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At the Crossroads of Languages: A Study of '*Half-English, Half-Bengali*' Poems from Colonial Bengal

Multilingualism is a natural phenomenon in India, where most people are inherently bilingual or trilingual. People who can fluently communicate in three or more languages are not difficult to find across India. This multilingual nature of Indian society and culture gets naturally reflected in Indian languages and literature. This paper will focus on the modern manifestation of this linguistic situation with reference to the *oeuvre* of multilingual songs and poems that emerged after India's cultural contact with the English language in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Once a 19th – century singer in Kolkata, then the centre of British administration, was asked by his patron to perform songs before British guests. This singer who had no formal training in the English language sang a few devotional songs, otherwise attributed to the legend of Radha and Krishna, in a mixed language, which he himself called, 'Half – English, half – Bengali'. This phenomenon was not a new one, since Bengali songs with Persian phrases and words had already been composed in previous eras when India was under Mughal rule. The shift in the language, that is, from Persian to English, is representative of the administrative change, and how artists responded to this change.

The composition of the so – called, 'half – English, half – Bengali songs continued and prospered during the British rule, and soon enough became tools of satire, humour, and critique of British administration. Through this paper, the researcher would like to look into various multilingual poems and texts from India, especially from Bengal and would like to analyse them through the lenses of comparative literature, their social relevance keeping in mind the act of reception of a foreign language and artistic responses to that foreign language and foreign administration.