

have happened to the Jews if they had really followed the much defamed and often ridiculed notion of *ahimsa satyagraha* in face of a ruthless Nazi power structure. She, surprisingly, establishes loopholes in Gandhi's critics and defends him through a thorough discussion of the Jewish condition while engaging with a commentator like Hannah Arendt ("Gandhi: Calling to Non-Violence Joined by Shy Pragmatism").

Hilal Ahmed in his text, "Afterlife of a Text: *Hind Swaraj* and the Chattisgarh Muktu Morcha" looks into the parallel situations that Gandhi faced in his times and looks for affirmation/negation/problematisation of pragmatics while engaging with at least three case studies with the CMM against industrial-political nexus. The result, as the author finds, is not completely in the negative. While the caste question (the Ambekarite debate) is re-engaged with in Sudhir Chandra's "Gandhi's Twin Fasts", Lucy Nusseibeh and Sari Nusseibeh in their "Sheherezade and *Hind Swaraj*" in a radical digression with the study of pragmatics, scuds back to the effect that non-violence in the form of stories could have against brute and corporeal violence, in a parable from the *Arabian Nights*. Apart from exploring the Indic notion of memory and oral story-telling, this essay looks at how 'force' can be re-defined through non-closed anticipation of a more communicable future. This problem of communicability is taken up in the essay by Tridip Sahrud when he deals with the etymological origins of Gujarati terms and looks at the transformation, both on a linguistic and semantic level, while translating them into English. His essay is extremely significant in understanding the subtleties of semantic progression/elision against the problem of 'language' that not only looks at the Chomskian idea of 'performance' and culture but moves beyond to locate meanings that were "non-existent".

This collection of essays and articles is not just significant to understand Gandhi and his writings alone but almost like its sprawling and exhaustive structure (and content), the book also vindicates the impossibilities of understanding a man to whom theory alone, in itself, was an impossibility. While many of the discussions are not very new to scholars and researchers working on Gandhi, this book might serve a very seminal role in collecting bits and connecting dots towards a failed totality, much like what Gandhi would have loved in his continual iterations and revisions towards his practical but ethical philosophies. The editor has evidently succeeded in presenting a text that might, with lingering doubt, make Gandhi more comprehensible as an entity but will surely claim the locus of confluence for an Indian and an anti-imperial system to resonate across global imagination.

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VERNACULAR ENGLISH: READING THE ANGLOPHONE IN POST COLONIAL INDIA.  
By Akshya Saxena. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2022. 208 pp.

Translation is not an endeavour regarding the inter-communicability of language or semantics alone but a way of both construction and comprehension of one's self, the other and the world. This idea has caught the imagination of modern translation studies where the act of translation is being considered to linger within texts and extra-textual moments of recognition. Of course, it is about re-defining the very foundations of translation practices as what underlies 'expression' and its ethno-cultural dimensions of meaning and politics. In this regard, Akshya Saxena's text is one of the most fascinating studies on translation and extra-translational ways of perception. When I say, 'extra-translational', I also mean 'extra-textual'. In a way, the idea of a text and the act of translation has always been thought to be synonymous in literary practice. However, as Saxena proposes (and also substantiates) in her text, the idea of translation can expand from its common motifs of textuality and the act can pervade spaces that are least perceived or processed. That spatiality can be textually

constructed (and vice versa), is relatively a purchased concept in post-modern academia; however Saxena's argument is not just about spaces or/as texts but concerns hegemony, global politics and the English language. In an epigrammatic usage of a strikingly intriguing book title, it promises four problems; of 'reading', the 'vernacular', the language English and the condition of 'postcoloniality'.

The last problem is mostly based on the functions of 'experience', a condition of temporality and more importantly relates directly to the other problems of language and 'reading'. But underneath all these issues what concerns Saxena (and us) is to seek an exploration with the greater concerns of identity. Saxena takes up this apparent impasse of identity and the post-modern condition in the very introductory section where she positions the current Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi and the Dalit youth leader, Rohit Vemula, whose death raised allegation of discrimination and even "institutional murder", at similar yet polar emplacements. As Saxena relates to the peculiar "commonalities" between these figures (both of them belong to the lesser privileged/underprivileged sections of society), she also identifies the divergent approaches that each had towards the English language. Taking a cue from the historical conditions of Indian independence, the author dissects the dissimilar modalities that English as a colonial and a global, hegemonic language has to play in its interaction/confrontation with different ethnicities/castes and communities and argues for its rather variegated and counter-intuitive role in its 'vernacular' experiments.

To assert that Saxena looks at the 'vernacular' phenomena with a great sense of understanding would not be incorrect if one looks at the lengthy and tremendously incisive discussions that she engages with in the first few chapters of her book. Relating to the common dilemma that students of literature and culture studies face in English departments, the author positions English not as the singular common tool for colonisation/globalisation but looks at all less visible, often subtle interactions that the language facilitates on the post-colonial Indian mind. To place her argument on a concrete plane of references, she de-familiarizes our regular conception of language by drawing instances from Anita Dube's fascinating experiment of writing out Franz Kafka's parables by a velvet-covered cheap steel wire that would concentrate the reader/observer's gaze at the language through form and appearance rather than meaning. This "artist's way at giving body to language", Saxena argues, breaks down the sense of 'ubiquity' that accompanies a language like English against global imagination. She cites the likes of Simon Gikhandi, Srinivas Aravamudan, Jonathan Arac, Gaurav Desai and Rey Chow to "account for the multiplicity of the very organizing principles of English". As Saxena mentions, "Both the unmarked neutrality of English as a scholarly medium and its much remarked upon expropriations as a global imperialist language perpetuate the absorptive logic of language." She further refers to the difference in receptions that English gets to be worked upon and claims, "*The variety of (mis)recognitions, accents, and inflections that mark English chart desire and (un)belonging across class, ethnic, gender, and caste differences. This economy of literary, sonic, and visual English across languages and media—its use by people outside of traditional privileges of class, urbanism, and education—diminishes the authority of English as a language of global and colonial power. With such ubiquity, English demands newer ways of reading and conceptualizing and power.*" This statement, in many ways, becomes the guiding motif of the book.

The first chapter of the text locates the introduction of English in the Indian system of education and hence rekindles the historical debates on figures like Thomas Babington Macaulay and Charles Grant while attempting to gauge the peculiarities of Indic languages like Sanskrit and Hindustani, even Urdu and Persian, those that could hardly disentangle themselves from the tentacles of caste and class and communal differences. English, with the patronage of the British colonial government, and hence arrived with a promise of European notions of democracy and equality albeit keeping true to its intimate association with an oppressive colonial bureaucracy. Saxena observes a spectacularly intriguing phenomenon with the idea of English being co-opted as an "associate language" to Hindi in a political independent, post-colonial India. For her study, the author specifically looks into bureaucratic documents that contain "paper truths" and profess that which is "all wrapped up with

showing and all showing wrapped up with knowledge.” Reading from Rashmi Sadana’s *English Heart, Hindi Heartland* (2012), Saxena reads the peculiar experiences of power that Hindi and English exchange in administrative functions of the Indian government when Hindi is ‘transliterated’ into English to “vernacularize” the latter into Indian minds. Saxena observes that this incidence while allowing English to cling onto the upper echelons of the Indian elite population, also endorses its acceptability given its ‘distant’ character to the non-Hindi speaking Indian ethnicities. This distance is ironically the reason that encourages ‘familiarity’ and acceptance of the vernacularized English language as a language of Indians and emerges as one through which the essence of constitutional “Indianness” is communicated to non-Hindi speakers.

In the second chapter, Saxena studies the Dalit question that bears on the caste marks of touchability/untouchability. Referring back to an event in Sahitya Akademi that witnessed exclusive discussions by Dalit writers who write in English; the contradiction of whether to understand them as Dalit artists or as writers who write in English becomes a structural pivot around which this entire chapter is constructed. To the author, these apparently paradoxical questions of identity is about sight, much like English, which is used as a marker of unintelligibility that haunts public spaces of the cosmopolitan environment in India. Drawing from Anupama Rao’s *The Caste Question* (2009) that proclaimed “the history of India’s political modernity is a history of the term Dalit” and the “reorganization of caste under political modernity” illuminates a “constitutive relationship between Dalit emancipation and India democracy.” In discussing writers like Manoranjan Byapari, Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd, Chandrabhan Prasad (who constructed a temple for Goddess English) and Meena Kandaswamy, Saxena’s chief proposition is that the language English, with all the experiences by Dalit writers (and individuals exposed to English signage in Indian public spaces and literature), nourishes and expresses a discourse that essentially resists dominations by caste, culture, communities and even colonialism. This is not only through translating the non-hierarchical ethos of praxis but also through transforming English as a signifier language and altering the probabilities of signification altogether.

The third chapter, based on the idea of the text and the vernacular possibilities within the Anglophone, studies Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable* and Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* in an act of Deleuzian “minorizing the major” and locates sections of the texts where English as an instrument of power discourse, belonging not only to the colonial masters but also to the privileged castes and classes in Indian society, encounter moments of disruption, resistance and counter-discourse in its content, form and representation. In this, the character of Bakha (from Anand’s *Untouchable*) is minutely studied by the author where silences and ‘meaningless’ significations affect both the body and the being of the character (interestingly a real life experience of Anand with M K Gandhi regarding this text has also been vividly recollected). Similarly, an episode from Roy’s book *The God of Small Things*, has been analysed to look at the different possibilities of power. In an unsettling section relating to the upper caste Kochamma and a movement that “exposes” identities, just like it exposed privileges (like the sheltered depiction of the car), Roy’s text provides moments of disruption for Saxena, in the otherwise hegemonic language itself and that in the dominant ethos of Indian imagination.

The fourth chapter in the text understands ‘sound’ in the English language as a possible marker for disorienting dominant narratives. In the chapter Saxena broadly studies the Manipuri anti-establishment movements that used English to “throw back” power on the face of the Indian military system that had a controversial record in the state. Saxena studies silences and possibilities of language through the heinous rape of Thangjam Manorama Devi and several other women before massive protests shook the consciousness of the nation and its establishment. Saxena also relates to the question of ‘mother-tongue’ and the language of protest (here English) to read through what hegemony and counter-hegemony meant in formations of meaning and expression through the sounds of the English language. The author intends to suggest that often English is read or expressed without comprehension (that alters dominance that is nascent in the language’s history and politics) and relocates it at a site of resistance.

Finally, Saxena promises to study a couple of films that reveal the ‘ubiquitous’ and often non-meaningful ways to perceive English in India. She takes up Danny Boyle’s *Slumdog Millionaire* and Zoya Akhtar’s *Gully Boy*, both situated in Mumbai’s Dharavi, to study how English became a commonplace site for inspiration and even liberation against the popular belief of elitism. Saxena’s attempt is to argue that Indianness as a qualifier remains much more ‘messianic’ at times when a language like English becomes a language of ambition and social upward mobility.

If read from the perspective of translation politics, Saxena succeeds to offer a relatively deeper and fresher view on the construction of the Anglophone that has lately become a homogenous term for global politics. To her, Anglophone may not relatively be a stable concept of a singular, rather exclusive signifier but might very well be read through ‘provincialising’ English as a language that translates invisible boundaries into moments of survival and liberation. Specifically, talking about the post-colonial Indian scene, as Saxena proposes, the ‘meaninglessness’ of a ‘hegemonic’ language or the sensory perception of a ‘defamiliarized’ English might be a method in studying the language with a greater engagement of social reality and all that is ‘real’ in politics.

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LORE AND VERSE: POEMS ON HISTORY IN EARLY MEDIEVAL CHINA. By Yue Zhang. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2022. xv+223 pp.

Yue Zhang’s book is the first English monograph which investigates the *yongshi shi*, the poems on history, which is one of the important subgenres in the history of Chinese literature.

**Intense Problem Awareness:** The author has a distinct consciousness of questions. From the very beginning, he said in the book: “What were *yongshi shi* in early medieval China? What is the relationship between *yongshi shi* and *huaigu shi* in this period?” (6) Because *yongshi shi* is the key index word in the monograph, its definitions and scope are a must to be investigated and analyzed.

In the following chapters, it is the questions that lead and make a further study of the poems on history. In chapter 2, those questions are how Zuo Si’s poems related and contributed to the *yongshi* subgenre, as well as how they reflected the broader context of Western Jin Dynasty (265–316), etc. The question in Chapter 3 is whether Zuo’s efforts were effective in shaping the prospective memory of his poems. Chapter 4 “focuses on how Tao Yuanming’s reflections in his *yongshi shi* carried on cultural memory in a way that also conveyed his personal perspective on life, moving the *yongshi* subgenre from the political realm into the individual realm” (73). Chapter 5 discusses how the cultural memory of Zhang Liang in Xie Zhan’s *yongshi shi* is presented through Xie’s poems inspired by visiting historical places or relics. Chapter 6 concerns the historical accounts poets chose to be memorized by the world, how poets deal with complex historical records on particular historical figures, and the approaches adopted in appropriating lore from various accounts by the poets who composed the *yongshi shi* in *Wen xuan*, and so forth.

Academic research is designed to find, analyze and solve a question. Yue Zhang has made a thorough and systemic exploration of *yongshi shi* guided by those questions in the case studies of the Poems by Zuo Si, Tao Yuanming, Xie Zhan, and the like.

Where does a question come from? It’s from the contemporary. “All the true history is the contemporary one.” (Croce 2) The truth of history lies in the accordance with the tradition that was invented by contemporary era. The questions of *yongshi shi* resulted from the concerns of the contemporary. It is true with Zuo Si, the poets before him like Ban Gu, and the ones after him such as Jiang Yan and Tao Yuanming.