“The Otherness of English
India’s Auntie Tongue Syndrome”

Probal Dasgupta

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From the inside jacket
This book offers a unique interpretation of the meaning of the English language in India, focusing on the mode of its presence in the post-modern phase. To do this, Professor Dasgupta presents an interdisciplinary account of the role English plays at various levels of modernization. Starting with the socio-linguistic notion of diglossia and the geo-linguistic notion of an Asian area of formalized code cleavage, the author shows that English occupies a constrained functional slot in India’s discursive space. Professor Dasgupta’s critique of earlier works on the linguistic and literary presence of English suggests that they were based on a code-oriented, naturalistic theory of language and thus could not cope with the discourse-bound properties of diglossic systems. Based on this critique, the author argues that the crucial contrast that needs to be explained - given the fact that both Sanskrit in ancient times and English today play an artificial ‘high’ role - is that between the poverty of modern India’s English compared to the obvious creative success of Sanskrit in classical times. [...] 

This is the first analysis of English (or any modern language) to situate the topic in the context shaped by recent work in a host of domains including modernization, post-modernity, cultural strategies, ‘othering’ as the cognitive content of colonial domination, and a theoretical convergence of sociology and linguistics. It will interest scholars in such fields as socio-linguistics, education, sociology, political science and English literature.