

Concept Note

De-centring English Studies: Studying Literature in the Global South

Dates: January 20-21, 2017

Venue: P.G. Department of English, Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India

English Departments have continued to exist in the countries comprising the Global South. They have not been abolished in a surge of nationalistic sentiment, as Ngugi wa'ithiongo had so fervently wished. Yet their activities have been significantly altered. Three developments are noticeable. One, the course content of English has been indigenised to a significant degree, creating space for the literature, or literatures, of one's own country. Two, cross-cultural connections with world literature have been forged, lessening the importance accorded to British and American literature. Three, the ambit of literary study has expanded to incorporate elements –such as the media, print and electronic/digital, the visual and the performing arts – that were previously thought of as extraneous.

These developments have put an end to two default positions the English Departments have taken. One is their 'self-enclosure' which has resulted from a narrowly literary focus. The second position is an unconscious 'ethnocentrism' by which is implied the inherent superiority of the English language and the white race. As a result, English studies, de-centred once in its homeland (read Global North) in the wake of Theory and Cultural Studies in the sixties, seventies, eighties of the last century, has entered a second phase of de-centring. English in this phase is harnessed to the task of encountering what it had earlier excluded as the 'other' in its real historical location and specificity. It is now a matter of being face to face with the languages, texts, belief systems and social realities of the Global South instead of looking at these through the lens of an appropriative translation and an 'Orientalist' interpretation which have long served as a 'civilizing' and 'pacifying' agenda of the colonizers. Translating, comparing, reading cross-culturally and contrapuntally, creating local and regional archives and interpreting on the basis of archives are the operations which have gained a strategic importance in the English Departments of the Global South. English has indeed become a rubric under which are assembled a range of reading and writing practices devoted to articulating 'home' in its cultural specificity and, of course, in its interaction with a global landscape of fluid demarcations.

Against this backdrop, the two-day conference proposed to be organised by the Post Graduate Department of English, Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha will discuss, debate and deliberate on the implications of studying literature in a changed scenario. It will especially seek to address the following questions.

- Will the literature of Global South deliver a new paradigm of interdependence and community and of gender equality or will it replicate the same assumptions about the primacy of the self, the individual and the masculine that lie at the heart of the Western literary canon?
- How can the literature of the Global South narrate the nation and yet have a post-national, internationalist focus desirable in an era of Globalization?
- Is the notion of 'alternative modernity' (D.P. Gaonker, Satya P. Mohanty) that motivates the study of indigenous literatures a viable concept? How does it articulate a non-capitalist form of rationality?
- How will new literatures in English relate to the literature of the Global South? And will it be a stretching of the concept of 'Global South' to seek to include in it literature produced by the marginalized peoples in the Global North?

- Will the literature of the Global South be a counter-discourse to postmodernist relativism and scepticism with its epistemic focus on subaltern forms of knowledge and practice?
- How is it possible to clearly distinguish between ‘our literature’ and ‘their literature’ while theoretically subscribing to the idea of blurred social borders and fluid identities?
- If translating is towards English instead of towards an indigenous language, how is it possible to ever contest ethnocentrism in translational practices?
- Given the English Department’s method of basing comparison on the reading of indigenous texts in translation, how genuinely cross-cultural can it become?
- Are there generic modes that are specific to the Global South? If so, what are these?
- How can emerging areas such as ‘digital humanities’ find a place within a largely print-based mode of reading and analysing? And what are the implications for English Studies in the Global South?
- What is the role to be played by indigenous critical theories in the study of the literatures of the Global South?
- What does it mean to de-territorialize English?
- Finally – and this has a bearing on the point raised earlier about comparative undertakings - how can we keep from distorting the soul of non-English literatures by discoursing on them in English?

These questions can be best addressed within the framework of the following sub themes the conference has agreed upon.

- Global-Local Dialectic
- Narrating the Region, Nation and the World
- Literature and Theory in an Uneven World
- Towards a World without Borders
- Humanizing Technology
- Hybrid Identities and In-between Spaces
- Texts and Modes of their Transmission
- Translation and Multilingualism
- Reading Visual Culture
- Modes of the Popular
- Designing an English Curriculum for the Global South

The conference invites proposals for papers exploring issues such as those enumerated above in relation to the regional and national literatures of the Global South. Abstracts seeking to probe the curricular reforms proposed for English in India by the University Grants Commission are especially welcome, as are proposals for reshaping English studies in the context of Odisha, which is the venue of the conference.

Plenary Speakers

Dr. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan
Distinguished Professor of English
New York University, USA

Dr. Ellen Handler Spitz
Honours College Professor
University of Maryland (UMBC)
USA

Prof. Paul St-Pierre
Adjunct Professor Department of Linguistic and Translation,
University of Montreal
Canada

Call for Papers – Guidelines

- Registration is compulsory for participation and presentation of the papers.
- Participants are requested to send their original and unpublished articles, strictly following the MLA Style Book-7th Edition for preparing their papers.
- Only selected papers are eligible for presentation and publication.
- In case of the co-authored papers, both of them have to register and at least one of them should be present in the conference.
- Some of the selected papers will be published in the *Journal of Literary Studies*, published by the Department of English, Utkal University.
- Participants have to make their own arrangements for their travel, stay and board. Assistance in booking guest house and rooms can be provided on request and availability.
- The abstracts written in 300 words with a paper title should reach the following email ID- iccenglish.utkal@gmail.com
- Each participant will have 15 minutes presentation time.
- The word limit for the completed paper is 2500-3000.

Important Dates

- Last Date of Sending Abstract: 31st August 2016
- Communication on Acceptance: 30th September 2016
- Submission of Registration Form and Payment of Registration fee: 20th November 2016
- Submission of Completed Paper: 20th December 2016
- Dates of the Conference: 20th and 21st January 2017

Registration Fee

- Paper Presenters (India) : INR 1500/-
- Foreign Participants/Paper Presenters : USD 100
- For Utkal University Scholars: INR 1000/-

- Students of the Department : INR 200/-

*Late registration after due date: Rs. 500/25 USD for each participant along with the above said fee.

*Registration fee is to be paid through NEFT Account No- 10164208601 IFS Code- SBIN0002135 or to be paid in cash at the Department

Note: Registration fee includes conference kit, certificate, working lunch and refreshments on both days of the conference.

Venue/Contact

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Utkal University, Vani Vihar-751004
Phone No- 0674- 2567542

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Department Faculty: Prof. Jatindra K Nayak
Prof. Asim R Parhi
Mr. Pulastya Jani
Miss. S. Deepika



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PG Department of English

Utkal University, Vani Vihar, Bhubaneswar-751004

Registration Form

Name: Prof. / Dr. / Mr. / Ms.....

Designation:.....

Affiliation & Address:.....

.....

Mobile Number with Country Code:.....

E-Mail ID:.....

Paper Presenters (India) : INR 1500/-

Foreign Participants/Paper Presenters : USD 100

For Utkal University Scholars: INR 1000/-

Students who wish to participate: INR 200/-

Payment details: NEFT Reference No. Date:..... Bank &

Branch.....

or

Paid in Cash at the Department.

Signature of the Delegate