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This book is not lost in translation

Express Features

When historian-cum-author S Muthiah was on an early morning flight from Madras to Bengaluru, an American couple seated next to him, grabbed two popular Indian dailies and began discussing their struggle to understand a few words mentioned in the paper. Muthiah joined in and all three were engaged in an absorbing conversation about the changes English was undergoing in the countries it was spoken in. This prompted him to write a book that would act as a guide to English communication in South Asia. The historian recently released the book *Words in Indian English*.

Indian English? Yes, it is a mainstream term in the current scenario, where lexical innovations and linguistic creativity have taken centre stage. Pointing to typical Indian English phrases, Muthiah said, "I use the phrase 'I will go and come' before I leave a place. In Tamil, it's *poitu varen*. You don't just tell someone that you are going, before you leave. So, a lot of translations from vernacular languages to English have been taking place over the years, and used in the literal sense."

Talking about how Indian English has become a language of its own, Albert P Rayan, professor of English, KCG College of Technology, who released the book, said, "Phrases like 'simply sitting', 'can have the meeting in the backside', 'your good name please' and 'homely girl', the last of which means a warm and caring person, in India has a totally different meaning. Living in a multilingual country, people from different states speak English in

different ways and the language has become one of our own. It's safe to say that Indian English exists."

Shantha Gabriel, PRO, Stella Maris College who was with its department of English for 14 years received the first copy and did a reading. She remarked, "The book is clearly set out and has an interesting and enjoyable introduction. Muthiah includes an article on 'The Trouble with English in India' and hits the nail with this introduction: 'The trouble with English in India is that too many people want to use it,'" and the audience burst into laughter.

With Words like *Vada*, *Anna*, *Surya Namaskar* and *Dadagiri* making its way to the Oxford English Dictionary, it's time English included Indian English phrases and words too. "We can find such words all around us. The book contains a melange of Indian English words that I have read in Indian newspapers over a period of time and is a listing of that," added the historian.

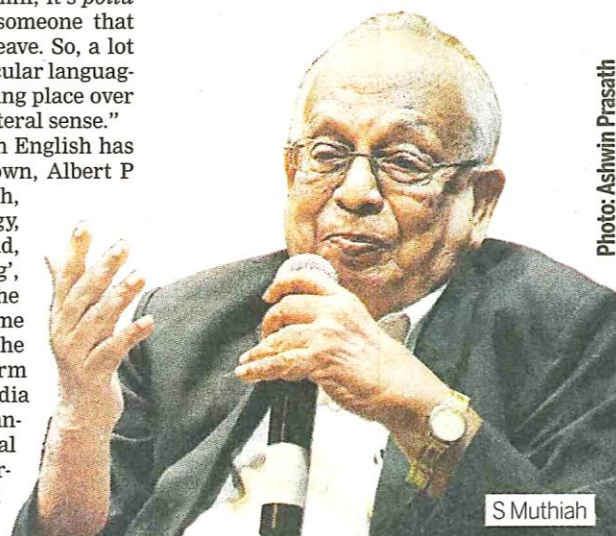


Photo: Ashwin Prasath

S Muthiah