

# **Learning, Researching, and Teaching of English through Asian Literature: A Discourse Analytical Perspective with Special Reference to Refugee Literature**

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Even though the language English originated in the small island in northern Europe called England, the growth of English as a language beyond the boundaries of that small island nation is tremendous culminating in the present status where no country, not even England can claim the ownership of English, for English has become a denationalised language, a global language surpassing different geographical boundaries yet having the local colour and smell as a language of that soil. In this sense, at present English cannot be called as a foreign language in India or Sri Lanka or in any part of the commonwealth countries but as part and parcel of that country's ethos, tradition and understanding. Thus English has developed its own variances adopting and adapting to the place in which it drifts along with other languages thus creating various Englishes such as British English, Canadian English, Australian English, Mongolian English, African English, American English, Indian English, Caribbean English, Sri Lankan English and etc. Therefore, one must remember that when we teach English there is no need to follow the Received Pronunciation per se as in the past, but we need to teach English that suits the purpose of our students—the purpose of earning bread and butter.

When English was introduced, it was the English of Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth and etc., to which Indian and Sri Lankan learners—I mean it is the same throughout Asia—were introduced to. This English that was much British in nature was further added with the mainstream writings of the so called American cannon. All these writings even though some discussed oriental issues such as the transcendental writers etc., they were Eurocentric in their outlook, where, even Hinduism and the

Vedas were approached from a thought process that was cultivated carefully by Eurocentric perspectives. Therefore, these literatures—even though they had a universal appeal due to the projections of universal truths etc., like in the plays of Shakespeare—seemed far-fetched and unrelated to the immediate lifeworld of the learner of South Asia as here and now, whereby learning became challenging and many were demotivated. When the case was so, many literatures in English, like Indian Writing in English, Sri Lankan Writing in English, Mongolian Writing in English, Aboriginal Writings in English, and etc., came into existence and are still on the growth attaining the same mainstream recognition as the British or its counterpart American literature.

It has to be noted that after the questionings of the Russian Formalists, Structuralists, and Poststructuralists, literature is not seen as a medium to inculcate values within the classroom, but even though technically literature has been striped-off all values by the modern thinkers, one must remember that still literature is a powerful exhibition of logos and therefore it not only influences, directs, and teaches its readers but also opens up a world of possibilities for the readers to emotively live-in the world opened up by the text in knowing themselves in the light of the text, thereby being self-reflective. In this sense, literatures written in English of those particular territories rooted strongly in those cultural, traditional, and socio-political ethos find more validity claims in the reader belonging to the same territory. Therefore, literature even though is universal in its appeal, it should be valid to the immediate present, and it is in this context, the literatures of the particular, of the micro, and of the little tradition

becomes valid as here and now generating valid claims in the reader's lifeworld.

All literatures are narrative texts, where these narrative texts have been used by totalities for a very long time in brainwashing the society to suit their agendas, where the change in the thought pattern was induced through narratives so that the cultural hegemony was set in unconsciously with greater acceptance. For example, even the Tamil narrative in the form of epic entitled *Cilappatikaram* projects a patriarchal thought pattern, for example, Kannagi rather than taking revenge or rather than punishing or rather than reprimanding her husband for his illicit fornicating relationship with Madhavi, leaves the place of habitat to Madurai in search of new beginnings is a pattern that is accepted until today exhibiting the acceptance or acculturation towards the dominant culture. Therefore, even if it is Russian Formalism, or the Structuralists, or the Poststructuralists, or the Postmodernists and etc., try to strip-off the values put forth by the world opened by these narratives or texts, their striping-off cannot be valid in toto since narratives cannot exist in ex-nihilo. Therefore, one must be astute more with narratives, even though they may seem harmless superficially, but are in-deed the most vital tools in changing the thought process in an unrecognisable manner in support towards the dominant class.

It is only in this sense, I would like to make it clear that Refugee Literature is the need of the hour to be introduced into the mainstream curriculum so that new values with new consciousness and an inclusive mind-set can be developed promoting life-furthering attitudes that would lead to an inclusive life-furthering society as "[o]ppression is said to be rooted ultimately in the way in which we and others are defined linguistically, the way in which we are positioned by words in relation to other words, or by codes which are said to be 'structured like a language'" (Nally 26). Thus when we are defined by and through language, only if we can make a change towards liberation in language through one of its tool called literature, will we be in a position to escape from that which makes us what we are, breaking the immutable structures of oppression.

One may argue that Refugee Literature is not new, by citing *The Bible*, where the Israelites lived for four hundred years as refugees in Egypt, or Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* or *Othello*, Ovid's *Tristia*, and etc. But if one were to do so they are only trying to set-in a normalization attitude which is very harmful since it is killing the consciousness in a systematic manner like the me-too movement where victimization becomes a normal way of accepted life pattern; for in a sense, it is only through such desensitization capitalism exists to this very day. Furthermore, the difference of this state of a human being between now and earlier times is pointed out succinctly by Edward Said in the chapter 'Reflections on Exile' of *Reflections on Exile: & Other Literary and Cultural Essays* as:

In other ages, exiles had similar cross-cultural and transnational visions, suffered the same frustrations and miseries, performed the same elucidating and critical tasks—brilliantly affirmed, for instance, in E. H. Carr's classic study of the nineteenth-century Russian intellectuals clustered around Herzen, *The Romantic Exiles*. But the difference between earlier exiles and those of our own time is, it bears stressing, scale: our age—with its modern warfare, imperialism, and the quasi-theological ambitions of totalitarian rulers—is indeed the age of the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration (180).

Since World War II, unrest amongst people has become the norm creating huge number of refugees until the present times. Refugee Literature exhibits a kind of exile which cannot be comprehended under any terms since it objectifies anguish, pain, misery, loss of meaning, loss of future, and etc., a predicament less experienced by most. These above mentioned objectified negativities where a person undergoes tremendous turmoil due to the actions of few human beings on other human beings with muteness as response is problematic since it can get transformed into another form of oppression that the world as not witnessed yet. It is in this sense that Refugee Literature differs from the Diaspora Literature since all of it cannot be termed as Refugee Literature due to the factor of forced immigration.

Refugee Literature is the expression of the muted response towards Others and in this sense it can be termed as an alternative discourse and one must remember that “[a]lternative discourses develop, in other words, because official discourses do not capture the whole of the life experiences of the oppressed... And in these ‘spaces’ they develop discourses or genres which express feelings, sentiments, ideas, views, and aspirations which go unacknowledged by the official discourse” (Nally 31-32). Since, language is social and historical, so is literature that employs language where meanings exist in relation to other words and social relationships which are contested and never closed. Since, refugee literature presents us with resources for the construction or detection of life-furthering meanings which are futuristic creating an inclusive lifeworld they are potential texts.

Immigrants termed as refugees are not a problem but are the symptoms of the ruins of the imperialistic barbarism of our times which is the real problem and even though literatures written by refugees do not aim to solve the problems, they become texts with potency which can induce a change in the personality of the reader in trying to be with more understanding towards refugees and at the same time in not becoming a reason or part of the imperialistic barbarism. John Bellamy Foster in his book *Naked Imperialism: The U.S. Pursuit of Global Dominance* suggests a solution to this barbarism: “Only the transcendence of capitalism, in the direction of socialism, offers the possibility to escape from the current state of barbarism that is paving the way to new global holocausts and a worsening ecological collapse” (160).

The South Asian countries, i.e., India, Pakistan, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Myanmar (Burma), and the British Indian Ocean Territory are immersed in various conflicts where forced immigration is a part of life leading people to live as refugees within their own countries or seeking asylum in foreign countries. Some of the useful literature in this sense can be noted as follows: *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid, *Immigrant, Montana* by Amitava Kumar, *The Invitation* by Anne Cherian, *Oleander Girl* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri,

*Unaccustomed Earth* by Jhumpa Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies* by Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Abundance* by Amit Majumdar, *American Dervish* by Ayad Akhtar, *The Story Hour* by Thrity Umrigar, *Family Life* by Akhil Sharma, *When the Moon is Low* by Nadia Hashimi, *Bright Lines* by Tanwi Nandini Islam, *The Year of the Runaways* by Sunjeev Sahota, *Before We Visit the Goddess* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, *Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid, *No One Can Pronounce My Name* by Rakesh Satyal, *Cutting for Stone* by Abraham Verghese, *One Half from the East* by Nadia Hashimi, *What Lies Between Us* by Nayomi Munaweera, *Stained* by Abda Khan, *Marriage Of A Thousand Lies* by S. J. Sindu, *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida* by Shehan Karunatilaka, *A Passage North* by Anuk Arudpragasam, *The Story of a Brief Marriage* by Anuk Arudpragasam, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid, *Such a Long Journey* by Rohinton Mistry, *Reef* by Romesh Guneseckera, *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini, *The Boat People* by Sharon Bala, *Brixton Beach* by Roma Tearne, *Refugee Trap* by Bharathi Mohan, *Refugee Dilemma* by V. Suryanarayan, *Between Fear and Hope* by V. Suryanarayan and V. Sudarsen, *The Cage* by Gordon Weiss, *The Divided Island* by Samanth Subramian, *The Seasons Of Trouble* by Rohini Mohan, *Anil's Ghost* by Michael Ondaatje, *Island of a Thousand Mirrors* by Nayomi Munaweera, *Noontide Toll* by Romesh Guneseckera, and *On Sal Mal Lane* by Ru Freeman will be some of the good fiction and nonfiction writings dealing with issues such as war, education, childhood, identity, culture, equality, respect, fear, hope, suffering, sadness, discrimination, and displacement.

Forced immigration creates a group of people known as refugees who “are the price humanity is paying for the global economy in which commodities—but not people—are permitted to circulate freely” (Žižek) and advocates that only a long term solution which is set in a radical economic change only can abolish the conditions that creates refugees. The ideas of Slavoj Žižek are valid when the Mediterranean refugee crisis is taken into consideration, but cannot be hundred present validating the South Asian refugee crisis, since refugee crisis in South Asia centres on fanaticism of one kind or the other.

A researcher who wishes to read South Asian literature or in particular Refugee Literature —the literature written by a refugee or literature written on a refugee— has so many non-literary sources whereby they can very well employ a new historical reading of the texts in question in order to understand and interpret along with the theory of Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy so as to decipher on how each and every character in a narrative detects meaning and the modus of converting them into meaningful personal validity claims. Thus, Refugee Literature is a rich source for intertextual and intratextual reading through which the human dilemma can be projected much effectively and on the means of detecting hope in the face of adversity is also the need of today when people tend to judge whether life is worth living or not as projected by Albert Camus. In this sense, the world opened by these Refugee Literature narratives are texts with much more valid and richer textual, contextual, and multiple textures of meanings for a South Asian reader than the existential narratives which emerged after World War II due to being here and now. Therefore, this international conference will be an eye-

opener for curriculum planners, syllabus designers, and researchers to embark on a rich tradition that is currently emerging due to the present crisis that are around us, whose roots even can be traced down to the mythical era and mythical narratives whereby even a reinterpretation of the archetypes become a possibility.

### References

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