
CHAPTER 6

The Exile at Home: Ahmed Ali's Twilight in Delhi

PROGRESSIVE WRITING AND THE INDIAN NOVEL IN ENGLISH

English has become ours: it is not less ours for being primarily the Englishman's or the American's; and Indo-Anglian literature too is our literature, the literature, which, with all its limitations, still taught us to be a new nation and a new people.¹

When Professor K. R. S. Iyengar, the dean of Indian writing in English, delivered these lines in a crowded lecture hall at the University of Leeds in 1959, he was quietly but triumphantly making the assertion to his audience of British academics that English had finally become an Indian language and was no longer something gifted or loaned to India by “them.” By transforming English thus, the Indian “we” had created a literature “our” own that in turn had actually created a new nation and a new people. I mention the quietness of this assertion because implicit—but certainly not explicated in it—is the entire history of anglicist policy in India starting with the 1835 English Education Act and culminating in the Orientalist Horace Wilson's dire predictions: “By annihilating native literature, by sweeping away all sources of pride