English literature is studied, at some stage or the other, by almost every middle- and upper-class person in India. Its importance as a discipline, or as a body of texts, that shapes the minds, attitudes, behaviour and social aspirations of India’s educated urban elites - who occupy powerful positions in government, business and industry - is often fundamental and certainly undoubted. Yet some of the most basic questions about English literary studies in India - such as their relevance and validity, their social functions, their institutional contexts, their pedagogic and publishing practices - are never posed. This volume, taken as a whole, breaks the long silence and asks why. It comprises seventeen essays, fourteen of which are by women academics. Collectively, they seek to show up the sorts of conservative orthodoxies, bureaucratic power structures, fossilized thought processes, unacademic institutions, colonial worldviews, outdated theoretical frameworks, gross cultural premises and crassly commercialized situations which frequently define what it means to study and teach English literature in India. The essays appear in eight sections; the first has two pieces which situate English within British and post-Independence India; the second has an essay on teaching English in the colonial context; the third has one on teaching it today. The fourth section focuses on three widely-prescribed English literary texts and analyses Indian classroom responses to these. The fifth section examines ideological and business contexts: an essay on publishing outlines the markets for anthologies, textbooks and monographs; another essay provides a critique of England’s mediations in India via the British Council. The sixth section looks at the broad types of students and teachers that exist in university departments of English, as well as at the attitudes, aspirations and academic situations that commonly prevail. The seventh section has a piece on the sorts of intellectual resistance that dominate Indian academia, specifically the resistance to those new and changing parameters of thinking about English literature which question both the sacred canon of Eng. Lit. and the professorial guardians of that canon. The final section has essays on the position of English in a post-colonial society, and on the desirability of using linguistic tools to penetrate the paradigms of literary criticism. An annexure on landmarks in Indian education policy serves as conclusion. The contributors to this volume are all Indian academics who have taught English in the country’s major universities, and some of whom are now highly-reputed expatriate professors of English in the West. Their book is a pioneering attempt to situate, define, analyse, historicize, destabilize and problematize the study of English in India. This volume will seem invaluable to teachers and students of sociology, history, colonialism and culture, and to all who teach or study English literature anywhere in the world.

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