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Annie Montaut

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But why do you write in Hindi?

Whenever attending meetings on Commonwealth or postcolonial literature outside the sub continent, a Hindi writer will invariably be asked this ritual question, ‘why do you write in Hindi?’, and similarly any other “regional” or “vernacular” writer, even if the name of these other languages may sometimes sound so exotic that it can hardly be properly uttered and may be confused with the name of the state (Malyalam and Kerala, Kannada and Karnataka, Oriya and Orissa). The wonder of the Western journalist or literature scholar at Indians writing in “regional” languages (or, as they are often called in India, in *bhasha-s*, a word meaning ‘language’ which, incidentally, has long been the usual designation of Sanskrit, and then of Braj, that is to say, of the changing dominant cultural language) involves an obvious understatement: why don’t you write in English, why did you choose this regional language that no one understands outside India and is hardly translated in international languages, why such a bizarre inclination towards a medium vaguely perceived as archaic, or smelling of dubious revivalism, or dusty, or naïve, a folk dialect, if you wish to take part in the world dialogue of cultures and belong to the real network of the world story?

Questioning the question...

It is easy to recognize and criticize the never-ending “orientalist” (in Said’s meaning) bias, a colonial legacy, behind the persistent asking of the same question to a ‘*bhasha*’ writer who simply writes in his mother tongue, as if 1) English was unquestionably a better literary medium and you have to be brave or seditious or uneducated or stupid enough to choose a minor medium with no entry into the broad market,2) the regional writer was defined primarily by his linguistic medium: would any journalist ask Proust why he writes in French or Hrabal why he writes in Czech, not to mention the English writers? And if, incidentally, one might have asked Kafka “why do you write in German?”, it would not have been the first (and often last) question regarding his literary achievements¹.

Geetanjali Shree, a Hindi writer whose novel *Mai* (1998) was recently translated into French (2008), experienced a few months ago the agonizing pressure of the ritual question, when invited to England as a “vernacular” writer, along with another senior Marathi writer widely acclaimed in India, for a symposium on postcolonial writing and Commonwealth literature. Both vernacular writers were looked on with a mixture of condescension, surprise and disdain, by the horde of young Indian English writers, most of them beginners, who had never heard their names before, but all new each other and playfully exchanged jokes as if belonging to one and the same world, now ruling the literary field in Western clothes and idioms, and softly excluding the “vernacular” writers, minor both in their number and in their literary medium, and their traditional exotic garments. This is how she analyses the question

¹ Significantly I could myself witness the reverse of such a ritual question when a Hindi writer was once asked in College de France in Paris, after a full lecture about what is really at stake in contemporary literature and particularly in his own creation, why he did not use Hindi as his creative medium. The writer, K.B. Vaid, who writes exclusively in Hindi although he has been a professor of English and American literature in the States for more than thirty years, was asked by an Indian Hindi speaking lady at the end of his talk: but Sir, why don’t you write in Hindi? The question is interesting too for our purpose because it shows that the very same persons who may be strong and sometimes aggressive supporters of the ‘Hindi cause’ may also be very ignorant of the literary culture of this language, and that Hindi revivalism often goes hand in hand with a total indifference towards what is going on in the cultural contemporary or past literature field, apart a few ritualized landmarks such as Kabir or Premchand, names which act as purely social or political passwords in such contexts. Romila Thapar ?

of her “choice” of Hindi for creative language, a question asked in India as well as abroad (2nd and 3rd §):

English I got, from early childhood, through a schooling that reinforced an unequal relationship between the two languages, giving English the higher status. So much so that on learning I write, it was mostly assumed that it must be in English! And on learning it is in Hindi, there was and still is sometimes, amazement and responses of the following kind – wow, Hindi, how exotic, or Hindi, how stupid when you can do it in English, or Hindi, good good, be patriotic, or Hindi, how brave of you to be willing to be isolated and poor. Etc. The point I am making is that it is not seen as a natural choice that I am writing in my own language! Normally if one is writing in a foreign tongue there would be this curiosity and surprise. This is the classic colonial condition!

... There is one more thing about today – the huge pedagogical concern with postcolonial literature in the West that is reinstating a margin and a centre by putting up a tableau with English writers, to the exclusion of most others.

...In England last month, I was introduced as a vernacular writer, in Italy as a local language writer. What is English in England and Italian in Italy? Why do these epithets not apply to the writers in those countries? (Geetanjali Shree 2008)

...and the distorted relation between English and ‘regional’ languages...

The last sentence can be better understood if we keep in mind that Hindi is the official language of the one billion plus Indian republic², alongside English, initially added as an associate official language of the Union for fifteen years in 1950 and later maintained in its status of second official language of the Union after the Tamil populations strongly opposed Hindi as official language in 1965.

Why was English initially not wanted as the national or official language of free India? Because, as well interpreted by Gandhi, it was not only the language of the colonizers invited at that time to “quit India”, but the language of colonization itself as a process of (more or less unconsciously) accepted alienation from the native values and mental frames. The story Gandhi relates in the paper *Harijan*’s issue of 1938 is exemplary and largely commented in his book on *The Evil wrought by English*:

The pillory began with the fourth year; I know now that what I took four years to learn of Arithmetic, Algebra, Chemistry and Astronomy, I should have learnt easily in one year, if I had not to learn them through English but Gujarati. My grasp of the subjects would have been easier and clearer. My Gujarati vocabulary would have been richer. I would have made use of such knowledge in my own home. This English medium created an impassable barrier between me and the members of my family, who had not gone through English schools. (...) *I was fast becoming a stranger in my own home.* (my italics).

Ray too, a well-known chemist, tried in 1932 to oppose education in a foreign language, foreign therefore according to him bound to extinguish all creativity and originality: “Imagine for a moment what would happen if the English lads were compelled, first of all, to learn Persian or Chinese, and then had to read through the medium of such a tongue” (Habib: 348-352). The neglect of vernacular languages and cultures started indeed in the middle of the 19th century when English started to appear as a key for lucrative jobs (Shukla: 45). The depth of the ensuing alienation, has been described even by some contemporary Anglophone writers such as Keki Daruwala:

² A language deliberately not chosen as « national » yet spoken by 40% of the 1,2 billion population as a mother tongue and by about 70% as a second language.

The Europeans came to trade, hung on to fight, intrigue and conquer, and stayed on to instruct. Their colonies became markets for their textiles and their language. Conversions followed, to another way of life and on occasions to Christianity. When they went back, they left their language behind, and half-castes. In an alien land, language itself turns brown and half-caste...Colonial history shows that language can be as domineering as any occupational army. It supplants myths, whole iconographies, world-view, ideology. It ushers in its own symbols and its own values. An armada of new texts sails in. Old dogmas and bigotries are swept away and exchanged for new ones” (Daruwala 30).

Such reactions help to understand the feeling of a “colonial situation” described by Geetanjali Shree, in relation to the above mentioned “orientalist bias”. The feeling of being “gazed” at, and the subsequent “refusal of the gaze” (Gupta 2000), are but reactions to the persistent hangover of the colonial situation. Beneath the gaze, both in and outside India, always lurks the certitude, once arrogantly stated by Macaulay in his famous ‘minute’ of 1835, that the “obscure imbroglio” of the entire amount of the Sanskrit and Persian literary and scientific productions (which he had not read) did not amount to a single shelf of any Western library, or, more recently but equally arrogantly stated by Salman Rushdie, that apart from the Urdu short-story writer Manto (which he could read in translation) the whole “regional” literature in India (which he could not read) had not yet produced works of a quality comparable to the Indian English writing. No wonder that fierce reactions sometimes symmetrically echo such imperialist proclamations, with no more argumentation and as much arrogant stupidity (there are hundred of Rushdies in any regional language), equally blurring the complex picture of the Indian linguistic and cultural situation. I leave it to the former Director of the Sahitya Akademi (the Indian Academy for literature), to frame the literary field in India in a dispassionate way:

Is U.R. Anantha Murthy a “regional” fiction-writer? What about Nirmal Verma, O.V. Vijayan, Sundara Ramaswamy, Mahashweta Devi, Qurratulain Hyder or Amrita Pritam? If these writers are “regional” – or at least were so in their first lives before being reborn in English translations – who are the true “Indian” writers? Kalidasa, who wrote in the supposedly pan-Indian Sanskrit language or Vikram Seth who writes in the presently pan-Indian English that has quietly replaced Sanskrit and Perso-Arabic as the language of power?

The critical tools of the majority of our Anglophile critics, I fear, are hardly adequate to grasp the civilisational significance of hundreds of rich, complex and stimulating works of every genre in the Indian languages that they may choose to qualify either as “vernaculars”, a term with implied derision for the “natives” inherited from the colonial masters or as “regional languages”, a term that vainly imagines the existence of some other “Indian” language and slyly hints at the pan-Indian appeal of Indian writing in English and silently asserts its hegemonic role... English (is) a legitimate product of our historical and existential conjuncture, a genuine expression of our profound postcolonial crisis. Only I am unwilling to concede to it the centrality it seems to claim: it is but a peripheral region of Indian literature and there is an obvious disparity between the publicity it attracts and its literary quality and ability to reflect our social as well as spiritual lives. It is the politics – the power-knowledge nexus – behind Indian writing in English that has attracted greater criticism than the writing in itself.(...) Our postcolonial condition, with all its complexities inherited both from the colonial and the pre-colonial days, finds its most authentic expression in novels like Gopinath Mohanty *Paraja*, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai’s *Coir*, O.V. Vijayan’s *Dharmapuram*, U.R. Ananthamurthy’s *Samskara*, Phanishwarnath Renu’s *Maila Anchal*, Mahasveta Devi’s *Agnigarba*, Ananda’s *Marubhoomikal Undakunnathu*, Shrilal Shukla’s *Raag*

Darbari, Nirmal Verma's *Raat ka Reporter*, Krishna Sobati's *Zindaginama* and Sundara Ramaswamy's *Oru Puliyamarathin Kathai* or in the poems of Muktibodh, Raghuvir Sahay, Shreekant Varma, Dhoomil, Kunwar Narain, Kedarnath Singh ... Faiz, Shubhash Mukhopadhyay, Namdev Dhasal, Dilip Chivre... or in the plays of Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, Mahesh Elkunshwar or Mohan Rakesh ... The belief that the subaltern can speak only in English or in Sanskrit (the Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English has a long entry on Sanskrit literature, but none on the living languages of India) is certainly more than a joke since it has disastrous political implications in our context (Sachidanandan 13-15)

...to grasp at the present predicament:

One of the reasons why the so-called 'regional' masterpieces are largely ignored as such (apart from the so-called inadequacy of critical tools) in postcolonial literary studies, and in world literature, is that they are generally so poorly translated, when they are, that their literary quality is hardly visible. An example to the point is Krishna Sobati's translations, which she herself used to oppose, and which, once available, were severely criticized, most recently in Geetanjali Shree (2008). Counter examples too can be found, particularly Ananthamurthy and K.B. Vaid, who translate their own works or collaborate with their translator. Another reason is that they often lack the explicit ethnographic (exotic?) content which could make them appealing to today's world audience, since they do not explain nor describe the Indian "culture" for the outsider, they simply live in it, taking for granted a general knowledge and ethos, which often makes the primary interest of many a "postcolonial" literary piece.

But the main reason is probably of a different nature. If we come back to the deep consequences of the "colonial situation" prevailing in the cultural medium of present India, we cannot fail to acknowledge the persistent status of English as a language of power: it was first taught in India with the explicit intention of forming a small body of "brown Saheeb" thinking western, which would inject the cognitive frame of Western modernity into the masses – the framing of the new nation indeed owes both its major leaders, with the notable exception of Gandhi, and its administrative and political structures, to this western formatting, a well studied topic among historians questioning the very notions of nation and state (*Subaltern Studies*). English is no longer the privilege of the 'collaborating' Babus, at a time it was the language of the "service-seeking mania", responsible for a deep "social schism" (Di Bona 350sq). It is now the language of the quick-money hunt such as jobs in the call centres which blossomed in all the big Indian cities during the last ten years. English is now the only door to economic and social success, re-enacting in the 21st century the antidemocratic split between the haves -- urban, educated-- -- and have-nots -- rural masses-- , a deep social and cultural schism (Montaut 2004a). Education in English medium schools has increased at a very quick pace during the last years: national enrolment in the upper primary sections (grades I to VIII) of English medium schools rose by 74% between 2003 and 2006, according to the National University for Education Planning and Administration (NUEPA). The highest jump is recorded in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra Being schooled in English most of the time means being cut off from one's "regional" culture, up to the total inability to read its literary master- pieces, as sadly acknowledged by an eminent Bengali English writer, Amit Choudhury, in the latest Paris book fair; moreover, it also means being cut off from the masses, those masses who made the living culture of India in its various languages, and speak the languages in which were written its great texts (*cf. infra*).

One consequence is the rapid decay of knowledge of the wide literate culture in Indian languages, no longer prestigious since they have no part in the contemporary global market.

Over the past fifty years, however, the ranks of this category of scholar [well versed in their literary tradition] have gradually diminished – so much so that the study of South Asian literary archives in their historical depths has lost two generations of scholars. There is now good reason to wonder whether the next generation will even be able to read Pingal texts in old Gujarati or riti kavya in Brajbhasha or ghazals in Indo-Persian. *After a century and a half of Anglicization and a certain kind of modernization*, it is hardly surprising that the long histories of South Asia literatures no longer find a central place in contemporary knowledge in the subcontinent itself, however much a nostalgia for the old literary cultures and their traditions may continue to influence popular culture (my italics) (Pollock 3)

what is threatened in the Indian literary culture...

The blame for the incumbent situation on “a certain kind of modernization” is worth explaining, because it meets some of the most radical and today popular critiques of the modern nation state among historians. It also reminds us of the “civilisational significance” alluded to by Sachidanandan as well as of the Gandhian stand against “modernity”. All such notions – doubting the nation state in relation to both empowering the masses and maintaining the Indian great culture alive, doubting “modernity” in the shape of a western-like development grounded in science and technology, “Indian civilisational significance” – are ultimately linked to the cultural alienation undergone during the 19th century. This alienation increased during the 20th century with the Nehruvian modernistic model which first came to shape the new Indian state, then with the economic opening and liberalisation since the nineties: the present shining India is seen by many as the logical outcome of a cultural and developmental vision typically born out of the western modernity. Roughly speaking, it echoes the choices of what Gramsci called the urban intellectuals, like Nehru or Tilak, as opposed to the rural intellectual, like Gandhi: an intellectual and ethical choice not entirely determined by the educational formation since Gandhi too received higher education in England.

The problem is not with the addition of a new culture and language such as brought by the British in India in the 19th century – India had long been famous for its legendary capacity of “digesting” new comers and new modes of thinking. The problem lies in the radical change of the global network accommodating the plural cultures which had always been in a more or less conflicting and mutually enriching relation in India: from a traditionally fluid network built on a mosaic of “subcultures” in constant interaction, with no hierarchy, hence no center, a more rigid architecture emerged; strongly centred, with the new culture of science, technology and ‘progress’ as its hegemonic center (Nandy 1980, 2007). In the traditional pattern, dialectic continuity, with inner criticism as the motor for change and eventually subversion, was assumed to be the invariant of Indian culture, a continuity made fecund by an incessant process of exchanges both vertical (time) and horizontal (space): a continuous dialogue related the various moments of this long history, with for instance the great Sanskrit epics being rewritten, reinterpreted and sometimes quite “deconstructed” to voice the changing social and political environment, in all regional languages, from the medieval times of mystic devotion with Ezhutthachan in Malayam, Pampa in Kannada or Kirtibas in Bengali to the present days with Dharamvir Bharati in Hindi); on the other side, there has always been a living dialogue between popular folk culture, local songs and performances, and the learned “high” literatures. This continuity between what is often called the *marg* (‘high way’, high literate culture) and the *deshi* (local) is a main feature of Indian cultural tradition:

One of the great things about our regional literatures is the remarkable way in which the brahminical tradition is acquired by the entire non-Bahmin populace, that is, how it is

acquired, revised, re-worked, made into Puranas, put into all kinds of theatre, and so on. ... While speaking through this tradition and composing his *vachana* in it, Basava (the medieval mystic poet, who changed the canons of poetry by using the oral 'folk' patterns) had access to a lot of words and ideas and concepts which you find in the Vedas and Upanishads, and these too entered his discourse in a remarkably effortless manner...Our vernacular languages have survived because the masses speak these and not Samskruta. And these masses are the carriers of our culture, of our great stories and epics (Ananthamurthy 360; 380).

With English as the new *marg*, this continuity has been broken, and the "enchanted circle" alluded to by Vaid (88-911), banning the majority of Indians, came to impose among Indians themselves a mode of communication which perverted the way we perceive each other and similarly the way we and Europe see each other.

and the seminal concepts of Indian civilization ?

The lack of clear-cut categories, the lack of a hegemonic centre, as prevailed in the traditional architecture of the Indian cultural pattern, has far reaching consequences in conceptualizing mankind in the world, among which the feature of "non-separateness" has oft been emphasized (from the psychoanalysts Erikson to Lannoy and Kakar). It has also been equated with the non colonial non-modern world view (Nandy v-vi, 51-62) which refuses the following hierarchies: man superior to woman, human superior to animal, to nature, adult superior to child, civilised superior to 'savage', reason to affects, history to myth, science to intuitive and empirical knowledge, etc. (such hierarchies legitimately allowing the 'higher' to impose their will on the 'lower' part of the planet). It results in a particular attitude towards one's own culture, itself related to a particular conception of time and of the relationship between part and whole, I and non-I. "My feeling of being part of the Indian culture, says Nirmal Verma (1991: 70-1), does not only rely on being linked with a piece of ground which is called India but rather derives from the fact that I live in a time which is eternally contemporaneous to me", whereas cultural identity has been "given" to the West with historical conscience, as a collective past objectified in the form of churches, museums, dates, etc.. He substitutes for the vision of an oriented time progressing from past to future, with radical changes, what he calls the eternal present: *anantar vartamân*, non-finite present, a noun originated from a root meaning 'revolve', in a natural process like a never ending wheel where past and future are both intertwined with the eternal/never-ending present and which he equates to *prakriti* (nature). This does not mean that the distinct categories of time do not exist, but they are themselves embedded within a smooth global vision where their motion (*gati*) can also be called a pause (*virâm*), with no longer any difference between motion (*gati*) and motionlessness (*gatihîntâ*). The very word *gati* means motion, speed, and also path, way. Prehistoric or primeval times are then on-par with the contemporary present, with no one-way orientation. Similarly, in a 'culture

that you cannot represent from the outside, nor name in an articulate objective manner, the body is not like a window that opens for the soul on the knowable world as in western philosophy. "The difference between body and soul is as artificial in the Indian tradition as is the contradiction between outside and inside. What our ancestors had seen from the window centuries ago – trees, rivers, a vast unchanging landscape of animals and men -- is the same as what I see, and I discover that I am not simply a spectator (*darshak*) of this surroundings (*paridrishya*), rather am I in the middle of them, a non differentiate part of them" (Verma 72).

There is (or was, before the colonial point of rupture) a feeling of "oneness" or "one-soul-ness" (*ek-âtma-tâ*) which according to Nirmal is the key for the alacrity and vitality of Indian traditional culture because it is supported by the inner feeling of interconnectedness

between the various components of the whole. Non-distinctness between the viewer (*drathtâ*) the viewed (*drishya*) and its environment (*paridrisya*) and the act of vision (*darshan*) accounts for the philosophical as well as for the mystical stand (*darshan* is the term used to translate “philosophy” and “religion”) and another keyword is empathy or sympathy (*âtmîyatâ*), derived from *âtman*, “center of the body, then self, soul, abstract cosmic principle”.

Such perceptions result in a very particular conception, too, of the self and the other. To start with, the self in the traditional Indian mental framework is both ego (*aham*) and its wider form the self (*âtman*), and this wider form is an all-encompassing form, which includes nature, animals, human beings, trees and rivers, history and society, and the supernatural world or supreme cosmic principal. Hence the relative irrelevance of such notions as identity as formatted in the western modern or postmodern frame, i.e. centered on the notion of individual, in an ego-centered world. “Individual” according to Nirmal sides along with the world of separate units, and the word he used for it is *vyakti* (cut off, articulated, from a verbal root which is also present in the word for ‘grammar’, *vyâkaran*, the systematic organization of linguistically distinct units). *Vyakti* is the opposite of *manushya*, “man”, a term derived from Manu, the primordial Man in Hindu cosmology equitable with *prakriti* as the force for creation, and entering the world of *manushyatâ*, humanity, means getting free from the individual limitations: the detached or *nir-vaiyaktik* state (lit. ‘un-individualistic’) is valued because it allows the self to interconnect in a non ego-centered universal whole, and not because it is cut off from the contingent world, as is often understood. Similarly, the other word used by Nirmal for detachment, *tatasthtâ* (also “indifference, impartiality”), is derived from *taT*, “shore, bank of a river or seacoast”, and being *taTasth* means standing on the shore, on the limit, therefore neither in nor outside, beyond the very notion of limit and distinctive categories. As expected, such “seminal concepts” as *aham/âtman*, *darshan*, *manushya*, *nirvayaktik*, *sampurn*, *prakriti* have often been the cause of deep misunderstandings when translated in European languages by ego, self, vision or philosophy, detachment, whole/complete, nature, Nirmal insists after Coomaraswamy. Entering the world of *manushya* characterizes the creation of all Indian great artists, and it is like leaving

the world of units to enter the world of relations. Here all living creatures and animate beings are intertwined, inter-related, and not only those animate beings who breath but also the objects which externally/superficially seem to be inanimate. In this intertwined world, the things are linked with the men, the men with the trees, the trees with the animals, the animals with the flora /vegetation, the flora with the sky, with the rain, with the air. A creation which is living, animate, breathing at every second, vibrating – ... humanity is not in the center, is not superior to everything, the measure of everything; it is not the autonomous unit which the individual has been considered to be till now, on the contrary, it owes its completeness to its connectedness, in exactly the same way as the other living beings are complete by being connected, and in the same way man is not the support of creation, similarly the individual is not the support of the human (Verma 26).

This mental frame has undoubtedly been deeply distorted by colonization, as repeatedly stated by Nirmal Verma and many other writers like Ananthamurthy. The continuity between local folk culture (*deshi*) and high learned culture (*mârg*) has been broken and now English culture has become the *mârg* in India, along with the modernistic (westernized) cognitive frame, but this new *mârg* has not developed beyond ‘an enchanted circle’ and (still?) excludes the mass (*cf. supra*). In this situation, writing in Hindi, or any “regional language” still conveying this articulation of local and learned culture is not just being patriotic or stupid. Yet cultivating exclusively the *deshi* tradition never amounts to real creation if it is not constantly and reflexively enriched by the dialogic “contention” with the *mârg*, presently with the English

modern subculture. Without this “contention”, the writer will produce not the lived-in Van Gogh shoes, but the Bata shoes which are only a marketable product, be it written in English or in some regional language: Ananthamurthy quotes the whole Kannada literature of the end of the 19th century as an example of a sterile rehashing of the traditional codes, and many contemporary novels of the progressive or “new story” school in the ‘regional’ language and western mental frame, no less sterile and conventional examples of the modernist trend.

Writing in Hindi as one of the possible answer to such threats

If daily habits (food habits, religious practices, etc.) are still deeply ‘Indian’,

all our models for writing and intellectual thought are derived from the West. This will come to an end only when we understand why there is a Gulf War. And we do not understand the Gulf war if we follow the logic and dynamics of global politics: you have to adopt an altogether different position.... And if you have that kind of a political frame of mind, that kind of a mindset ... then you develop a mode of thinking which is that of a critical insider, but one who will make a significant contribution to tradition (Ananthamurthy 373).

Not only, as mentioned above, the notion of a periphery ‘writing back’ to the center, a notion deemed crucial in the expression of the postcolonial condition, has little relevance when we look at things from the inside of a culture which does not allow a center to systematically categorize and organize its various components. But, as the psychologist of cultures Ashis Nandy as well as the writer Ananthamurthy repeatedly asserted, this reaction typically proceeds from the mental frame induced by cultural colonization, with the colonized fighting the colonizers in the colonizer’s terms: a writer like Bankim Chandra Chatterji for instance in the end of the 19th century succeeded in representing India as potentially as rational, as martial, as technologically successful as the West (therefore deserving freedom as a mature will-be entity of the first world. Yet, although Independent India was forged according to this ‘modernist’ mind frame, other visions and ways have always existed for expressing an alternative to the colonial vision of a passive, savage and ‘uncivilized’ India: before its major and successful representation with Gandhi, these other visions and ways have shaped the critical discourse of Vidyasagar, a contemporary of Bankim. Both men were ‘critical insiders’, deriving their analytical and critical potential (against cast, social inequity; colonization) from inside their tradition. The creative strength derived from this mind set – using the exposure to the world outside one’s indigenous culture yet speaking from the inside – is the condition for reaching strong and new alternatives instead of elaborating an inverted or concurrent system, where margins or periphery reshape their distinctive values and identities by means of opposition to the ‘center’. A farther-reaching ‘deconstruction’ of the so-called euro-centric system consists, not in inverting hierarchies (‘provincializing Europe’) nor in successfully competing within the global intellectual and power system but in finding other ways to address the problems humanity is confronted with, today like yesterday and tomorrow, and not only in a given culture.

Such is the challenge that the ‘vernacular’ culture may answer in their own terms, with a unique voice, and certainly in various ways (Gandhi’s alternative is certainly not the only possible one for the progressive developmental model) but all very different from the now conventional (ized) answers evolved in the world. One of the major differences is the preserved strength and vitality of the sense of the sacred: hence a certain modesty and deference in conceiving the relation of mankind to the universe, nature, cosmic world, fellow men and gods, a sense of the sacred which has nothing to do with the claim for religious identities so present today in communal antagonisms. We find this quality under the word *tevar* (*lit.* ‘proper behavior’ in Anupam Mishra, a major Hindi writer and stylist who devoted

his work to the description of the ancient and new water techniques in rural India: the way he deals with this culture by using comparisons, metaphors and legends which every one can re-appropriate as his own lived-in culture (the book is kept in temples and read at night in panchayats in hundreds of thousands of villages) is far more than a technical treatise, it voices the deeply rooted culture, inventing daily answers to contemporary environmental challenges while emphasizing the crucial importance of having a global perception of the relation man/environment or man/sacred, and not the usual resource oriented perspective. We also find this ‘insider’ perspective in Bharamvir Bharati in a very different area and style: how to deal with violence? Using modern Hindi verses in the great tradition of high poetry in modern language to re-write the last day of the Mahabharata fratricide war (*Andha Yug*, ‘In the Darkness’, in 1954), on the unvoiced background of the communal killings during the Indo-Pakistan Partition, he originally criticizes, against the mainstream vision of such events, both the universal moral ‘humanist’ condemnation as well as the commodity of alien’s agency, and the psychological grief and revenge or noble forgiveness, in order to voice a more philosophical and political viewpoint rooted in detachment (*anâsakti*), a prerequisite for truth and compassion (*karuna*); the enigmatic figure of the absent Krishna, voiced by a similarly complex messenger embodies such *anasakti* which is both a condition for a genuine intelligence of events and a generous realistic response to them, barring the determinism of the so-called fatality as well as modern history. We find it too in one of the few really agnostic modern writers, Krishna Baldev Vaid, but a mystic agnostic, in the great tradition of the paradoxical *sant* medieval poets yet with a uniquely ‘experimental’ style full of the lived-in verve of his native Punjab: within the inside tradition of the Indian critical skepticism (Sen 111), Vaid evolves an original vision where humor and irony allows for the deconstruction of all and every clear-cut identity, both cultural-linguistic (Urdu Hindi Panjabi) and religious (Montaut 2004).

It is certainly not the case that similar ‘glocal’ alternatives to the dominant globalized knowledge are exclusively expressed in a ‘regional’ language: Essayists like Ashih Nandy, great environmentalists who re-shaped the very concept of ‘environment’ like Anil Aggarwal or Vandana Shiva do write in English³. But they do so within a definitely non-Western non-modern (to avoid the ambivalent term ‘pre-modern’) due to their intense interaction with the village folk, usually non literate but with a sophisticated culture still linked with a context where poetry was not read but sung. But for creative writing, vernacular languages obviously lend themselves better to such critical innovations in continuity with the traditional mental frame, were it only because of the full access to the full historical continuum of learned and folk masterpieces. Their deep structure, in Nandakishor Acharya (2007)’s acceptance of the term in his book on the *Grammar of Culture*, is distinct from the western one, like that of Indian languages compared to English, brown or white.

Last, but not least, using one’s mother tongue is not simply a better way of ensuring the conservation of bio-diversity in languages and cultures than making it an official ‘heritage’. First, this mode of conservation also ensures accessible new alternatives to the challenges now met by humankind at large, not likely to be thought of within the “monoculture of the mind” stigmatized by Shiva (. Then, it does not build on opposition nor competition or contradiction or aggressive mastership, but a friendly openness: as rightly pointed out by Ananthamurthy (2007), Gandhi was intellectually hostile to the West but emotionally friendly to the West whereas Nehru was intellectually friendly but emotionally hostile to the West.

³ As well as some Western writers have also been able to display a similar perspective, like Thoreau, quoted by Gandhi, , Giono in France, Toynbee...

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