’s face—
the unborn grandchildren
grow to love that strange language. (p. 37)

Some other writers were more direct in their estimation of the English language. Such writers made little effort to conceal their hatred of a

language which originally belonged to the oppressors and enslavers. This was acidly made clear by the Indian writer Lakdasa Wikkramasinha:

I have come to realize that I am using the language of the most despicable and loathsome people on earth; I have no wish to extend its life and range, or enrich its tonality. To write in English is a form of cultural treason. I have had for the future to think of a way of circumventing this treason; I propose to do this by making my writing entirely immoralist and destructive. (as cited in Gooneratne, 1979, p. 6)

Subsequently, many other writers also held that the global hegemony of English was not just a matter of a benign *internationalization* of a language. Anglophone dominance has more to it than we ordinarily tend to think (Brians, 2003). In this regard, to command someone to write in English is not just to ask someone to use a particular grammar and vocabulary but to command him/her to enact a particular identity. Given this legacy of a historico-linguistic complexity and Anglophone dominance, the modern South Asian writers have to straddle not only more than one culture but also more than one language. Such writers as Bapsi Sidhwa, Mohsin Hamid, Hanif Qureshi, and Zulfikar Ghose routinely employed in their works a wealth of words from native languages which their characters manipulate with flair and gusto (Shamsie, 2007).

With reference to the use of an imperial language in order to express the intrinsically indigenous experience, the mention of the Pakistani writer Bapsi Sidhwa is very significant. Like other postcolonial writers, language is also a major preoccupation with Sidhwa. Although she looks approvingly at English as a literary medium employed by the postcolonial writers, she introduces a fair deal of words from Urdu, Gujrati and Punjabi. This is how she explains her linguistic experience with respect to colonialism:

My first language of speech is Gujrati, my second is Urdu, my third is English. But as far as reading and writing goes I can read and write best in English. I'm a tail end product of the Raj. This is the case with a lot of people in India and Pakistan. They're condemned to write in English, but I don't think this is such a bad thing because English is a rich language. Naturally it is not my first language; I'm more at ease talking in Gujrati and Urdu. After moving to America I realized that all my sentences in English were punctuated with Gujrati and Urdu words. (as cited in Dasenbroke, 1992, p. 214)

As a result, even if Sidhwa decides to write in English, it is a different English—an English punctuated with words from the native Indian languages. These words are translated in the glossaries given at the end of her novels. For example, in *Cracking India* (1991), she uses a huge variety of words from Urdu such as: “pahailwan” (wrestler), “choorail” (witch), “shabash” (bravo!), “kotha” (roof), “khut putli” (puppet), “mamajee” (uncle), “badmash” (scoundrel), “gora” (whiteman), “heejra” (eunuch) and so on. What makes Sidhwa’s linguistic stance all the more radical is that apart from these words, there are certain other words from the native languages which are left altogether untranslated such as: “sarkaar,” “yaar,” “doolha,” “chichi,” “Angrez,” “chaudhary” and so on.

Such a use of indigenous vocabulary is extremely significant from the perspective of postcolonial literature. It signals, among other things, an assertively authorial intrusion into the language of the conquerors and colonizers. Further, such a use of language constitutes a discursive practice intended to reclaim space in a discourse which has been known for its aloofness and imperial ascendancy. The inclusion of these words not only complicates the signification pattern of the narrative but also the trans-cultural experience the reader has. Moreover, beside these Urdu and Punjabi words, Sidhwa, also quotes Muhammad Iqbal, the foremost Muslim poet of the 20th century. *Cracking India* (1991) opens with the following anticolonial lines by Iqbal:

The times have changed; the world has changed its mind.
The European's mystery is erased.
The secret of his conjuring tricks is known:
The Frankish wizard stands and looks amazed. (p. 1)

In sum, even if a considerable number of South Asian writers approvingly used English as a literary medium, they considerably bent its lexis and syntax to give it what I will call *a strategic unfamiliarity* whose chief purpose was to dismantle the colonial narrative and create a space for a cultural diversity which is at once emancipating and egalitarian. The real motive behind all these hybrid writing patterns seems not simply to problematize the experience of the reader, but also to stake a claim to the English language which is no longer considered to be an exclusive prerogative of the colonizers.

The Mature Voices

As early as 1938, the Indian novelist and short story writer Raja Rao presented a somewhat more balanced and quite realistic view about the use of English with reference to identity formation: “We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us” (p. 67). The outcome of this

recognition was that the Indo-Anglian literature (especially novel) became the site of conflicts enacted between the canons of a borrowed literary form and the actualities of the indigenous fictional patterns. The Pakistani writer and diplomat Mumtaz Shahnawaz's novel *The Heart Divided* and the Indian author Meenakshi Mukherjee's novel *The Twice Born Fiction* set the tone of most of subsequent novel writing. Most of the early Indo-Pakistani novels deal with the concerns of socio-political realism in a newly emancipated land where an individual's search for identity becomes an urgent concern. In the Indo-Anglian novel of the 1950s and 1960s, the recognition of alienation born of an identity loss is usually expressed through a conscious engagement with the issues of form and technique (Shamsie, 2007).

Even from the early days of the British Raj, we find the themes of patriotism and nationalism in the prose and verse produced by the South Asian writers. An acute sense of attachment to home occupied the minds of a large number of writers as early as the mid-19th century. The 19th century Bengali poet Michael Madhusudan Dutt (as cited in Gibson, 2011, p. 216), echoes this nationalist impulse:

Where man in all his truest glory lives,
And nature's face is exquisitely sweet;
For those fair climes I heave impatient sigh,
There let me live and there let me die.

Whereas Dutt was harping upon a purely nationalistic and cultural theme, there were certain other writers who wrote with a cross-cultural imagination. One gets the impression that as time passes, Dutt's romanticized preoccupation with the homeland gave way to a broader conceptualization of homeliness, albeit the question of identity remains timelessly urgent. Look, for example, at the following small poem in which the 20th century Indian poet A. K. Ramanujan (1971) exquisitely relates the richness of Indian tradition with the vastness of its transcontinental history:

And ideas behave like rumours
once casually mentioned somewhere
they come back to the door as prodigies
born to prodigal fathers, with eyes
that vaguely look like our own,
like what Uncle said the other day:
that every Plotinus we read
is what some Alexander looted
between the malarial rivers. (p. 42)

Here the poet's ingenuity is built upon the thought of cross-cultural and essentially historical transformations. What is more, in these lines, a borrowed language is skillfully employed until it successfully embodies the intended vision of the poet—a depiction of a typical Indian house, jumbled with local minutiae and marked by a plentitude of history.

The more recent novelists both in India and Pakistan show a powerful compulsion to reclaim past through a self-conscious re-conceptualization of history and myth. In the context of India and Pakistan, fiction remains unusually inextricable from history and geography. The first thing which strikes the reader of postcolonial South Asian literature is its inextricable linkage with geopolitics and geography. The postcolonial redistribution of the Subcontinent and the emergence of the sovereign postcolonial nation-states had far-reaching implications for the region's literary landscape. What appeared to be a cohesive literary culture before 1947 abruptly broke up into disparate geo-national traditions—each claiming a separate history, canon and aesthetics. Both Pakistani and Indian literatures parted ways and a self-critical consciousness began to dawn on them. Soon these two literary traditions were to achieve distinct orientations and trajectories. The shock and horror which accompanied the Independence became paradigmatic for most of the literature produced thereafter. A collective historical memory firmly embedded in colonial experiences kept shaping the individual expression (Shamsie, 2007). A relentless preoccupation with self-expression and self-exploration set in and the notions of self and sensibility were increasingly foregrounded. The themes of cultural and colonial collusion were replaced with the traumatic themes born of the turmoil of Independence.

During this period, the foremost task awaiting the writers was to recover from the estranging burden of history a consciousness of commonalities found among the indigenous cultures. These commonalities were taken as a defense mechanism intended to combat debilitating effects of an imperial cultural encroachment. It was hoped that this would lead to a sense of belonging and homeliness. In Pakistan, this trend was typified by Bapsi Sidhwa, whereas, in India this trend was represented by Anita Desai. In the novels of these two writers, most of the time, we come across a rigorous interrogation of the past largely due to a substratum of silence and suffering. Anita Desai's stories are a passionate search for identity and voice. Her *Clear Light of Day* (1980) is a fine example of this search. The female characters of Desai are embittered and their fight for their identity is, though unrelenting, foredoomed. They are constantly constructed, objectified and used by others. Redemption is precluded. While the characters keep searching for their authentic selves and viable

modes of expression, nothingness prevails which rules out any possibility of change or alleviation:

“How everything goes on and on here, and never changes,” she said. “I used to think about it all,” and she waved her arm in a circular swoop to encompass the dripping tap at the end of the grass walk, the trees that quivered and shook with the birds, the loping dogs, the roses—“and it is all exactly the same, whenever we come home.” (Desai, 1980, p. 34)

On the other side of the border, in Pakistan too, one finds a growing preoccupation with the question of identity and voice. In Pakistani literature, a considerable number of writers embraced a diverse cosmopolitanism in which the elements of Islamic, European and Indian traditions were blended with finesse. Most of them articulated a spectrum of anti-colonial protestations in their writings. Their themes stretched from an aesthetic eroticization of Europe to a rarefied conceptualization of a romanticized India. We can also notice a thematic divide between the older and the younger writers—the former aim at evolving an anti-colonial narrative; the latter just went on ignoring these issues and welcomed the thrill and excitement offered by the neocolonial order emerged from globalization (Shamsie, 2007). Notwithstanding this thematic revolt on the part of the younger writers, the issues of identity, representation, migration, dislocation, and voice remained sufficiently foregrounded.

Take the example of Zulfikar Ghose and Shuja Nawaz. Both of them are Pakistani-born diasporic writers and are settled in America. They are, in the main, preoccupied with such themes as migration, displacement and a persistent nostalgia. Call it an outcome of the postmodern crisis of meaning or a corollary of their diasporic experience that, at times, their writings appear to be fragmented and stricken compositions. They seem to be wrestling with the issues of a checkered history, an irretrievable past and a formidable present. By and large, in all these writers, the issue of identity is the one which features invariably prominently. An agitated and schizophrenic self is often seen struggling between the bygone cultural stabilities and the modern day uncertainties (Shamsie, 2007). The certitude of the past seems to have given way to a skepticism which is at once nihilistic and depressing.

At the same time, quite a few writers have a Pakistani identity which is merely titular such as Sattiya Paul Anand, Daniyal Mueenuddin, and Maliha Masood, just to name a few. They have never lived in Pakistan. They have settled abroad for good and ever since there has been no looking back. Nostalgia made them write about their ancestral homeland

but that homeland turned out to be a highly *textualized* and *romanticized* Pakistan. In case of these writers, distance obscures the vision both literally and figuratively. The temporal and spatial distance which separates these writers from Pakistan proper also tends to alienate them from the subject matter of their immediate topic. At times this distance becomes exceedingly critical and seems to have ambiguated their attitude towards Pakistani history, society and politics by nurturing tropes of irony, skepticism and even aversion.

Conclusion

We should recognize the critical potential of literature in the process of identity formation and identity maintenance. Giving voice to a muted and marginalized community remains one of the definitive goals of literature. Indeed, no literary tradition can survive, let alone prosper, if it is fundamentally cut off from its moorings and disinherited of its past. However, in the construction and assertion of identity, no attempt should be made to propose identity as an overdetermined signifier as it is essentially a site of conflictive and cumulative significations. The search for identity is a quest for voice and a struggle to find viable modes of *representation*. We have observed that by deliberately modifying the lexis and syntax of English, some of the writers have sought to stake a claim to the English language which is no longer considered to be an exclusive prerogative of the (neo)colonizers. It has been seen how the insertion of the words from Urdu and Punjabi by some of the writers has complicated the signification patterns of their works as well as the trans-cultural experience of their reader. A large number of South Asian writers have been roving between two worlds and many of them have been striving to combine the best of both of these worlds in order to forge a recognizable voice of their own. At the same time, some of the writers have sought to go beyond the mere fusion of the English literary canons and Anglophone content and have tactfully bent the language itself in order to communicate the indigenous thought-patterns and verbal flavors. Bapsi Sidhwa and Anita Desai typify this trend admirably. What is really required is the emergence of some sort of linguistic pattern which could serve as a broad paradigm with a distinctiveness of its own. Therefore, quite a few writers have also been concerned with the indigenous canon-formation. As regards their success, it will be some time before anything definitive is said.

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