

SELECTED INDIAN-ENGLISH FICTION:
A CRITIQUE OF INDIAN NATIONALISM

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PREFACE

Leading Indo-Anglian scholars and authors valorize an Indian national identity in Indian writing in English that is based finally on essentialist notions of Indianness. This dissertation would examine selected Indian novels in English by R.K.Narayan, Raja Rao, Salman Rushdie, and Bharati Mukherjee to show that nationalist claims to Indianness have limited, rather than expanded, the scope of Indo-Anglian studies. The novels of an earlier generation of Indian writers coming out of British colonialism have been privileged by Indo-Anglian critics because they supposedly express strong nationalist identifications. But critics have not taken into account the problematic, disrupting status of the English language in these novels.

My reading of Narayan's *The English teacher* demonstrates that Narayan's nationalist identifications waver between a deep affiliation with the British humanistic tradition and an abstract resentment against colonial power. Narayan's use of translation in *The guide* elides the categories of social class and gender when it is these categories that provide access to a stratified India that is more 'real'. My study of Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* shows that Rao's essentialist nationalist identifications are delineated at the expense of castes other than the Brahmins and without any consideration of gender. His experimentations with the English language in *Kanthapura* do not produce a viable Indianization of the English language.

The writing of a more recent generation of Indian immigrant Writers has been largely ignored by the nationalist critics because it calls into question the essentialist truths of nationalism that have been traditionally ascribed to Indo-Anglian literature. In *Midnight's Children*, Salman Rushdie examines Indian nationalism as an ideological construct that cannot be disengaged

from its discursive practice; his use of translation indicates, rather than disguises, the social categories of class and gender.

In *Wife and Jasmine*, Bharati Mukherjee outlines a project that is intended to challenge both Indian and North American nationalist discourses of femininity and “the melting pot” respectively. Finally Amitav Ghosh in *The Shadow Lines* and Anita Desai in *Bye Bye Blackbird*, have endeavored to erase those areas of ‘representational’ and ‘ideological’ separateness that give rise to segregation among nations.

Indian colonial and post-colonial writing in English is massive in its scope. Furthermore, the inclusion of certain writers in literary studies such as this one entails the exclusion of others. For this reason, the work of, say, Mulk Raj Anand, Kamala Markandaya, Bhabani Bhattacharya, V.S. Naipaul is not discussed. Among these, Mulk Raj Anand deserves a much more extensive study because his Marxist belief and his radical experimentation with the English language mediate his nationalist identifications in complex ways. Contrarily, V.S. Naipaul, an immigrant writer in Britain, tends to minimize and so hugely problematize his nationalist identifications that he is outside the scope of this study.

The present study is basically analytical in nature. Analyses of books, both primary and secondary, have helped in a major way to formulate my primary idea. Documents, statements and resolutions relating to nationalism and nationalist discourses have helped to assemble my notion. References from secondary sources and data collected on the internet have been of immense help. I have tried to acknowledge my debts to them by citing them, where apposite, as sources for my information. I have prepared a bibliography following the instructions as laid down in the M.L.A. Handbook.

Finally I would like to acknowledge the meticulous guidance and strength that my supervisor, Prof. Benoy Kr. Banerjee has provided me

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INTRODUCTION

"I'm just a red nigger who love the sea
I had a sound colonial education
I have Dutch, nigger and English in me
And either I'm nobody or I'm nation"

Omeros: Derek Walcott

"One did not have to belong; one could simply float, effortlessly, through a super-market of packaged and commodified cultures, ready to be consumed"

-In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures— Aijaz Ahmad

The discursive constitution by both novelists and critics of the field now termed "Indo-Anglian" or "Indo-English" literature has created various ways of characterizing Indian fictive writing in English, even while it remains a continually and stubbornly contradictory enterprise. On the one hand, the ongoing analyses of Indo-Anglian literature by its critics and its creative writers themselves – in their essays, introductions, prefaces, and in the fiction more obviously written with a view to its critical reception – are predicated upon notions of a consensually discernible national identity that is Indian in essence. On the other hand, the very use of the English language brings crucially into question the sort of national identity that can be assumed to have escaped Western "Orientalizing"

The basis for such a contradiction is provided by the field's preoccupation with the vexed questions surrounding nationalism: how "Indian" is this body of literature and, given that it is written in English, from what point of view can it be

pronounced "true-to-India"? The *raison d'être* of a body of writing constituted as Indo-Anglian by its creators and commentators has been defined precisely by the extent to which it has addressed these questions. This is why a historical sketch of Indo-Anglian studies as they emerged and then developed over the years is necessary; the impulse is not to offer a history so much as to go to visible conjunctures where one could say the writers' and critics' concerns with nationalism { section (3) Is it Indian?} and nationalists authenticity [{4} How is it true-to-India?] began and then persisted in problematic relation to a socio-political reality informed initially by British colonialism and then by post-and neo-colonialism.

Our first section, however, comprises a study of Nationalism and Orientalism. At this early point we wish to raise some skepticism regarding the attachment of the concept of nationalism with India-the subcontinent, that has been projected as a 'nation' for the first time, only by its colonial rulers.

1. NATIONALISM AND ORIENTALISM:

Nationalism has always been a problem with India. It is well known that much of our received knowledge about the concepts of nation and nation-state is derived from the West and is based on the Western experience. The compulsion for conceptualizing an Indian nation was largely the outcome of British colonial presence and its articulations.

The rise of Nationalism in the West has been briefly traced out by
Dipankar Gupta:

As capitalism sponsors a continuous hierarchy, it is unable to internally fuel a politics of commitment... a politics of commitment emerges when identities are informed on the principle of repulsion. This is why the forces of capitalism must necessarily take recourse to creating a supra-local allegiance based on territorial attachment to the nation state. This gives its continuous hierarchies more space to realize themselves, and at the same time fashions an exclusivist identity based on the principle of repulsion. From this identity then, a politics of commitment can be more realistically commanded. From now on members of a nation state are on guard against those who belong to other territories and other nation states.

(Gupta, 65)

With India however, the case is a bit different. Its formulation as a nation has been a recent task undertaken by the British colonizer:

Recapturing the problematic of the [Indian] nation state, it is worth reiterating that often colonial expediency alone, without any concern for history, tradition, culture, language, economy and geography had determined national boundaries. In addition to this, in India's circumstances nationhood must be forged consciously out of a commitment to political liberalism which would unite Indians against the colonizers and transcend earlier divisions & loyalties.

(Pathy, 71)

Thus a land, where "...the idea of tribe, region and nation conveyed a single complex whole.... [Where] each could only be comprehended if studied along with others" (Pathy, 76) a separate space has been created, in the name of nationalism, for its 'Others':

It was colonial subjugation that reduced the holistic multidimensional premise to analytically separable and operative wholes with distinct spaces of their own.

(Pathy, 86)

India had been a collage of self-determined multi-cultural communities: Liberalism, tolerance and acceptance of the 'others' were the hallmarks of Indian tradition. Swami Vivekananda has stated-'I am proud to belong to a tradition which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance' (World Parliament of Religion; Chicago, 1893). But--

Despite the oft-repeated slogans of unity in diversity, the practice in the last fifty years has revealed that in order to build a manufactured homogeneous syndrome on a basically heterogeneous landscape with diverse political, economic and socio-cultural dimensions, the diversities have rarely been honoured. Rather, the formation of the nation state led to the denial of diversity of cultures and value system of the peoples, and the creation of a single standardized pattern. The modernization syndrome disregarded the heterogeneity of communities and thereby not only threatened their ecological base but also their cultural viability as groups. In brief, the diversity that should have been preserved and valued has been reduced to a near historical memory under world capitalism ...That all these states contain different cultural-linguistic groups within their boundaries and that they have a tendency to maintain

their distinctiveness is something that has been
derecognised.

(Nandi, 149)

Benedict Anderson's analysis shows that nations were not the determinate products of given sociological conditions such as language or race or religion; they had been 'imagined' into existence everywhere in the world. Nationalism is often defined as an ideological phenomenon, a matter of ideas and concepts adhered to by certain groups and communities. But history shows that people of different ethno-linguistic groups located in various regions have lived harmoniously. With the rise of imperialism there is a constant fear for loss of culture, language and tradition and even religion. Thus they begin to detach themselves as 'unique' and 'other' and in this way nation becomes "region as a mental construction" (Hartshorne). A series of elements are identified, constructed and placed together to constitute the nation.

Benedict Anderson has also indicated the ties between nation-building and print communities formed around newspaper and novels. The novels, he says, helped to create "imagined communities" through their "empty, calendrical, time" that accommodates an entire civizenry. Accordingly, the critics and writers of Indo-Anglian literature, being aware of their uniqueness or 'Otherness'

....tend to be either racists...or individualists. The racists devoutly believe *Indianization of Indo-English literature* and usually seek to demonstrate that Indian writers think alike, feel alike, and therefore write alike (and thus separated from European writers)...so long he is Indian his writing is regarded as an expression of nativity, a verbal manifestation of Indian soul...Nationalist critics are preoccupied with *mapping the geography of Indo-Anglian literature*...a literature conveniently contained

within the arbitrary territorial and essential
boundaries drawn by the former colonial powers.

(Manom, 292)

Infact, using the 'nationalist' platform, we are participating in the act of seclusion / exclusion and in our process of denial what we have been doing is an assertion of Western Orientalizing.

In his book *Orientalism*, Edward Said has shown how the post-Enlightment age in Europe produced an entire body of knowledge in which the Orient appeared as a system of representations framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and later, Western empire. As a style of thought, Orientalism is 'based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident"'. On this basis, an 'enormously systematic discipline' was created 'by which European culture was able to manage_ and even produce_ the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightment period.' Orientalism created the Oriental; it was a body of knowledge in which the Oriental was contained and represented by dominating frameworks and Orientalism was 'a kind of Western projection onto and will to govern over the Orient.'

The central characteristics of the dominating framework of knowledge have been described by Anouar Abdel-Malek as follows, and this characterization has been adopted by Said. Abdel-Malek identified the problematic in Orientalism as one in which the Orient and the Orientals were

...an 'object' of study, stamped with an otherness_ as all that is different, whether it be 'subject' or 'object'_ but of a constitutive otherness, of an essentialist character... This 'object' of study will be, as is customary, passive, non-participating, endowed

with a 'historical' subjectivity, above all, non-active, non-autonomous, non-sovereign with regard to itself: the only Orient or Oriental or 'subject' which could be admitted, at the extreme limit, is the alienated being, philosophically, that is, other than itself in relationship to itself, posed, understood, defined and acted by others. .At the level of the thematic, on the other hand, there was an essentialist concept of the countries, nations, and peoples of the Orient under study, a conception that expresses itself through a characterized ethnist typology...

(Abdel-Malek, 102)

By applying this distinction to our material, we will find that the problematic in nationalist thought is exactly the reverse of that of Orientalism. That is to say, the 'object' in nationalist thought is still the Oriental, who retains the essentialist character depicted in the Orientalist discourse. Only he is not passive, non-participating. He is seen to possess a 'subjectivity', which he can himself 'make'. In other words, while his relationships to himself and to others have been 'posed, understood and defined' by others, i.e. by an objective scientific consciousness, by Knowledge, by Reason, those relationships are not acted by others. His subjectivity, he thinks, is active, autonomous and sovereign.

At the level of the thematic, on the other hand, nationalist thought accepts and adopts the same essentialist conception based on the distinction between 'the East' and 'the West', the same typology created by a transcendent studying subject, and hence the same 'objectifying' procedures of knowledge constructed in the post-Enlightenment age of Western science.

There is, consequently, an inherent contradictoriness in nationalist thinking, because it reasons within a framework of knowledge whose representational structure corresponds to the very structure of power, nationalist thought seeks to repudiate. Partha Chatterjee has rightly observed:

The domain of sovereignty, which nationalism thought of as the 'spiritual' or 'inner' aspects of culture, such as language or religion or the elements of personal and family life, was of course premised upon a difference between the cultures of the colonizer and the colonized. The more nationalism engaged in its contest with the colonial power in outer domain of politics, the more it insisted on displaying the marks of 'essential' cultural difference so as to keep out the colonizer from that inner domain of national life and to proclaim its sovereignty over it.

(Chatterjee, 26)

Similarly out of an urge to construct an essentially 'true' Indian novel, the Indo-Anglian writers have in fact nourished the Western definition of the 'native' and have failed to erase the marks of colonial difference.

Thus the themes handled by the older generation of novelists in English had for a long time remained predictably, what Meenakshi Mukherjee calls, 'pan-Indian': "the time worn clichés of East-West confrontation". It is a well-accepted fact that novel as a genre has traditionally been implicated in the construction and consolidation of the idea of nation, e.g. *Robinson Crusoe*, *Jane Eyre* or *The Forsyte Saga*. The Indo-Anglian novels have also, in its brief history, been visibly concerned with defining such a national identity. Raja Rao's definition had a Brahmanic frame; R K Narayan distilled its essence through a benign small town, middle-class and upper-caste in its composition; some others constructed their India in opposition to what the West was supposed to connote. What appeared to be 'indigenous', in fact was the repetition of the British criteria for being 'Oriental'.

In an attempt of constructing a clearly defined and recognizable India, the writers have given a detailed description of the Indian 'ways' in such a detailed fashion that in their attempt of 'Nativization', the implicit addressee [reader] seems to be situated outside the culture, possibly in England, or among Colonial administrators living in India, who are concrete representatives of the abstract 'Other' as far as Indians are concerned. For example when Lal Behari Day in his novel *Govinda Samanta* (1874) announces without context that there are no taverns in Bengal village for peasants to spend an evening in, or that young men and women in India have no concept of courtship, he is testifying to his concern with alien reader. His gratuitous cultural gloss goes on to elaborate Indian matters, for the benefit of this reader:

In Bengal and in most of India_ they do not make love in the honourable sense of the word. Unlike the butterfly whose courtship Darwin assures us, is a very long affair, the Bengali does not court at all. Marriage is an affair arranged either by the parents and guardians of the bachelors and the spinsters... (p. 3)

A Madhaviah in his novel *Satyananda* (1909) similarly pauses in his narration to provide anthropological details about the outlandish habits of Hindus:

The Hindu husband and his wife have no recognized form of addressing each other and strange are the devices often resorted to by them...The Brahman wife generally calls her lord's attention by means of a peculiar noise...while the husband refers to his helpmate as 'she', 'it', 'our housewoman', 'you' or more often by a meaningless interjection. (p. 255)

In all these instances, we perceive how the addresser (writer) is in turn being constructed by the supposed alien addressee, located in a foreign culture. At a time when one of the functions of the Indo-Anglian novel was the consolidation of an incipient nationalism, any assertion of a broadly Indian identity was undertaken generally to emphasize “Otherness” and exoticity rather than to make a political statement. The project of portraying a “true” India has resulted in reaffirming the British definition of the “Oriental”.

(2) THE ‘TRUE-to-INDIA’ FORMULA !

We often doubt if there can be a truistic equating of “Indian” with nationalism. Can there even be such a point of view that can be called ‘true-to-India’, such a formulation, i.e., that can be represented in terms of ‘truth’? Two theoretical issues merge here, that of representation of nationalism and that of the discursive functioning of this representation as ‘truth’. In Michel Foucault’s socio-historical work on genealogy and discourse, it is the various interested constructions of ‘truth’ that have come under active scrutiny. For

and ...truth isn't outside power...Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its own regime of truth, its general 'politics of truth: that is, the type of discourse which it accepts makes function as true.

(Foucault, 131)

Foucault implies here what he states later on: discourses produce effects of truth; they are in themselves neither true nor false. In this sense, as a post-independence country hungry to define itself as a nation, the Indian subcontinent began producing nationalist formulations that discursively and genealogically affected certain “truths.”

Hence, the Indo-Anglian critic's formulation of "truth", insofar as it has defined Indian nationalism and nationalist authenticity in Indian writing in English, has been non-productive. An effort to locate Indian national identity (itself an enormously heterogeneous and problematic concept) in its corresponding "truthful" expression in literature can prove and indeed has proved to be a deadly malaise when all that it amounts to is an announcement of inviolable otherness; this "otherness", however, is an "Orientalized" construct that had already been attributed to the "native" of the Indian subcontinent under the British government's imperialist campaign. So one may put to question the usefulness of the gesture of putting on the garb of otherness as if it were an originary, self-discovered identity.

At least one result of the critic's (and the writer's) location of national identity in Indo-Anglian literature in terms of "truth" has been the privileging of India-born writers who display nationalist affinities. This privileging has, in turn, worked to undermine the writing of Indian immigrants to Britain and North America. R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao provide the bastions on which the validity of Indo-Anglian literature rests and Salman Rushdie and Bharati Mukherjee stand in for the Westernized, alienated writers lost in search of their Indian identity.

V.K. Gokak, an influential Indian critic who was the first to define the term "Indian-English-writers" (i.e. Indo-Anglians), makes this bias very clear:

Where Indo-Anglian writing very nearly approximates to English writing in its accent, tone, vocabulary, syntax and style, *by reason of the writer's interest or domicile*, it also tends to lose, to that extent, Indianness of thought and vision. *Our Indo-Anglians, who are fond of cosmopolitan living, have plenty of flavour of conversational English in their writings. The latest fashion in language, which they assimilate, and employ in their writing, makes them more 'Anglian' than 'Indian'. They tend to write about India from the*

outside rather than inside. On the other hand, the Indo-Anglians who are true to Indian thought and vision cannot escape the Indian flavour even when they write in English... (Italics mine)

(Gokak, 9)

Gokak here attaches a particular "truth" to the writer's domicile. In other words, "Indianness of thought and vision" can only be written by native Indians; hence expatriate Indian writers are cast as *Westernized and unpatriotic* by virtue of their "interest and domicile" for, "fond of cosmopolitan living", they "merely follow the latest fashions in language". The latter are "Anglian", the former "Indian."

In fact, by delineating the field of Indo-Anglian literature in this manner, Gokak prefigures and, to some extent, even dictates the nature of more recent unfortunate reactions by Indian intellectuals to Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. The popular Sikh writer, journalist, and consultant editor of Penguin in India, Khushwant Singh, himself an adventurous risk-taker in his work, was among the first to voice his uneasiness over Rushdie's controversial and "irresponsible" treatment of the Prophet's life in *The Satanic Verses*. He was soon followed by the majority of Indian intellectuals who were well versed in the consequences of religious riots in the subcontinent and to whom Rushdie unmistakably represented the Westernized immigrant alienated from the cruel realities of religious segregation in India. (If a shift from Gokak's aestheticized idealization of India to Singh's awareness of its political realities seems to have occurred, this is due, in part, to Singh's own delicate position as a consultant editor of Penguin in India who, upon reading the manuscript for Penguin, has to adjudicate Rushdie's radical political views for an Indian audience.)

It is interesting to note that Govinda Sarma, who quotes Gokak in *Nationalism in Indo-Anglian Fiction*, devotes his study to the "Indian" and not the "Anglian" writers; he accepts Gokak's bias as self-evident truth. By thus

legitimizing the “Indo” “Anglian” division, his argument becomes a redundant and circular exercise: he chooses to study writers who are “Indian” and the writers who are “Indjan” display the spirit of nationalism in theme and language. Therefore, a host of illegitimate local arguments has been valued in the service of the “truth” of Indianness; this Indianness has been preserved as inviolably “Other”, “non-Western”, when, in fact, it is a received Western, “Orientalized” definition of the Indian “native”.

Gokak’s and Sarma’s arguments point to the inadequacy of the title “Indian-English”/”Indo-Anglian”, its inability to contain and explain the definitions it has produced in the context of an increasingly multicultural, internationalist, capitalist, and cosmopolitan world that has grown at once smaller and more complicated. Further, even as post-colonial, post-war “brain-drain” has led to a diminishment of the immediacy of nationalist concerns at home, the First World countries of Britain and the United States to which immigrants like Salman Rushdie and Bharati Mukherjee now “belong” are in turn having to re-articulate their own nationalist concerns in order to contain and explain their multicultural diversity.[Timothy Brennan, *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989), 50. At times illuminating, Brennan’s work fails to take into account the actual weight and work of Indian nationalist literary thought that Rushdie is up against. Instead, Brannon’s effort is expended towards making Rushdie exemplary of the Third World]

Symptomatic of the inadequacy of the title “Indian-English”/”Indo-Anglian” is the fact that Gokak ambivalently calls the Westernized Indian writers “our Indo-Anglians “. Now, in what sense are these “Indo-Anglian” writers his and presumably an entire Indian-based community’s if they are more “Anglian” than “Indian”? There seems to be an appropriation of the sophisticated English which these “Anglian” writers presumably use even if, at the same time, Gokak extols the value of “Indianness”.

What we wish to examine in subsequent pages of this study, then, is the constitution of Indian-English /Indo-Anglian studies as a field which allowed and disallowed privileges based on the critics' and writers' claims to nationalism and nationalist authenticity. An examination of R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao shows that these claims have elided the radical raptures that have taken place due to the creative use of the English language. Two symptoms of these raptures appear in the form of the contradictory or essentialist national identifications and problematic translations.

Because its definitions have proved to be inadequate, the field has been unable to include Salman Rushdie's and Bharati Mukherjee's rich and complex identifications with nationalism. Rushdie's and Mukherjee's writing points to and indeed even lives in the space which is an excess of the field as it has been defined thus far; this excess should serve equally to define the field. For with Rushdie, Mukherjee, Amitav Ghosh and Anita Desai, contradiction and translation determine the very condition of their existence as immigrant writers.

Finally then, we will argue that the field of Indian-English studies must be re-defined in global term—not as the overly aesthetic and neutral study of “Indo-Anglian” or “Indian-English literature” but as the study of a highly political and global category of literature about (and not necessarily in) the Indian subcontinent, one that records the conditions of multicultural, multilingual Third World, post-colonial discourses.

In the larger narrative of the history of Anglo-American and European criticism, post-modernism and post-structuralism mark a break from the concerns of classical aesthetics, and so make it possible for literature to be read in relation to the politically charged categories of race, gender and class. This literature has, however, been largely European and Anglo-American. In the specific study of marginalized (in this case “Third World”) literatures, the post-colonial critic combats two methodological problems that become the parameters for post-

colonial critical studies. First, while the categories of race, gender and class are to be recognized as themselves politically constituted and deployed, in the post-colonial context they must not be reconstituted in terms of a nostalgic recovery of what was lost through British imperialism. One is not, that is, at liberty to imagine and posit an ideal, non-stratified, pre-colonial Indian condition.

Second, one must not reinscribe within the categories of race, gender and class a hegemonic "First World" reading implicated in the act of domesticating a simply oppositional "Other". Gayatri Spivak says,

To consider the Third World as distant cultures, exploited but with rich intact literary heritage waiting to be recovered, interpreted, and curricularized in English translation fosters the emergence of "the Third World" as a signifier that allows us to forget that 'worlding' [the narrative, in literary history ...of what is now called the "Third World"] even as it expands the empire of the literary discipline.

(Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism, 261.)

In this essay, Spivak renders the moment of imperialism as a fracture that makes impossible a nostalgic recovery of the colonized country's origins. In the same essay, she tries to locate the category of gender in Western feminist terms as itself imperialistic:

It seems particularly unfortunate when the emergent perspective of feminist criticism reproduces the axioms of imperialism. A basically isolationist admiration for the literature of the female subject in Europe and Anglo-America established the high feminist norm. It is supported and operated by an information-retrieval approach to Third World literature which often employs a deliberately 'non-

(Three Women's Text and a Critique of Imperialism, 243)

In other words, to non-problematically incorporate the "Other" that is the Third World into a First World literary field is to ignore the fact that the incorporation itself might be an act complicit with the history of imperialism.

In the following pages, we work within these parameters in order to study and redefine Indian-English/Indo-Anglian studies. A search for pre-colonial origin seems, by its naïve nature, to imply that the moment of colonialism is only an interruption of a continuous, linear Indian history. But the moment of imperialism not only fractured this historical continuum; it dictated the very discourse in which Indian scholars would talk about Indian history, whether that history be pre-colonial or modern. The danger of a First World academic domestication of the simply oppositional "Other" is that it tends to merely continue or parallel the history of the imperialist, Orientalizing project. This appropriation of the Third World then blocks out the possibility and positive value of critical intervention in the course of both the history of empire and the history of academic imperialism.

These parameters are not meant to posit another politically correct "truth", as opposed to the "truth" that Indo-Anglian critics have engendered. Instead, they provide the boundaries for a responsible political stance from which to study and re-define Indo-Anglian studies. First, how did Indian scholars and writers go about constructing a national identity that is in fact problematic because, far from being uniquely Indian, as they claim, it relied on Western thought for its conception?

[3] Is it Indian? Or "Matthew Arnold in a sari?" (*The Swan and the Eagle*, 12)

In the genealogy of Indo-Anglian critical studies, Indian nationalism was equated uncritically, even pre-critically, with an unexamined and finally subjective sense of what it meant to "write" race into the English language. The whole problem of how this creative writing could ever have taken place without a radical rupture in the meaning-making process enacted between text and writer, text and reader, was not explored. That it could not have been explored was due, in part, to the fact that such writers as R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao achieved popularity in the West in the nineteen-thirties, at a time when anti-colonial movements did not connote a particular value there. Since their literature targeted a Western audience (only critical acclaim abroad legitimized these novels at home), it was already rhetorically geared toward reproducing Orientalized information for the very audience that had determined its production in the first place.

The earliest Indian writing in English began as far back as the second half of the nineteenth century because, after 1835, English came to stay in India as the language of most educational institutions. In fact, even before Macaulay's decision in 1835 to institute the English language on all levels of governmental and educational work in the Indian subcontinent, enough Christian missionary teaching of English in schools and colleges had begun. It is a well-recorded fact that these missionaries produced a vernacularization of English which, in turn, was itself influenced by Indian vernaculars.[for instance, Feroza Jussawalla, *Family Quarrels: Towards a Criticism of Indian Writing in English* (New York: Peter Lang, 1985), 2.] Further, many Indians desired a Western education and Macaulay implicitly addressed this desire in his minute on Indian Education of February 2, 1835.

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Macaulay's minute signified the British government's imperialist concern with instituting English as the language of educational systems, a concern which, by extension, had to have altered Indian literary and cultural forms. It is important to note that these resulting changes can't be of their ideologically charged content and can't be dismissed as simply "bad" or simply "good". Instead, the question may usefully be asked, what did this decisive minute produce?

Abdul JanMohamed has underscored a distinction between the "dominant" phase of imperialism (which lasts up to the granting of independence to the colonized country) and the "hegemonic" phase (neocolonialism, or the phase in which "natives" have internalized Western forms of administration).[Abdul JanMohamed, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature", *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (Autumn 1985), 61-62] JanMohamed allots to the first phase the direct colonialist material practice of exploiting "native" resources; in the second phase, which he sees as properly neo-colonial, colonialist discourse starts to exert full force in convincing the "native" to change his savage ways.

JanMohamed's model provides a distinction between two planes of the history of empire as well as between the different and contradictory rules that govern colonialist material practice and colonialist discourse in each. A mapping out such as this one serves to lay bare some of the operations and effects of imperialism. But it also runs the risk of rendering them static. In a complex way, Macaulay's minute is both colonialist discourse and direct material practice; it is distributed unevenly in both its overt aim, in the guise of Britain's "social mission", to educate and Westernize (i.e. civilize) the Indian, and its overt aim to produce an Indian intelligentsia which would ally itself to, and ensure, British economic presence in India.

Macaulay, in his administrative capacity as member of the Supreme Council and President of the Committee of Public Instruction, spoke to an audience comprised of the Governor General Lord Bentinck and his representatives on the urgency of promoting "European literature and science among the natives of India". [Thomas B.M. Macaulay, *Prose and Poetry*, ed. G.M. Young (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), 719]. Lord Bentinck formally approved such a plan on March 7. The tone and content of the minute on Indian Education are, of course, rampantly imperialist, but so sanctioned and institutionalized as to appear only natural. It is obvious matter of fact to Macaulay that,

...a single shelf of a good European library [is] worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. The intrinsic superiority of the Western literature is, indeed, fully admitted by those members of the Committee who support the Oriental plan of education...It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say, that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanscrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgments used at preparatory schools in England.

(Macaulay, 722)

All this is said when "I have no knowledge of either Sanscrit or Arabic."

"But", he says,

I have done what I could to form a correct estimate of their value. I have read translations of the most celebrated Arabic and Sanscrit works.

(Macaulay, 722)

Suffice it to say that while it is the obviousness (of the fact) that renders proof of the superiority of the English language unnecessary, it is also the same

obviousness that makes it unnecessary for Macaulay to read Oriental literature except in select canonical Orientalized translations and as a way of correctly estimating their value. Edward Said has pointed out that gestures like Macaulay's were traditional "Orientalizing" moves:

...the Orient in itself was subordinated intellectually to the West. As material for study or reflection the Orient acquired all the marks of an inherent weakness.

(*Orientalism* 152)

As was evidenced by the socio-political history hinging upon the ambiguous benefits of the English language, Macaulay's minute now allowed Britain's centralized literate power to be more widely and heterogeneously reproduced and distributed among certain sections of the Indian intelligentsia ("brown sáhibs", anti-British activists, college students, aspiring writers, etc.) even as it constituted the site for further heated anti-British sentiment.

For the purpose of genealogically locating the discourses around and about the Indian-English literature, Macaulay's minute and the importation of the novel serve as dominant and visible impulses behind the gradual production of books written in English by Indians in the nineteenth century. The eighteenth-century writing of Fielding, Smollett, Richardson and Sterne established a viable precedent for the genre of the novel in Britain, although the point has to be made that there, too, the novel has to be located and defined in problematic relation to the cultural conditions that produced it. But there had hitherto been no genre recognizable as the novel in the Indian subcontinent, although poetry, epic and drama had occupied "high" and "popular" places in an active and primarily religious, written and oral history.

Critics seem to agree that this early Indian writing in English was largely unsuccessful in terms of the handling of English by a non-English writer; but this literature's concern with "Indian" themes makes it authentic. [Most of my information about these early novels, largely inaccessible and out of print, comes from Narasimhaiah, *The Swam and the Eagle* and Iyengar, *Indian Writing in English*. A brief list of novels is as follows: Pyaricharan Mitra, *The Spoilt Child* (1858); Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864); Sorabji, *Life Behind the Purdah* (1901); S.B. Banerjee, *Tales of Bengal* (1910); Romesh Chander Dutt, *The Lake of Palms* (1902) and *The Slave Girl of Agra* (1909)] These novels demonstrate powerfully the birth of a paradox that would later become a contradiction to boggle the Indian intellectual mind: namely, how can one write in the colonizer's language about colonized subjects? Further, these novels put into motion the positioning of the Indian as native informant. Indians began producing writing that contained "native" Indian subjects; most of it took the form of social treatises aimed at the reform of "barbaric" Indian practices (like dowry and the purdah). Addressing itself to Western curiosity about the Orient, it was already shaped by British literary influences. A striking image of this kind of paradox may be found in the figure of the Indian poet, Henry Derozio (1809-1831), who taught for a while at the Hindu College in Calcutta. A self-acclaimed westernized liberal, Derozio condemned Hindu superstition and primitivism and lauded the French revolution and Christian missionary work in the subcontinent. Fired by the Romantic ideals of Byron, he rode through the streets of Calcutta on an Arab horse. Yet a more patriotic zealot could not have been found. His poems draw equally on Hindu mythology and Wordsworthian influences and demonstrate a disgust for India's colonized situation. [See H.M. Williams, *Indo-Anglian Literature (1800-1970): A Survey* (Bombay: Orient Longman Ltd., 1977), 15]

The first critical discourses to adequately respond to the minute and this production of books were formulated in the early nineteen-sixties. They

unanimously hail the English language's utilitarian purpose of yoking disparate regional linguistic elements {by virtue of providing a language common to educated Indians across the sub-continent}. But they meander into an unfortunate contradiction that was to determine the course of Indo-Anglian studies. Namely, they create as their object of study a quintessential Indianness that withstands a translation to the English language and survives intact in the literature in spite of that translation and the political condition of neo-colonialism; at the same time, they measure, in some confused spirit of critical evaluation, the early Indian novels written in English against their Victorian "counterpart" in Britain, institutionalizing thereby a practice of letting the "master" text exert and continue its own hegemony in the space of Indian writing in English. If a novel didn't "sound" English enough, it wasn't good enough. I am referring to the first full length critical works that in fact expressly aimed to constitute the field of study of Indo-Anglian literature, C.D. Narasimhaiah's *The Swan and the Eagle* (1969) and K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar's *Indian Writing in English* (1961; rev. 1973). Iyengar does this by the immediate claim to nationalism. Narasimhaiah's bias toward the innate superiority of the English language and Indian nationalism emerges more subtly. Feroza Jussawalla succinctly summarizes his critical prejudices:

1) the literature could not be any good if it did not imitate what was produced abroad; 2) it could be any good if it was written in English by someone who had not been abroad—implicit in this is the judgment that Indians could not use English effectively by themselves; 3) the writer could not produce great literature if he was not concerned with the profounder issues which could range anywhere from Indianizing English, to expressing Indian philosophical problems, to dealing with the current nationalistic issues.

(*Family Quarrels*, 7)

In the constitution of the field as Indian-English, then, the novels of the first major writers, R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, and Raja Rao were made synonymous with a sort of aesthetically delineated nationalism that was only very

tenuously linked to and in fact displaced the material sense in which “nationalism” originated as a political movement against British imperialism in India with the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885. Partha Chatterjee’s historical research has shown that Indian nationalist political thought was itself attempting to structure an essentialist Indian nationalist discourse, even as it was being shaped by nineteenth century British logic. [Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1986)]. Indo-Anglian studies performed a similar activity, with a further complication introduced by the aestheticizing, rather than the politicizing, of nationalism.

Feroza Jussawalla, whose study explores the relationship between Indian writing in English and its criticism, seems to skirt the issues surrounding the earlier critics’ aestheticized displacement of nationalism by casting this displacement in the friendlier language of absorption and incorporation:

Indian critics...felt that Indian literature should be patterned after British literature. At the same time, Indians should attempt to make the English language their own. For, nationalist criticism indicated that Indians should shake off the yoke of imperialism but if it could not be thrown off, it should be incorporated into Indian nationalism.

(*Family Quarrels*, 7-8)

In any case, what was beginning to get theorized was a now familiar critical agenda: the text or subtext in Indian writing in English is about a clearly identifiable national identity which, while it is jeopardized by the threat of foreign presence, stands to gain from the influence of that presence; so Indianness is distilled from Indian writing in English as the pure factor which enables originality while the sophistication and flexibility of the English language are lauded. Narasimhaiah asserts dogmatically:

Now what holds writers so divergent as those whose work is examined here, together? First and foremost, their writing is the *expression of a distinct, identifiable sensibility which is Indian, and the language, foreign in that it is not picked up on the mother's lap but learnt assiduously by a most sensitive exposure to its practitioners* in a wide-ranging variety of speech and writing in India and abroad.

(The Swan and the Eagle, xiii-xiv)

Published as recently as 1985, Samares Sanyal's study, *Indianness in Major Indo-English Novels* represents precisely the nationalist enterprise which salvages thematic concerns (Indian English, Myth as Technique, Asceticism and Renunciation, Gandhian Nationalism) peculiar to the Indian temperament. "English", he says,

though not native to the Indian soil, can be adopted by the Indian writer to the needs of expressing Indian thought and tradition without being grossly misused. Whatever merit the Indian languages can claim to have for expressing the life of the Indian people and the distinctiveness of the values of Indian life is possessed by English too.

(Indianness in Major Indo-Anglian Novels, 13)

Sanyal's is a gesture that leaps to a non-problematic equation between language and "life"/"values"/"thought"/"tradition" on behalf of both the sub-continent of India and the original English speaking countries of the world. The point to be made here, however, is that his notion of "English" is of course an already received one; the more obstinately difficult point to be made is that his notion of what is "Indian" falls into a received category also, a category that is already "Orientalized". What must be acknowledged is that any nationalist concept of Indian-writing in English is one that must invariably be mediated by already "Orientalized" categories of understanding. When, for instance, Sanyal

salutes the ambitious project of the "Indo-Anglians", his idiom and ethic are Victorian: "...there are men and women who have bravely run the race and reached the goal."(6). What in this sentiment is especially Indian?

Note also the chapter "India" in *The Commonwealth Pen: An Introduction to the Literature of the Commonwealth*, in which K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar puts himself in the position of "native informant" to the West:

Indian literature is somewhat akin to a garden. Nature, man, the march of history, the play of chance, all have taken a hand in making this garden. One marks the individual trees, one is attracted by the flower here, the fruit; but one takes no less the garden, admiring its relations and proportions and inferring its unifying and harmonizing elements. (116)

As native informant, however, Iyengar legitimizes his identity by writing in line with the British literary mainstream; his notion of unity and harmony presents itself as vaguely Johnsonian or Austenian in ethos. And here we have clear Keatsian and Tennysonian traces:

Drinking deep in the springs of English literature,
Bengali youths wished to lisp in English and also to
give Bengali a new vigor and sensibility. (119)

In this essay, Iyengar seems to be engaged in the project of legitimizing Indian writing in English in nationalist terms under the rubric of "Commonwealth literature". It is illuminating to note that, in his 1989 study, *Salman Rushdie and the Third World*, Timothy Brennan quotes Srinivasa to show that Indian writing in English had a limited following in the West, in contrast to the following of

African and Caribbean Commonwealth literatures. Brennan seems to be responding to Iyengar's position as native informant by placing him in the position of authority. This position, however, is itself engaged in the act of producing, promoting, and establishing that very authority. [Brennan, *Salman Rushdie*, 79].

Actively influenced by the nationalist spirit which produced this sort of nationalist criticism, the post-war, post-independence Indian novels written in English sought to locate "India" and delineate proudly its "unity in diversity" (the patriotic motto later emblazoned in post-independence Indian history textbooks): "Again and again, behind the seeming complexity, the forces of unity and harmony seem to prevail." [Iyengar, "India", 18]. But this "India" is not recoverable in terms of its origins. As Edward Said's research has shown, it had been arranged into recognizable shape only by the first Oriental studies done by Western scholars. [for instance, Said, *Orientalism*, 78-79. Said's initial work in the field of Orientalism had made possible the task of the already "Orientalized" Oriental to come to terms with an identity that is neither purely Indian nor purely western(ized).]As such, it is always already a pre-given category within which newer readings of India were and still are being rearranged and appropriated by the Indo-Anglian scholars themselves.

[4] How is it "true-to-India"? Authenticating the use of the English language

The preceding section has elaborated critical issues attending the delineation of the field of Indian-English literature studies. What has been intended to show there was a picture of the field in the grips of a binding

contradiction: the attribution of a sort of duality to the literature by critics (best exemplified by naming it as "Indo-Anglian", so that it is Indian but it is English too) has been justified, in effect, explained away, in terms of nationalism. Yet the Indian creative writer's use of English can never be neutral particularly since one of its effects has been to illicit the charge by "regional" writers (i.e. creative writers of the "bhasa literature") that the use of English is politically incorrect and corrupts a subject that is essentially not English. English thus put to use, nationalistically traitorous and creatively misplaced as it is perceived as being, has "sold"—literally and figuratively—an exoticized India to foreign audience and alienated the Indian writer in English from his native country.

Some historical background to the current controversy between Indian writers in English and Indian writers writing in Indian languages is pertinent here since it demonstrates how Indian-English studies represented themselves to "native" Indians, some of whom claimed for themselves another kind of nationalism. This was the nationalist discourse which emerged from a refusal, in certain quarters, to write in the master language of English; its particular "truth" was that one could express a nationalist sensibility only through the medium of an Indian language. An excursion into this background reveals, further, the manner in which Indo-Anglian studies sought to legitimize the authenticity of their own nationalism in the face of this other nationalism. What we are confronting, then, is a debate between competing positions, each of which claims to possess true access to nationalism. This debate highlights competing discourses of "truth", but what we have the occasion to witness is the way in which these discourses are being made to operate as true by other side.

Much of the debate between regional writers and Indian writers in English over the post-independence status of English was precipitated in the late sixties at an All-India Writers' Conference in Bombay. The president of that conference, Masti Venkatesa Iyengar, announced that English had, in fact, arrested the growth

of regional languages from its first instance; he further called for the abolition of its use both within the country and outside it.

Iyengar's announcement caused an immense indignant stir within the Writers' Workshop, a group of Calcutta-based young writers in English who published their writing in their own journal, *Miscellany*. Their spokesman, Professor P. Lal of St. Xavier's College, Calcutta, responded vociferously to Iyengar's criticisms in *The Free Press Journal*, a Bombay weekly. On another occasion, Lal took up arms against the editor of *Quest*, Professor Ayyub, who had stated in an editorial that: "[f]iction and poetry written in English by Indians cannot be regarded as freakish or at best as highly exceptional". To this, P. Lal retorted in the form of a manifesto (he had a penchant for the declamatory air of the manifesto):

Freakish? But isn't any great writer freakish and flashing-in-the-pannish? What about Conrad, Beckett, Naipaul? Is their mother tongue English? And is not this scorn for a 'minority group' a most reprehensible thing?"

(The Other Tongue: English Across Cultures, 3)

First, Lal declares as universally self-evident the eccentric greatness always attached specifically to writers in the Western humanistic literary tradition. How this greatness is to be adjudicated in the complicated Indian regional context is glossed over strategically; hence, the comparison with Conrad and others is made valid while, at the same time, Lal is able to make his cause the cause of a beleaguered "minority group".

This is not to suggest, however, that the regionalist claim to "truth" is the valid one. With the unmistakably unprecedented and remarkable spread of the English language to virtually all corners of the world and the ideological and hegemonic institutionalizing of the language in neo-colonial political

administration and education, it appears incredibly innocent to posit as an alternative the exclusive creative use of a language other than English. Linguists calculate that at present, 30-40% of the world's population using the English language are those to whom English comes as a second language; it is estimated that, by the year 2000, "its non-native speakers will outnumber its native speakers." [For an account of the heated controversy between regionalists and Indian writers in English, reference can be made to David McCutcheon's Introduction to *Indian Writing in English* (Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1969), 20-22]. But even more than merely innocent, Iyengar's call for abolition of the English language is baseless because it ignores, as an issue, the complex relationship between international capitalism, nationalism and literary culture as a form of modernity. Further, the regionalist claim too easily relegates the domain of Indo-Anglian studies to discourse in English when in fact the literature's status as "English literature" is as yet dubious and marginalized within the academic discipline of English studies. There is even a nationalist agenda to Indianize English to the extent that it is no longer recognizable as "English" (British or North American); the English language in these novels has been termed by many "Indian English".

Much of the proud desire to create a writing uniquely "Indian English" was articulated by Raja Rao in 1937 in his now-famous Author's Foreword to *Kanthapura*:

The telling has not been easy. One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought-movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use the word "alien", yet English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up like Sanskrit or Persian were before—but not of our emotional make-up. We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us writing in our own language

and in English. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us. Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will someday prove to be as distinctive and colorful as the Irish or the American. Time alone will justify it.

(*Kanthapura*, vii)

Yet to return to the regional/Indian writing in English debate, the defensive attempt by Indo-Anglian writers and critics to characterize Indian English has mired itself in essentialist notions of “Indianness” (“our emotional make-up”). Grounding themselves in a finally subjective sense of “Indianness”, these essentialist notions typically privilege and sanctify dominant representations of India. The essentialist position on India has yet to recognize its own historical constitution in the history of Orientalism and, further, its strategic suppression of other Indias (the India of the Sikhs and the India of the illiterate female labor, for instance) that might disturb its imagined unity. To talk about India means first to talk about enormously heterogeneous constructs of India, many Indias, many representations that, for one reason or another, might be interested in the formulation of their own position as the position on India. Raja Rao’s own position on India, for instance, is the South Indian Brahmin’s position, as his semi-autobiographical narrative, *The Serpent and the Rope*, amply demonstrates.

One way out of the double bind that regional writers and writers in English have created, I suggest, is to acknowledge that the literature partakes of both Indian and English words and worlds, but that when it does so neither can then be seen as distinct and incorruptible. There is a body of writing that is in “Indian English”; significant chunks of this consist of translations from an Indian to the English language; and some parts find expression in one of the Indian languages. In other words, instead of a situation where the sole use of English is seen as traitorous and the sole use of an Indian language is seen as nationalist by

the regional writer, we have a situation in which the two are bilingually, dialogically defined, with neither occupying the place of "truth".

Indian writers typically have available languages other than English and a significant body of their writing finds expression in these languages. Problematically placed side by side with English, they render impossible the notion that language is a pure transparent medium, a line moving unconfused from writer to reader. If this were so, we would not have before us a text criss-crossed with "foreign" words and passages whose dictionary definitions in English and American publications are provided in a glossary at the back; one consequence of such a text would be the cross-disciplinary nature of a reading which is literary but also etymological, sociological and anthropological.

More importantly, the availability of more than one language to a colonial and post-colonial writer should indicate not just indeterminacy of meaning (the instance in which one word in one language seems to signify, yet defy, a possible meaning in another language). It points to choices that a writer makes towards the inclusion or exclusion of either language. When one of these languages is what we may call the "master" language, English representing the imperialist language of the colonizer, and when this language forms the narrative framework and substance of the novel, how are we to read the status of the various Indian signifiers dispersed through the text? Or, conversely, how may the Indian signifiers that are translated into English be interpreted?

M.M. Bakhtin's insistence on discourse that is dialogic offers an initial position from which to address the Indian writer's working situation of bilingualism. His project in *Discourse in the Novel* is an attempt to fix attention on the novel as the area where the "heteroglossia" of socioideological life, impelled by stratifying and centrifugal forces, effects a no-win no-loss battle between one discourse and another alien discourse. The battle is, then, necessarily cast in "dialogic" terms; it is always at least "double-voiced", for any word on its

way to meet its object finds itself internally dialogized as a result of having to encounter within the object an alien word. (*The Dialogic Imagination*, 324). The relationship between signifier and signified is not simply indeterminate so much as doubly wrought:

The word is born in a dialogue as a living rejoinder within it; the word is shaped in dialogic interaction with an alien word that is already in the object. A word forms a concept of its own object in a dialogic way

(*Discourse in the Novel*, 329)

Inextricably linked to this activity is its corollary: the situation in which a word seeks out the alien subjective belief system of another and finds itself dialogized.

These dialogical transformations, when stylized in the novel, enable Bakhtin to displace classic critical topoi (author, narrator, character). His insistence on the characteristic way that socioideological heteroglossia multiplies individual utterance (in other words, makes it imperative that one talk always in other tongues) takes authority away from a unitary system of language and disperses it in the field of battle where several languages intersect. His ability to account for multilingual situations in the contradictory midst of which a writer chooses between languages may make him useful for a study of Indian writing in English (and, indeed, readers of contemporary African literature find him congenial for this reason):

The actively literary linguistic consciousness at all times and everywhere...comes upon "languages" and not language. Consciousness finds itself inevitably facing the necessity of having to choose a language.

(*Discourse in the Novel*, 295)

. . . as soon as it becomes clear that these [languages] were not only various different languages but even internally variegated languages, that the ideological systems and approaches to the world that were indissolubly connected with these languages contradicted each other and could no longer leave in peace and quiet with one another—then the inviolability and predetermined quality of these languages came to an end, and the necessity of actively choosing one's orientation among them began.

(296)

After Lacan and Derrida, one has to say, of course, that such a choice cannot be a free one; consciousness doesn't "come upon" language because it is already constituted and in fact overdetermined by language. But in the case of multilingualism, in the specific case of a country like India, which struggles to contain roughly eighteen linguistically different state languages (not to mention the superabundance of regional dialects within each state) and the uneven and only partially unifying presence of English, one has to be struck by the persistent proliferation of meaning(s). One is also struck by specific moments of an overdetermination of meaning in which two systems of signification confound each other in ways that are not simply oppositional. Using the Bakhtinian model, one could say that the Indian writer who writes in English shuffles between "authoritative" discourse and "internally persuasive" discourse (342), and that the dialogic space between the two is rich with contradictory drives. Authoritative discourse has already persuaded the writer to use the master discourse of British English; this use is problematized by the fact that he/she may be equally internally persuaded by utterances that stretch beyond the master discourse of English: the "internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else's"(345).

It is this curious overlapping of authoritarian and internally persuasive discourse in the post- and neo-colonial phase that Bakhtin does not adequately consider. He casts authoritative discourse as isolated, as radically the "Other":

Both the authority of discourse and its internal persuasiveness may be united in a single word...But such a unity is rarely a given—it happens more frequently that an individual's becoming, an ideological process, is characterized precisely by a sharp gap between these two categories...Authoritative discourse may organize around itself great masses of other types of discourses (which interpret it, praise it, apply it in various ways), but the authoritative discourse itself does not merge with these (by way of, say, gradual transitions); it remains sharply demarcated, compact and inert...one must either totally affirm it, or totally reject it. [342-343]

But the internally persuasive word, if it is "half someone else's", lends itself to being positioned as authoritative, with the "someone else" in this case being the colonizer. The individualized "half" of the equation described by Bakhtin ("half ours") may then be usefully represented by the Indian writer's drive to include, in his/her writing, discourse other than authoritative: Indian languages.

A revealing instance of this blurring between the authority of discourse and its internal persuasiveness may be found in the "ideological development" of R. K. Narayan. In *The Dialogic Imagination* Bakhtin observed: "Our ideological development is just such an intense struggle within us for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions and values."(346) Such a struggle, we argue, is implicit in Narayan's

identification with the English language. In a BBC interview with William Walsh, Narayan stated:

Until you mentioned another tongue I had never had any idea that I was writing in another tongue. My whole education has been in English...I am particularly fond of the language...it came to me very easily. I can't explain how. English is a very adaptable language. And it's so transparent it can take on the tint of any country.

(The Other Tongue, 311.)

The sheer transparency of the English language allows it to take on the hues and shades of any foreign culture. Narayan also considers English to be, for all practical purposes, his first language. One notes the amazingly neutral manner in which he discusses his use of the English language; the internal persuasion to use English language is made self-evident, so natural that it can't be defined: "It came to me very easily. I can't explain how." Yet when, in his youth, Narayan failed in English language and literature and was consequently prevented from graduating from high school, he was fully cognizant of the social implications of his failure: English stood for the hallmark of a good education. In his memoirs, *My Days*, Narayan remembers:

...I had failed where I was most confident—English. I failed so miserably and completely that everyone wondered if I was literate at all... [My father] was forced to exclaim in surprise, 'Stupid fellow, you have failed in English! Why?' Proficiency in English being a social hall-mark, I remained silent without offering my explanation (55).

English as a dominant discourse plays a crucial role here.

Hence, the colonial context mandates that the line between authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse cannot render authoritative discourse as radically "Other". Further, the Bakhtian model, which posits authoritative discourse in absolute terms of either total truth or total falsehood, runs the risk of subtly reinstating authority as that which is simply oppositional to another kind of discourse which is then seen to be disempowered.

Foucault's work in the genealogical histories that reveal discourse as the teeming and shifting site for relations of power/knowledge seems to be more pertinent to a study which is calling into question literary representations of nationalism in the colonial and post-colonial context. An examination and critique of the power with which these nationalist representations invest themselves in the name of "truth" may serve to disrupt the ends of dominant nationalist literary discourses. Hence, one needs to talk about Indo-Anglian studies in a way that refuses to erect any one position on nationalism (be it the regionalist-nationalist or the Indo-Anglian nationalist) as the true position. Consequently, we may more usefully see how every dominant discourse is an interested one and one that can never be disengaged from its operations on power/knowledge

In a Foucauldian analysis, it is not a matter of a simple opposition such as that between a discourse that seems to possess truth and a discourse that is then seen to be disadvantaged. This kind of simple opposition only fosters a continuation of the hegemony of "truth":

...the problem does not consist in drawing the line between that in a discourse which falls under the category of scientificity or truth, and that which comes under some other category, but in seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false.

Homi Bhaba clarifies this not-simply-oppositional relation between two discourses:

The productivity of Foucault's concept of power/knowledge lies in its refusal of an epistemology which opposes essence/appearance, ideology/science. 'Pouvoir/savoir' places subjects in a relation of power and recognition that is not part of symmetrical or dialectical relation—self/other, master/slave—which can be subverted by being inverted. Subjects are always disproportionately placed in opposition or domination through the symbolic decentering of multiple power-relations which play the role of support as well as target of adversary.

(*The Other Question*, 24)

What seems to be most powerful in such a formulation is the peculiar way in which opposition is functional, productive, and the way in which it almost invariably then forefronts the actual operations of power. More importantly, this formulation may be rewritten in terms of the momentarily complicit rather than simply oppositional relationship between two kinds of discourse that together seem to forefront operations of power. For it is in this complicit rather than purely oppositional sense that Indian-English literary studies have unconsciously set themselves up in relation to imperialist discourse. The opposition, if any, between the two has been homogenized over the years, as when Sarma undertakes to "see how far the English language used by the Indo-Anglian fiction writers has been Indian in their hands, though basically it is still English":

A study of the style of Indo-Anglian fiction reveals that even from the beginning there has [sic] always been two main tendencies—to write always chaste, standard English of impeccable idiom and rhythm of speech; and to write an Indian English with translated idioms, occasional direct use of Indian words and Indian rhythm of speech in an attempt to capture the tempo of Indian life.

(*Nationalism*, 327-328)

Significantly, Sarma does not address how both “chaste, standard English” and “Indian English” are to be mediated in the texts of the writers he studies and what the agency of this mediation might be. In order to study this mediation, he would have to examine the way in which a writer’s use of Indian English is embarrassingly complicit with, rather separate from, the use of “chaste, standard” (British) English.

The next section touches upon the various ways in which the earlier Indian writers coming out of the colonial context (the nineteen-thirties and forties) were equated by Indo-Anglian critics with Indian nationalism. The texts of R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao, in my own examination of them, seem to elide the crucial disrupting factors presented by the use of the English language. Two symptoms of this elision emerge in these writers’ unexamined contradictory and essentialist nationalist identifications and their problematic handling of translation.

R. K. NARAYAN: THE QUESTION OF CONTRADICTION AND
ELISION IN *THE ENGLISH TEACHER* AND *THE GUIDE*

My tongue swore, but my mind's unsworn.

(Euripides: *Hippolytus*)

In this section, we would examine R. K. Narayan's nationalist identifications in *The English Teacher* and find them to be contradictory, shifting between a deep affiliation with the British literary tradition and an abstract resentment against the British colonial power. Further, Narayan's translation of Indian subjects into English in *The Guide* is problematic because, in the seemingly neutral and uniform use of the English language, his translations elide the categories of class and gender. Hence, critical appraisals of Narayan's "nationalism" must be revised so that contradictory nationalist identifications and effects of translation into the English language may be seen as disruptions to Narayan's "truthful" representation of India. In a larger theoretical context, one may begin to see Indo-Anglian/English nationalism as a construct that cannot be detached from its representational and discursive functions.

One of the major Indian writers in English to achieve any international stature, R. K. Narayan began his prolific career in the thirties in an India up in frenzied arms against the British imperialist occupation. But, except for *Waiting for the Mahatma*, there doesn't seem to be an overt nationalist agenda in his work. There are, instead, scattered allusions to the contemporary struggle for independence and the status of the English language. But, using this text as exemplary, nationalist work on Narayan too easily and quickly attributes nationalism to him, as if it were a self-

evident fact. Nationalist critics have sought, and not surprisingly found, elements quintessentially Indian and nationalistic in all of Narayan's fiction, from his use of the English language to his overriding themes. To some extent, what has happened was inevitable, because Narayan had to have a number of identifications with anti-British sentiments; but these identifications are uneven and contradictory. Similarly, although Narayan must have been sensitive to the critical dictum that one remains an Indian even when writing in the medium of English, his use of translation does not allow the reader access to an economically, politically, and linguistically situated understanding of India.

In studies such as *Dimensions of Indian English Literature* [1984] and *Raja Rao* [1971], M.K. Naik has shown the correspondences between the Gandhian movement and "the Indian political novel". Even though the nationalist struggle for freedom from colonial occupation had begun a century ago (with the Indian Mutiny of 1857 marking its historical origins), Gandhi revitalized it in a way that traversed the Indian social, cultural and political sites. According to Naik:

The Indian freedom struggle was already more than a generation old, but with the advent of Mahatma Gandhi it was so thoroughly democratized that freedom consciousness percolated for the first time to the very grassroots of Indian society and revitalized it. It is possible to see a connection between this development and the rise of the Indian novel in English; for fiction, of all literary forms, is most vitally concerned with social conditions and values.

(*Raja Rao*, 16)

The novels that Naik links politically to nationalism are, among others, R.K.Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma*, Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* and Mulk Raj

Anand's *The Sword and the Sickle*. These texts have overt political agenda; according to Naik, they are:

political novels ...that action, character and setting would appear to be more or less grounded in politics, in them. These novelists differ considerably in their approach to their material, and consequently, their fictional value is conditioned by the success with which their authors are able to deal with politics in artistic terms.

(*Dimensions of Indian English Literature*, 118)

What Naik needs to note is that Gandhian nationalist thought, more than any other dominant nationalist thought, was characterized by its economic and philosophical rejection of the British imperialism. Here, Gandhian nationalism cannot avoid being displaced in the aesthetic context, in "artistic terms", in the literature which is itself a product of the British imperialism. Second, Narayan's portrayal of Gandhian nationalism is ironic in *Waiting for the Mahatma*, his most obvious implication being that Gandhi's subtle manoeuvres against the British government went largely misunderstood and misinterpreted by the common man. And irony as a literary style works toward further displacing the actual political practice of nationalism.

Narayan's identifications with the political nationalist movements that were popular in his early writing period present a morass of contradictions. In *The English Teacher* (pub. 1945, two years before formal Indian Independence), the main character is unevenly but obviously identified with Narayan himself, for the text is a semi-autobiographical project. Its protagonist, Krishna, teaches English literature, at the Albert Mission College, to bored unwilling students. Narayan himself taught English at a government school in Mysore for a total of two days; the job had been secured for him with much difficulty by his father, but Narayan, seeing no excitement at the prospect of reciting Tennyson's "Morte d' Arthur" to

twelve year old Indian boys, left Chennapatna. (*My Days*). Similarly, Krishna resents the job:

I got up at eight every day, read for the fiftieth time Milton, Carlyle and Shakespeare, looked through compositions, swallowed a meal, dressed, and rushed out of the hostel...four hours later I returned to my room; my duty in the interval had been admonishing, cajoling and browbeating a few hundred boys of Albert Mission College so that they might mug up Shakespeare and Milton and secure high marks and save me adverse remarks from my chiefs at the end of the year. For this pain the authorities kindly paid me a 100 Rs. On the first of every month and dubbed me a lecturer...I was constantly nagged by the feeling that I was doing the wrong work. This was responsible for a perpetual self-criticism and all kinds of things aggravated it.

I was merely a man who had mugged earlier than them the introduction and the notes in the Verity edition of *Lear*, and guided them through the mazes of Elizabethan English. I did not do it out of love for them or for Shakespeare but only out of love for myself...If they paid me the same 100Rs. for stringing beads together or tearing up paper bits every day for a few hours, I would probably be doing it with equal fervour.

(*The English Teacher*, 12)

He is markedly ambivalent about the status of the English language, wielded in this instance by the British school principal, Mr. Brown:

He motioned us to our seats and said, "Could you imagine a worse shock for me? I came across a student of the English Honours, who did not know till this day that 'honours' had to be spelt with a 'u'?"...He began to lecture on the importance of the English language and the need for preserving its purity. Brown's thirty years in India had not been ill spent if they had opened the eyes of the Indians to the need for speaking and writing correct English! The responsibility of the English department was indeed very

The enormity of this student's crime is repudiated by Krishna, but underscored by his colleague, Gajapathy:

"Disgraceful. I never knew our boys were so bad... We cannot pretend that we come out of it with flying colours."

....I felt irritated and said, "Mr. Gajapathy, there are blacker sins in this world than a dropped vowel.... Let us be fair.

Ask Mr. Brown if he can say in any one of the two hundred Indian languages: 'The cat chases the rat.' He has spent thirty years in India."

"It is all irrelevant," said Gajapathy.

"Why should he think the responsibility for learning is all on our side and none on his? Why should he magnify his own importance?" (6)

"Why should he think the responsibility for learning is all on our side and none on his?"—Krishna's plaintive remark is clearly directed toward the unequal power relations between Indians and the British, relations which make it incumbent on him to master and teach correctly the laws of English grammar:

I spent the rest of the period giving a general analysis of the mistakes I had encountered in this batch of composition—*rather very, as such* for hence, split infinitives, collective nouns, and all the rest of the traps that the English language sets for foreigners. (15)

Yet, even as he rebels under this yoke, he doesn't wish to do anything to shift the status quo. He is inordinately moved in class as he recites from *King Lear*. Being a poet, he is inspired by the Western liberal creative ethos; teaching students who have no ready access to the British literary canon is an academic activity opposed to that creative ethos. Narayan also subscribes to this traditional Western split

between writers of fiction and academic teachers or critics. When he determined to do a graduate degree in English literature, a friend dissuaded him. Narayan recounts:

While I was going up the stairs of the Maharaja's college with my application for a seat in the M.A. class, a friend met me halfway and turned me back, arguing that this would be a sure way to lose interest in literature. I accepted his advice and went downstairs, once for all turning my back on college studies.

(*My Days*, 75)

Elsewhere, in *The Painter of Signs*, Narayan returns to the power of the British literary tradition. His protagonist, Raman, is steeped in his love for, among old books, the Western classics:

His cupboard overflowed with the books he had cherished since his college days—Plato to *Pickwick Papers*, some of them in double column editions, with paper turning grey, yellow, and brown, and etchings that transported him.

(*The Painter of Signs*, 17)

In his Memoirs, *My Days* (pub. 1974), Narayan lists the literature he had read in 1925, one year before he enrolled in the B.A. program in English in Maharaja College, Mysore: Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*; the poetry of Keats, Shelley, Byron, Browning, and Pope; the novels of Walter Scott, Dickens, Rider Haggard, Hardy, Tolstoy, Marie Corelli, Mrs. Henry Wood and H.G. Wells; Long's *English Literature*; the plays of Moliere, Marlowe and Shakespeare. Among literary journal and magazines: *Little Folks*, *Nineteenth Century and After*, *Cornhill*, *Boy's Own Paper*, *Strand Magazine*, *Bookman*, *Harper's Atlantic*, the American *Spectator*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, *Manchester Guardian*, *Life and Letters*. All this Narayan had accomplished at the age of eighteen and at a time when national opinion was already radically split with regard to the British Raj. R.K. Narayan's father was an administrator of several pro-British government

schools, and it was his position of authority that gave Narayan full access at all times to college libraries. Narayan's father wore tweed suits and customarily stopped by at the Officers' club to play tennis before he came home.

This is to suggest that Narayan was to some extent affiliated to the Western, specifically British, humanistic literary and creative tradition, which left him ambivalent toward Indian nationalism. As a child in 1916, when nationwide protests were under way against the Rowlatt Act, Narayan, "entranced", joined the *Madras march*. He was later scolded by his uncle for doing so because his uncle "saw no logic in seeking a change in rulers". (*My Days*, 15).

At least one contradictory or at best ambivalent identification with nationalism, then, gets to be articulated in terms of (1) a frustrated and abstract resentment against manifestations of the British power and (2) an affinity with the British humanist literary tradition (from which any trace of power relations is absent), an affinity which was as much received from without as it was internalized.

At the conclusion of *The English Teacher*, Krishna decides to resign from his nightmarish teaching job (as did Narayan). He toys with the idea of stating anti-British motives in his resignation letter:

....I was going to attack a whole century of false education. I was going to explain why I could no longer stuff Shakespeare and Elizabethan metre and Romantic poetry for the hundredth time into young minds and feed them on the dead mutton of literary analysis and theories and histories....This education had reduced us to a nation of morons; we were strangers to our own culture and camp followers of another culture, feeding on leavings and garbage. (178)

But he cannot, because,

It was like a rabid attack on all English writers, which was hardly my purpose. "What fool could be insensible to Shakespeare's sonnets or the 'Ode to the West Wind' or 'A thing of beauty is a joy forever'?" I reflected. (178)

This poignant realization greatly contradicts Krishna's/Narayan's relation with questions of nationalist identity even as it serves as an acknowledgement to his deep literary influences.

This kind of contradictory identification is crystallized in Gajapathy's argument with Krishna over the spelling of "honours":

"Politics need not butt in everywhere. There are times when I wish there were no politics in the world and no one knew who was ruling and how", said Gajapathy. "This would help a little clearer and freer thinking in all matters. The whole of the West is in a muddle owing to its political consciousness, and what a pity that the East should also follow suit. It is like a weed chocking all other human faculties. Shelley in his 'Sensitive Plant'..." (16)

While his referent is Shelley and the British canon, Gajapathy rails against Western politics, reserving for himself some uniquely apolitical position. But this apolitical position points to a characteristic contradiction in Narayan's writing and in Indian-English studies in general: colonial power to influence Indianness is either denied or ignored, but the denial takes place within the context of colonial discourse. By using Shelley, Gajapathy is using British discourse in order to make a non-Western case against the West.

Further, we might say that what Indian critics such as M.K.Naik have called Narayan's "nationalism" is the kind of nationalism that, in his writing, was translated into the English language. The Latin preposition *trans*, working as a prefix in trans-lation, connotes a sense of crossing over (across, to or on the farther side of, beyond, over, through etc.); translation consequently suggests not

merely the rendering of something into another language but a specific instance of displacement. We have already seen how the debate between the regionalist and Indo-English nationalists produced “true” representations of nationalism (“How is it true to India?”, Introduction). Here we can predict the regionalist critic’s objection to the kind of Indian nationalism that is translated into English by the Indian-English writer: how can one express a post-colonial national identity that is distinct from the Other when one is writing in the Other’s language? A leading Indo-Anglian critic, C. Paul Verghese, uses guarded language to indicate the stakes of this debate:

There are many Indians who believe that the writer in India ought not to write in English because, they say, it is a foreign Language and to write in English is a kind of disservice to the nation and is quite incompatible with our national pride. A few others take an apparently scientific stand and argue that only through an Indian language can an Indian consciousness be expressed and that the attempt of the Indian novelist on English to depict the life of those whose emotional and intellectual life is fashioned by a different language is characterized by a total absence of the mutual nourishment between the writer and his society. They also point out that since he writes for a western audience he will inevitably fail to present a true image of India inasmuch as in his own interest he will try to create an image that is most saleable. (Verghese, 99)

Verghese addresses these charges by locating the Indian writer’s choice of language in “the fundamental right of the creative artist to express himself through whatever language he likes” (100).

What both the regionalist and the Indo-English nationalists fall prey to is a simple understanding of the workings of language. Neo-colonialism is a form of government in which the old structures of power reinstate themselves subtly in the form of new masters who, in the case of the Indian subcontinent, were the

nationalist politicians who went on to rule the country. In other words, what is Indian has already been touched by the Other, first in the form of Orientalism, next in the form of neo-colonialism. Hence, the regional claim ("only in an Indian language can an Indian consciousness be expressed") wrongly assumes that the use of an Indian language indicates a pure Indian identity. But the Indo-Anglian claim to nationalism ignores the kinds of indeterminacy that can arise in a linguistic system of signification which is a product of translation. Verghese makes language the transparent medium for meanings which are perceived to be self-evident and readily available. He overlooks the fact that if much of the Indian-English writer's English consists of translation from an Indian language, one is then faced with specific instances of linguistic displacement that greatly complicate easy access to a discernible national identity.

Hence, translations in Narayan's novels are a literary practice that ruptures the apparently unmediated nature of his nationalist affinities. We can take, for instance, his construction of the imaginary, quaint, provincial South Indian town of Malgudi. Narayan peoples it with cross-section of the Indian population and social classes (from vendors, beggars, farmers, sweetmeat cooks to sadhus, bankers and teachers). Malgudi, according to Narayan, is a metaphor for the entire Indian subcontinent; it is a rendering on a smaller scale of any town anywhere in India, even though it is most specifically Mysore in South India. If, as critics feel over Malgudi, is the site for Narayan's articulation of nationalism, then we need to see that Malgudi is itself a translated product that can only unevenly be identified with the Indian subcontinent.

An indication of Malgudi's tenuous relation to the actual Mysore cropped up during the filming of Narayan's novel, *The Guide* (published in 1958). Narayan led the film crew around Mysore, pointing out the old familiar haunts that had wandered into the novel as Malgudi. He was under the impression that authenticity would be respected, that his representation of Mysore in the form of Malgudi would be honoured. Instead, to his outrage, the venue of *The Guide* was

shifted to Jaipur (a more scenic town) in North India. When he expressed his indignation, he was told: "Where is Malgudi, anyway? There is no such place; it is abolished from this moment." (*My Days*, 174). In other words, Malgudi had given itself over to interpretation as a town that, because it was a translation of an Indian town in imaginary terms, could be situated anywhere by virtue of its not having existed anyway.

Having deplored the film producer's change of site Narayan further complicates matters by stating in *My Days* that Malgudi is a universal place, to be found anywhere in the world. He has also likened it to "an old Greek city in its physical features... [and] the habits of its citizens are also very Hellenic" (131).

Just as Narayan's India is a translated India, the imaginary "Malgudi", so also the categories of socio-economic class are products of displacement in his novels. For it is crucial to note that the Indians in Malgudi are not Indians; they are characters made Indian, stylized to be Indian. This making marks linguistic displacement—in the sense that some representation of India and India's people has been translated into another register of representation in the English language. The price of this stylized Indianization, which has uniform neutral access to the English language, is a lack, even an absence, of those categories of class, linguistically defined, economically and politically situated as they must be, which would enable a reader's gestures to move between and inter-relate the stratifications of a nation more real even if less accessible. Why, one may ask, do Narayan's working class characters speak perfect British English and what are the consequences, for readers, of such radical translations? Finally, where in all this translation is the status of Narayan's "nationalism"?

What is at stake here is not the fact that the real India, the "true nation" is elided. This notion of the "real India" waiting to be unearthed by the Westerner had already been demystified by novels like E.M.Forster's *A Passage to India* (but the fact that India, after having signaled the impossibility of its own existence, is still

the active subject signaling its absence in A Passage served to subtly reinstate the India of Hindu mysteries, echoing caves, etc.). The “real India” is not so much this mysterious realm that is elided as it is another viable system of signification or body of texts that is either inaccessible or not in a position to represent itself to an English-speaking audience. It may occupy the position of “subjugated knowledges” or “disadvantaged discourses” that Foucault talks about in *Power/Knowledge*.

To the publication market and a readership that lies largely outside India and in Europe and North America, however, these were and still are not displaced representations of an India which is inaccessible to the Indian writer in English. More, Indian writing in English serves to present India as a nation for the first time, from the horse’s mouth, as it were. The fact that a working-class character in Narayan’s novel speaks perfectly grammatical British English seems “natural” in the face of the exigency of a native Indian’s writing situation; it doesn’t seem to problematize the nation-making process that Narayan is apparently undertaking.

So Narayan’s working-class characters who either speak perfect English or don’t speak at all give the impression of a unitary linguistic system. Further, they also create the impression of a class-free society, at least to the extent that the way they speak English is no index of their economic status; they either speak or don’t speak uniformly and predictably.

One crucial elision in Narayan’s translated representations (which are also presentations) is, then, the category of class. A unitary linguistic system which doesn’t acknowledge the heterogeneous adaptation of English in this subcontinent—in the linguist Braj Kachru’s “cline of bilingualism”, it ranges from ambilingualism and standard Indian English to adequate competence in one or more registers and “Babu”/Butler/Bearer/Kitchen English (Kachru, 391-410)—

or the lack of the adaptation of English in some quarters, seems then to give the deceptive impression of homogeneity and of a class-free society.

How characters talk, however, should be an index to their economic status, for an empirically situated analysis should point to the more or less direct correlation between class and access to education and the English language. Typically and ironically, the Indian fiction in English which has subjects speaking a homogeneous uniform English becomes the most accessible in the Western hemisphere; correspondingly, these books become the more sellable in the international publishing market. It is not by mistake that the novels of R.K.Narayan are reprinted year after year by several different leading publishers in Britain and in North America.

Narayan's use of translation tends to obliterate not only social classes, but also crucial gender stratifications. For instance, let's consider the representation of Rosie in R.K.Narayan's *The Guide*. This story is a bildungsroman that follows the vagaries and romantic adventures of a tourist guide, Raju, in Malgudi. Upon falling violently in love with a married woman, Rosie, Raju helps her break ties with her archaeologist husband and sets about establishing her in a career in dancing. Rosie rises to national fame and Raju is reduced to being her appendage and publicity manager; he even banishes his conservative and tradition-minded mother from the family house when she objects to Rosie's presence there. In due time, Raju becomes corrupt, partaking to alcohol, gambling, and the unhealthy company of fair-weather friends. He is arrested by the police and sent to jail over an instance of forgery. *The Guide* attempts to weave this past into Raju's present condition in the form of flashbacks. His present condition is that of a man who, upon being released from jail, takes refuge at a temple where he is mistakenly taken to be a holy man by the villagers.

When, after Rosie leaves her husband, Raju brings her to his house, a strange exchange with his flabbergasted mother occurs:

She asked next, "Where do you come from?"

"From Madras", I [Raju] answered promptly.

"What brings you here?"

"She has come to see friends".

"Are you married?"

"No", I answered promptly.

My mother shot a look at me. It seemed to me meaningful. She withdrew her glance from me, and looking at her guest kindly, asked, "Don't you understand Tamil?"

I knew I should shut up now. I let Rosie answer in Tamil, "Yes. It's what we speak at home". (124)

It is when Raju says, "I let Rosie answer in Tamil", that readers are shocked into remembering that the characters are to be understood as speaking in the Tamil language, Narayan's own South Indian tongue, even though they are speaking in English. During such gaps in the narrative, the text takes on the air of an absurdly impossible enterprise, all of it going on supposedly in Tamil but actually in English. What Rosie may have said in Tamil marks its own absence here as another equally valid, yet inaccessible way of saying something.

One notes as well that it is the male prerogative that drives Raju to speak for the female subject. Rosie, the speaking subject, is erased from the text not only because her own Tamil goes unheard by the reader but also because Raju is defining her textual identity; he explains her to the point at which he then "lets" her {allows her to} speak for herself.

Interestingly, all of Narayan's female characters who have broken from the normative patterns of South Indian society are given English names. They have been translated to the English register so that, on the one hand, their marginalized identity may be explained away by Western standards (of adultery, pre-marital sex, undefined social origins, and so on) and, on the other, that identity may be conveniently excised from the Indian register. Even in *The Painter of Signs*, the

female character who is instituting governmental family planning programs in rural South India is named Daisy. A woman exceptional by Indian standards because of her progressive and feminist views, Daisy engages in pre-marital sex with the main character, Raman. Of her name, Raman comments:

She called herself just Daisy. She was a slender girl in a sari.
No one could say who was her husband or father or brother,
or where she came from—a sudden descent on Maigudi. Daisy!
What a name for someone who looked so very Indian, traditional,
and gentle! One would expect a person on this job to be
somewhat matronly, like a Mother Superior in the convent—
large, broad-faced, towering over others, an executive type
who could with a flourish of her arms order people about.

(The Painter of Signs, 16)

In *The Guide*, Rosie belongs to a debased caste and class that isn't even clearly located by Narayan:

"I belong to a family traditionally dedicated to the temples
as dancers; my mother, grandmother, and, before her, her
mother. Even as a young girl, I danced in our village temple.
You know how our caste is viewed?"
"It's the noblest caste on earth", [Raju] said.
"We are viewed as public woman", she said plainly, and I was
thrilled to hear the words. "We are not considered respectable;
we are not considered civilized." (73)

One might ask, could there have been a representation of Raju's "thrill", upon hearing Rosie describes herself as a prostitute, in the Tamil register? Raju seems to be "thrilled to hear the words" that are spoken in English, and it's in this manner that his "thrill" is legitimized.

As if to underscore her already marginalized status, Raju's uncle, who has travelled to Malgudi at Raju's mother's request in order to evict the unwelcome

Rosie, repeats her own received representation of herself even as he asks and answers his own queries:

You are not of our family. Are you of our clan? No. Do we know you? No. Do you belong to this house? No. In that case, why are you here? After all, you are a dancing girl. We do not admit them in our families. (149)

Raju's mother calls Rosie a "she-devil", "demon" and "viper" (150). Again, the point to be made here is that, by virtue of being given an Other name, Rosie's social status, marginalized as it is in Narayan's actual orthodox, Hindu, South Indian society, removes itself from that society's set of attitudes and attaches itself to Western bastardization. It may then become an understandable object of orthodox Indian society's revulsion; a more pleasing picture of Indian femininity may thus be preserved. For, especially in 1958, when *The Guide* was written, there could be no other way of accommodating a defiant Indian character who was to be perceived as a prostitute of lowly social origin, who committed adultery, and who left her husband to move in with another man. In chapter IV, a discussion will be made on how the nationalist preservation of ideal Indian femininity is an interested one and one that constituted a significant part of Indian nationalist thought.

Finally, then, nationalist identifications in Narayan's work are hugely complicated by the interrupting and disrupting status of contradiction and elision. The value of highlighting such a complication is that we are able to examine Indo-English studies as not merely an "academic" (and therefore somehow disinterested) enterprise but an ideological structure that participates in the work of representation and discursive practice. Like Narayan himself, nationalist critics have skirted the embarrassing stratifications of social classes and gender in their essentialist representations of India. Hence, one may see that the very exclusion of gender and social classes becomes central to the representational, discursive nation-building process.

RAJA RAO: ESSENTIALIZED INDIAN IDENTITIES AND NATIVIZATIONS IN *THE SERPENT AND THE ROPE* AND *KANTHAPURA*

Because a man is born in a stable, that does not make him a horse.

(Duke of Wellington: an interview, 1915)

If Narayan's nationalist identifications are contradictory, Raja Rao seeks to escape, metaphysically, the condition of contradiction altogether by privatizing and hence essentializing the Indian identity. But this study of Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* will demonstrate that Rao's "nationalism", in the form of "Indianness", is still a discursive function that privatizes what is in fact a South Indian Brahminic (hence socially privileged) identity. This identity is defined by Rao at the unfortunate expense of a consideration of caste and gender and their status in nationalist representations. Also, contrary to most critics' reception of it, Rao's experimentation with English in *Kanthapura* does not allow one to come up against an Other (non-English) space that should be disturbing and resistant to translation. In *Kanthapura*, Rao attempts to imitate the rhythm and cadence of Kannada, his own native language, but he produces a highly literate and stylized English which is meaningful in the Western, not the Kannada, context.

An Indian writer who emigrated from India to France and later to the U.S., Raja Rao has interestingly remained for Indo-English critics the epitome of Indian nationalism. It is remarkable that the act of immigration has not meant a rupture of any sort, both for Rao himself and for his critics. Several reasons for this radical absence do exist, however. Perhaps no other Indian writer has taken to such an extreme the privatizing of an Indian national identity. By privatizing it, Rao creates what is, finally, an essentialist Indian identity because he posits Indianness as essence, as an inner space that has remained untouched by colonial influence by dint of remaining stubbornly and uniquely Indian. It may be said of

Rao that he is a man who, while he has traveled, has never quite left "home". Of the supposed impossibility of ever leaving "home", his narrator, Rama, says in *The Serpent and the Rope*:

India is wheresoever you see, hear, touch, taste, smell;

(389)

Wheresoever I am is my country. (402).

Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* presents his manifesto of belief in the Hindu philosophy of *Advaita Vedanta*, or non-dualism. As it was elaborated by Sri Sankara, an Indian classical philosopher who lived sometime between the fourth and eighth centuries, non-dualism is the philosophy of the soul's (the *Atman's*) merging with God (*Brahman*), once it has extinguished the dualistic and contradictory separation of experience ("isness") from what is perceived as its object. Rama obligingly explains *Advaita* on a number of occasions in the text. Here he compares it to the concept of zero:

Sri Aurobindo wanted...to improve on the Advaita of Sri Sankara—which was just like trying to improve on the numerical status of zero...The zero, you see, the *sunya*, is impersonal; whereas one, two, three and so on are all dualistic. One always implies many. But zero implies nothing. I am not one, I am not two, I am neither one nor two...I am the 'I'. (205)

Several leading Indo-Anglian critics have appropriately accused Rao of obscurantism and obfuscation in his use of language such as this: "I heard myself say I heard myself. Or I saw my eyes see that I saw." (169). Significantly, it is the Western critic who professes disgust (for instance, Klaus Steinworth's *The Indo-English Novel: The Impact of the West on Literature in a Developing Country*, 30-31) upon reading passage after passage in which the main character, Rama, sobs effeminately and uncontrollably:

I have wandered the world and have sobbed in hotel rooms
and in trains, have looked at the cold mountains and sobbed,
for I had no mother...I sobbed, for I knew I would never see
my mother again. (6)

....I weep into my bed...I go to bed reading something, and
some thought comes, I know not what—thoughts have no
names—or have they?—and I lie on my bed and sob. Sometimes
singing some chant of Sankara, I burst into sobs. (402)

But even stranger is the plot of the autobiographical novel, *The Serpent and Rope*. Ramaswamy is a South Indian Brahmin, the oldest son of an orthodox Hindu family, whose ancestry marks the glorious annals of Brahmin history. He comes to Sorbonne, France, sometime in the late forties for a Ph. D. in philosophy. He marries a Frenchwoman, Madeleine, who converts to Buddhism in the course of the novel. In the meantime, Rama makes two trips to India during which he reaffirms both his Brahmin ties and his ties to his family. While in London for his research work, he marries in the Hindu style a North Indian girl named Savithri. On his second trip to India, in Bombay, he falls into a brief sexual relationship with a married woman, Lakshmi. At the end of the novel, Rama completes his dissertation, severs his ties with his now fanatical Buddhist wife, and looks ahead to a teaching job in India.

What is strange about this plot is not only the highly disembodied and disengaged tone in which it is related but also the peculiar lack of any normative judgment on his own actions by Rama. Despite Rao's point, that contradictions in the material world get to be dialectically resolved on a higher metaphysical level, *Advaita* apparently relieves Rama's responsibility of committing, unbeknownst to his wife through the end of the novel, both bigamy and adultery.

Operating as a uniquely Hindu belief in *The Serpent and the Rope*, Advaita immediately introduces the essentializing nationalist agenda of “Indianness”. Indianness of theme has consistently been a hallmark of the nationalist novel, even when the theme in question has been radically apolitical and aesthetic and the tone of its treatment passive and disengaged. This is not surprising. The more aesthetic Indian literature tended to be, the more likely that it should be appropriated by nationalist critics who could point to an inner space that had presumably somehow escaped the effects of colonialism. In this way, in spite of or even because of its passive “Indianness”, Rao’s *The Serpent and the Rope* becomes a manifesto for nationalist critics. Discussing the first major novelists, Narayan, Rao and Anand, M.K. Naik makes a connection between the nationalist movement of the thirties and the sudden burgeoning of the Indian novel in English:

And then came a sudden flowering when the Gandhian age (1920-1947) had perhaps reached its highest point in glory during the Civil Disobedience Movement of the ‘thirties’. It is possible to see the connection here, if one remembers that by this decade the nationalist upsurge had stirred the whole country to the roots to a degree and on a scale unprecedented earlier; making it acutely conscious of its present and its past and filling it with new hopes for the future...It was...during this period that Indian English fiction discovered some of its most significant themes such as the....East-West relationships. (Naik, 103)

A dominant part of the East-West confrontation that Naik refers to is, predictably, Rao’s emerging emphasis on the Eastern front, an emphasis that has been acknowledged for its unique “Indianness”. And under the rubric of “Indianness”, the theme of East-meets-West from the perspective of the “East” has been abundantly attributed to Rao’s *The Serpent and the Rope*. Narasimhaiah copiously praises it, stating its agenda as follows:

The predicament, an Indian would say, is: 'it is just in so far as we do now see only the things as they are in themselves, and only ourselves, that have [sic] killed the metaphysical man and shut ourselves up in the dismal cave of functional and economic determinism.' It is in so far as he frees himself from the operations of such determinism that man's true estate lies. But in Western fiction there is a 'rancour that is contemptuous of immortality and will not let us recognize what is divine in us.'

(Narasimhaiah, 167-168)

So does M.K. Naik:

Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* is one of the greatest of Indian English novels. As an enactment of east-west confrontation and as a philosophical novel it stands unchallenged yet in the annals of Indian English literature.

(Naik, 109)

Narasimhaiah's tortured syntax may seem to reflect the complexity of Rao's metaphysical thought and Eastern thought in general, but it only fosters the privatizing, the cherishing of what then begins to function as an Indian metaphysical essence. In other words, Narasimhaiah's notion of "Indianness" does not escape the essentializing of "India" and Indian sensibility. This is precisely the reason why critics find Rao appealing for the nationalist agenda of "Otherizing", that is, privileging the Eastern as the Other to the West. Rao's Indian is, and in turn is made to function as, the simply oppositional Other in the East-West relationship. The nature of this opposition is formulated in terms of an Eastern metaphysical essence versus a Western "functional and economic determinism".

Hence, it could be found that if Narayan's India was the translated Malgudi, then Rao's India is an Indian metaphysical essence that serves to disguise what is actually an elitist South Indian Brahminic world view.

Through the text, Rama repeats that India cannot be defined politically or historically:

India has no history, for truth cannot have history. (102)

That for me is India, not a country, not a historical presence among nations, but a hypostatic presence ...India is apart, that is why she has no history. India is everybody's; India is everybody. (193)

India would never be made by our politicians and professors of political science, but by these isolate existences of India, in which India is rememorated, experienced, and communicated ; beyond history, as tradition, as the Truth. Anybody can have the geographical—even the political—India; it matters little. (352)

Coterminous with this essentializing activity and directly contradictory to Rama's amorphous descriptions of India are his periodic allusions to a startlingly non-metaphysical South India with clear geographic and exclusionary demarcations. The text bears out the point that Rama's (and Rao's) South India is Brahminic in the most hegemonic sense of the word. Rama himself is very conscious of the fact that, in the Indian caste system, the Brahmin caste is most powerful in the realm of Hindu culture:

...the fact that I was a Brahmin by birth and a South Indian seemed to have given me a natural superiority. (31)

Narayan's use of translation tended to elide the categories of class and gender. Rao's South Indian Brahminic metaphysical abstractions are founded on the very

exclusion of women and castes other than the Brahmin. (We don't mean to conflate the two categories of Narayan's translations and Rao's metaphysical abstractions here. We connect them in terms of their similar tendency to elide considerations of class, caste and gender.) Sifting through the very real stratifications of a Southern Brahminic culture that Rao betrays, one can arrange these as follows: Rao's India is specifically and hegemonically South India; this South India is Brahminic in nature.

Rao unmistakably favours South India over North India; the niceties of Southern tradition are elaborated at the expense of Northern culture, which is then seen to be uncivilized and uncouth:

I could not understand these Northerners going from strict purdah to this extreme modernism with unholy haste. We in the South were more sober, and very distant. (247)

The hideousness of Bombay hurt me as only an impersonal falsehood can hurt. (248)

Everywhere in the South you meet with this civilized attention, which shows how man has been informed of the sainthood of natural living. (53)

Early in the novel, on his first trip back to Hyderabad, to take charge of his father's funeral, Rama muses:

If there were no barbarian beyond our borders the Hindu would have melted into his nature, grown white as some women in the zenana, and his eyes have seen the splendour of himself everywhere.

(36)

Who is the "barbarian" mentioned here and what are the "borders"? One historical suggestion that offers itself is that the barbarian is the Aryan invader who had

entered the subcontinent from the North and in time intermingled with the native Dravidian. But a few pages later, referring to his stepmother's fears, Rama thinks:

It is good, Little Mother must have told herself, to belong to
the far South. No barbarian will ever come to us. (44)

Suddenly, the "barbarian"'s identity collapses with the identity of anyone not belonging to Rao's "far South" and with the identity of the North Indian in particular. One notes the extreme insularity and privilege of the South Indian. This is a view further buttressed by the fact that Rama and Rao revere Sanskrit as the ancient Brahminic language of the religious texts, "that noble, imperial heritage of ours, Sanscrit, the pure, the complete, the unique. He who possesses Sanscrit possesses himself." (35) In the novel, who possesses Sanskrit and who doesn't is quite clear.

Traditionally, it has always been the Brahmin, the priest, who possesses and interprets Sanskrit for the other castes. And the bedrock for this elitist knowledge has always been South India:

The Dravidian South [is] the very land of the supreme
dominance of the Brahmin.

(*Caste and Class in India*, 11)

The sense in which Rao's South India is hegemonically Brahminic is that it has systematically suppressed the possible self-representation of other castes.

Textual descriptions of the Brahmin's sacred existence and his deference to the Hindu law of *dharma* (moral duty) proliferate in the pages of *The Serpent and the Rope*, as do explications of passages from Sri Sankara and the *Upanishads*:

Brahmin is he who knows Brahman. (5)

The Brahmin, the Vedantin, has such arrogance... Yes, one is wonderful—when one is not one, but the “I”. (79)

Brahmins don't need words to say anything. (187)

Rama unmistakably prides himself as a Brahmin whose ancestry goes all the way back to an ancient Upanishadic past:

I was too much of a Brahmin to be unfamiliar with anything, such is the pride of caste and race... To me difference was inborn—like my being the oldest son of my father, or like my grandfather being the Eight-Pillared House Ramakrishnayya and you just had to mention his name anywhere in Mysore State, even to the Maharaja, and you were offered a seat, a wash and a meal, and a coconut-and-shawl adieu. (20)

Historically, the Brahmin caste has dominated over the other castes that it has controlled since at least 300 BC, when a Greek ambassador to the court of Chandra Gupta Maurya (322-298 BC) named Megasthenes had occasion to remark the social formations of class in Maurya's dominion. These formations undeniably approximate the four varnas or “occupationally-specialized, interdependent castes ranked by purity and pollution customs” (Pauline Kolenda, 5): the Brahmanas (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (merchants) and Sudras (servants). Manu's *Manava-Dharma-Shastra* or *Book of Laws* (300-200 BC?) is the decisive text which explicates the caste system as it is elaborated in the ancient religious texts of the *Vedas*. While the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas vied for centrality from time to time, the servility of the lower castes, the Sudras in particular, went uncontested, even by the Vaishyas and the Sudras themselves. Indian historians note the following facts:

In Gujrat and Southern India, generally speaking a Brahmin never thinks of accepting water, much less any cooked food,

from any caste but that of the Brahmins...a lower caste has no scruples in accepting cooked food from any higher caste. Thus all the castes will take cooked food from the Brahmin.

(Ghurye, 8-9)

[Brahmins] will not perform even their ablutions within the precincts of a Sudra's habitation. (Ghurye, 9)

A Sudra had no right to earn money and he was forbidden even to possess any kind of property. (Sunder Lal Sagar, 13)

The Sudra had no rights to religious rites...His marriage was not a sacrament but it should be understood as a means only for satisfying sexual desire. (Sunder Lal Sagar, 14)

It is no mistake, then, that Rama's sense of "touch" is so refined:

It was the Brahmin in me...the sense that touch and untouch are so important. (13)

Next, the status of women in the hegemony of Brahminism also deserves some attention, for it is at the expense of the female sex that Brahminic masculinity comes into its own. The woman's inability to attain fair representation in Rao's religious order parallels the Sudra's. Rama himself draws attention to the exclusion of the female sex from the patriarchy of Brahminic lineage:

[The sacred Brahmins of Benares] knew my grandfather and his great-grandfather again, and thus for seven generations—Ramakrishnayya and Ranganna, Madhavaswamy and Somasundarayya, Manjappa and Gangadharayya—and for each of them they knew the sons and grandsons (the daughters, of course, they did not quite know).... (10)

This epic listing of long sonorous names that luxuriously roll along one's tongue comes to an abrupt stop with the ambivalently voiced parenthetical aside.

On the occasion of her arranged marriage to a government official, Rama's step-sister Saroja appeals to Rama to save her from this forced ceremony:

We girls are thrown to other families as the most intimate,
the most private of our clothes are thrown to the dhobi
[washerman] on Saturday morning. Like cotton, we women
must have grown on trees... (257)

To this, Rama has "no answer to give." (257) But when she repeats her need to be saved from marriage, Rama rejects her:

It was no moment for cowardice. I, the head of the family,
could not be a coward; I could not, should not, let anyone
down in the world. That was my *dharma* (263)

In the text, two pictures of feminine sexuality emerge. They are structurally related in the service of Rao's position on "woman". First, there is the threatening female figure who takes the lead in her relationship with a man; but for Rama,

I'm a Brahmin, and for me touch and knowledge go with
the holiness of surrender, of woman not taking me there,
but I revealing to her that. (66)

In the text, Madeleine grows attached to a common friend, Georges, and when she chooses to show her regard for him, Rama feels that "the respect she showed [to Georges] was not altogether happy for a Brahmin husband to bear." (73) And when Madeleine grows demanding in bed with her husband, Rama not only withdraws from her invitation but also feels an irresistible drive to physically and sadistically torture her:

A woman hates a male when he withdraws. She cannot accept his defeat—his defeat is the defeat of her womanhoodshe must give him again and again that which he asks for, till his asking itself becomes a disgust. Then the woman has contempt for him....Then you want to take a cactus branch and beat her and scratch her all over. You want to bite her lip and pull the breast away from her chest, and taste the good blood of her wounds. (163)

But in the same scene in which Madeleine is perceived as a threat to Rama's Brahmin masculinity, a passage from her active threat to her passive submission is suggested:

You want her to be young and new and never named. You want her to be your first love, your first woman, you want her to be the whole of the earth. She knows it—for every woman is a concubine, a mistress of passion, a dompter of man's condition—and she becomes virginal and simple and, Lord, so new, so perfumed, that the ichor rises in the elephant and you are at it again...The world will become purified. The world is pure. For the mistress has become the mother. (164-165)

For Rama, the knowledge that every woman is an aggressive "concubine" at heart makes it imperative that she be transformed into "mother", the supposedly asexual object of man's veneration. Hence, the obverse of the active, threatening female figure is the pure, virginal woman who can be an object worthy of man's adoration, since "[T]he object", says Rama to himself, "is woman" (172):

You should know a woman and not understand her—for if you understand her, then you can never be a pilgrim to knowledge. (219)

Thus objectified and not understood, a woman's threat may be neutralized, controlled, so that the passage from threat to submission may take place. Madeleine herself submits:

You worship woman even if you torture them. But I like
to be tortured and to be your slave. (98)

For Rama, the ideal woman functions as an object; she is hardly her own subject of action or thought. As such, Rama venerates her as the suffering victim of fate:

To be a woman is to suffer, to bear the yoke of man. (133)

For women possession is knowledge. To hold is to be:
to love is to submit. Bondage is her destiny. (187)

Rama's adulterous affair with Lakshmi in Bombay is curiously marked by his fear of her:

Once or twice she came near me, but I moved away,
almost afraid of her physical importance. One felt she
had the power to pluck the manhood out of anyone and
throw it into the sea... (295)

The affair, however, is sanctioned by his controlling, highly objectified image of her:

She was indeed not particularly clean in her habits, but
she was a good Hindu wife. (294)

Not only are Rao's nationalist identifications deeply essentialist, elaborated at the expense of a consideration of caste and gender; his experimentation with the English language is also suspect. Unlike Narayan, who attempted a neutral and monolithic use of the English language, Rao actively infuses his English with

what critics like S.N. Sridhar have called a “nativization” of English (“Non-Native English Literatures: Context and Relevance”, *The Other Tongue: English Across Cultures*, 291-306). In the Author’s Foreword, Rao professes:

Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect
which will some day prove to be as distinctive and colorful
as the Irish or the American. Time alone will justify it.

(*Kanthapura* , vii)

In *Kanthapura*, this kind of linguistic experimentation, and its failure, is both quite discernible.

Kanthapura tells the story of a South Indian village that is thrown into upheaval over Gandhi’s Freedom Movement; the villagers rise up against bondage and attempt to overthrow their rulers. It is narrated by a pious old woman whose “distinctive and colorful” dialect is imbued with the rhythm and cadence of Indian (specifically Kannada) speech. Rao’s forays into experimentation with English are evident in passage after passage:

We shall offer you [Kenchamma, the village goddess]
our first rice and our first fruit and we shall offer you
saris and bodice cloth for every birth and marriage, we
shall wake thinking of you, sleep prostrating before you,
Kenchamma, and *through the harvest night shall we dance*
before you, the fire in the middle and the horns about us,
we shall sing and sing and sing, clap our hands and sing... (3)

Three days later, when we were just beginning to say *Ram*
Ram after the rice had been thrown back into the rice granary,
the cradle hung back to the roof, and the cauldron put back
on the bath fire, and the gods put back in their sanctum, and
all the houses washed and swept and adorned and sanctified,
and when one by one our men were slipping in and then hurrying
back to their *jungle retreats*, what should we see on that Saturday

...but *one, two, three cars going up the Bebbur mound, one, two, three crawling cars going up the Bebbur mound like a marriage procession*, and we all said, "*why, whose marriage now, when we are beating our mouths and crying?*" (157)

[Emphasis mine]

These sentences seem endless. Linguistically, they are fairly sophisticated, containing inversions ("Through the harvest night shall we dance"), repetition ("We shall offer you our first rice...we shall offer you saris...we shall wake thinking of you..."; "one, two, three cars going up the Bebbur mound...one, two, three crawling cars going up the Bebbur mound..."), and a generous scattering of what Bakhtin would call socioideological heteroglossia ("first rice", "first fruit", ceremonies performed for Kenchamma, the chanting of "Ram-Ram", "the gods put in their sanctum", "beating our mouths", etc.). Rao intends them to be understood as translations from the Kannada both rhythmically and literally. In the linguistic context of the academic study of English in non-English cultures, they are considered powerfully successful nativizations.

Larger theoretical questions, of course, crowd into this kind of experimentation by a writer who is himself enormously distanced from the rural characters he is attempting to speak for: who is the "native" and what is being nativized? Who recognizes this nativization? and so on. Klaus Steinworth points out that Indianizations are perhaps meaningful only in an Indian, not a Western, context. The narrator, who in an empirically situated understanding would not even speak English, is made to speak startlingly refined poetic prose, with stylized, Westernized alliteration ("crunch—cough—cane"; "paste—pickles", "pit—plant"), assonance ("side"—"sign"—"maistri"—"lime"; "much"—"crunch"—"touch"), symmetry of phrases ("telling story after story"—"looking to this side and that"; "lime their betel leaves"—"twist the tobacco leaves"), and so on (*The Indo-English Novel*, 118). Hence, Steinworth suggests, with the use of a "literary" or poetical language, Rao is targeting a Western audience for whom his Indianizations will work.

Jussawalla's criticism of Rao's experimentation with English is slightly different from Steinworth's. She makes a distinction between Indianization and Indianness, valuing the latter over the former. A distinction needs to be made here between Jussawalla's definition of Indianness and the essentialist definition of Indianness by other Indo-Anglian critics. By Indianness, Jussawalla means the actual situation of India's heterogeneous multiculturalism and multilingualism. (However, Jussawalla's own theorizing about Indian writing in English is inadequate). According to her, Rao's Indianization of English fails because Rao does not take into account India's actual multicultural and multilingual situation of spoken English and the fact that his English can never be Kannada itself. She relates an interesting experimental study in which Professor K. S. Narayana Rao of the University of Wisconsin made an American and an Indian to read out sections of *Kanthapura*. The American reading registered a loss in the meaning of the passage, due to the American reader's unfamiliarity with the rhythm of Kannada; the Indian reading flowed more smoothly but was flat in its inflection and could put off a Western listener. Jussawalla shows that Rao's Indianizations are not only geared towards a Western audience, but are also problematic for that very audience. (Jussawalla, 95-97)

More specifically, Rao's experimentation with English must be questioned on two grounds. First, there is the contradictory enterprise of preserving Indianizations within the text even while providing a fifty-nine page glossary at the back of it. Rao's extensive translations from Kannada back to English defeat his very purpose, for his nativizations prove, after all, to be de-nativizations put to the service of Western readers. In this sense, *Kanthapura* addresses and continues a pernicious anthropological curiosity about "alien" cultures that had been initiated many years ago in the West and that reappears in such anthropological Orientalized studies as Dorothy Spencer's bibliography, *Indian Fiction in English: An Annotated Bibliography*. Therefore, unlike Salman Rushdie's inclusion of Indian heteroglossia in his novels, Rao's inclusion of them in

Kanthapura serves to domesticate what should in fact be a space resistant to easy appropriation, so that it might be recognized as radically Other (because rural and illiterate) by the Western reader.

Second, what Rao and his critics fail to consider is the way in which an unthinking preservation of India's mythical past is detrimental to an enterprise which intends to produce a new language in which Indians who bear both English and "native" influences can express themselves. Rao's return to Indian myth suggests the sort of impasse that, in his study of colonialism and national culture, Frantz Fanon warns against:

The artist who has decided to illustrate the truths of the nation turns paradoxically toward the past and away from actual events. What he ultimately intends to embrace are in fact the castoffs of thought, its shells and corpses, a knowledge which has been stabilized once and for all.

(*The Wretched of the Earth*, 225)

Granted, the "truths of the nation" that Fanon speaks of are to be located as themselves embedded in discursive practices. Even so, it cannot be possible that one has access to a colonized country's pre-colonial past without colonialism itself presenting a radical rupture in this imagined continuum. As a novel about the Quit India movement against British domination published in 1938 (nine years before India's formal independence), *Kanthapura* strangely turns away from "actual events" and promotes a return to myth, folklore, and ignorance. Even the periodic acts of physical violence that the police inflict on the villagers are related remotely and detachedly; it is as if the sentence is so committed to Indian cadence and rhythm that it rushes through and past the violence being described:

...and the police, seeing the crowd out of their hands, kick and twist the limbs and bang more fiercely, and Seethamma is thrown upon the cactuses and Vedamma and Kanakamma after her, and we could hear their wailings, and we run to them

and pull them up, and we run down the lane and the field-bunds
and we come to the canal, and the women cry out, "We cannot
go! We cannot go!" and the men drag them and the police
push them in, and the pebbles slip under our feet, and saying,
"Ganga, Jumna, Saraswathi!" we look up into the wide starry
sky, and there is something in the air resonant like the temple
bell..... (167-168)

Fanon suggests that the colonized artist needs to break new ground:

...the native intellectual who wishes to create an authentic
work of art must realize that the truths of a nation are in the
first place its realities. He must go on until he has found the
seething pot out of which the learning of the future will emerge.

(The Wretched of the Earth, 225)

But in both *The Serpent and the Rope* and *Kanthapura*, Rao tends to insulate
(rather than open up) an Indian identity, arresting creative change by deadening
and fossilizing its possibilities. In *The Serpent and the Rope*, Rama typically
raises crucial issues only to freeze them on the basis of an apolitical subjective
belief in Indian metaphysics:

Marxism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Hitlerism, the
British Commonwealth, the Republic of the United States
of America, all are so many names for some unknown
principle, which we feel but cannot name. For all the roads,
as the Gita says, lead but to the Absolute. (90)

**SALMAN RUSHDIE: NATIONALISM AS A DISCURSIVE FORMATION
IN *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN***

If a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand.

(*The Bible: St. Mark*)

In *Midnight's Children* (published in 1981), Salman Rushdie analyses Indian nationalism from its birth in the Quit India movement to its institutionalization in post- and neo-colonial government. According to his analysis, nationalism cannot be disengaged from its discursive function of projecting certain nationalist "truths" to the Indian people. Rushdie seems to locate the operation of these "truths" in both the context of the Indian government's ideologically interested use of political rhetoric and the context of the Indian media in post-independence India. Further, one specific nationalist "truth" that Rushdie examines in *Midnight's Children* involves the imagined homogeneity of Indians under the aegis of the national motto: unity in diversity. Rushdie demonstrates that this imagined homogeneity is both interested and fraudulent. In *Midnight's Children*, Indian heterogeneity threatens to splinter, and indeed ends up splintering, the monolithic manner in which nationalist discourses produce and reproduce their "truthful" representation of India. Rushdie's analysis of Indian nationalism is significant because he wrenches it from the tenacious grasp of essentialism and places it in the field of representation and discursive practice.

Not surprisingly, Indo-English critics have avoided studying Rushdie's work. For him, Indianness is not a matter of one's feeling Indian; it is a matter of one's entering the realm of difference where Indianness is constructed in terms of the specificity of religion and class, among other cultural and socio-economic categories. Further, Rushdie's experimentation with the English language leads him to a kind of translation that is different from both Narayan's and Rao's. He seems to suggest that translation is necessary to the extent that it can make

possible the representation of the Indian subjects who lie beyond the reach of English. The use of translation is further necessary because these Indian subjects have the ability at least to indicate the social stratifications of an India that nationalist discourses have either suppressed or failed to account for. Thus, unlike Narayan and Rao, for whom the political implications of translation went either silenced or unacknowledged, Rushdie allows a definition of translation to emerge which locates it as a practice, as a politically situated act aimed at unsettling the hegemony of standard English. And in Rushdie's writing, Indian languages themselves (in the form of Hindi and Urdu words and street dialects, racy Hindi film dialogue, etc.) form a considerable bulk of the text.

Salman Rushdie writes, if it is possible for his home-bound audience to imagine this, from a position continually displaced by the fact that he is not properly Indian, nor British, nor Pakistani. The son of liberal-minded Muslim parents, he was born in Bombay (Mumbai), India, in June 1947, and came to England at the young age of fourteen for his schooling. In subsequent years, he migrated to England and remained there for a successful career in journalism, while, in the aftermath of the partition of India into Muslim Pakistan and predominantly Hindu India, his parents had moved to Karachi, Pakistan. Some of the context in which one ought to read his radically displaced position may be found in his 1965 visit to his parents in Pakistan. During this year, India and Pakistan were engaged in military combat over the possession of the state of Kashmir. As an adolescent, Rushdie witnessed the Indian bombs landing on Pakistan with wandering and shocked feelings of confused betrayal, having thus far defined himself rebelliously as Indian, even though his parents had begun to think of themselves as Pakistani.

One might say that his sense of speaking from a displaced position leads Rushdie, in part, to the writing of fantasy, to a compulsion to fictionalize worlds (Q. in *Shame*, Ellowen Deewowen in *The Satanic Verses*) in order to then populate them with some measure of authority. For:

It is the fate of migrants to be stripped of history,
to stand naked amidst the scorn of strangers upon
whom they see the...brocades of continuity
and the eyebrows of belonging.

(*Shame*, 64)

Hence, the formulation:

I, too, like all migrants, am a fantasist. I build
imaginary countries and try to impose them on
the ones that exist.

(*Shame*, 92)

Rushdie further asserts:

The country in this story is not Pakistan, or not
quite. There are two countries, real and fictional,
occupying the same space. My story, my fictional
country exists, like myself, at a slight angle to reality.
I have found this off-centering to be necessary; but
its value is, of course, open to debate.

(*Shame*, 28)

In aligning himself with “a fictional country”, Rushdie implies a correspondence between his own displaced subjectivity and the need to fictionalize “real” countries. Elsewhere in *Shame*, he addresses this displaced, off-centered subjectivity by calling himself “a translated man”:

I, too, am a translated man. I have been *borne across*.
It is generally believed that something is always lost
in translation; I cling to the notion--and use, in evidence,
the success of Fitzgerald-Khayyam--that something can
also be gained.

In the voice of his narrators (always identified with Rushdie himself) and elsewhere, Rushdie has drawn attention to the fact that his “belonging” to three different countries is productive and should not mean that he suffers a negative absence of roots. In 1983 interview with Michael Kaufman of The New York Times, he underscores the idea that

...migration, the process of being uprooted [doesn't] necessarily lead to rootlessness. What it can lead to is a kind of multiple rooting. It's not the traditional identity-crisis of not knowing where you come from. The problem is that you come from too many places. The problems are of excess rather than absence.

(Author from Three Countries, 23)

Likewise, his decision to invent fictional countries that he only very tenuously identifies with “real” countries is productive as well. By neither owing allegiance to one “real” country nor paying homage to it under the aegis of nationalism, Rushdie gains the wilful prerogative to analyze the accompanying problematics of nationalism in the context of his fantasy literature. Indeed, his novels overtly maintain the liberating, enabling value of a sort of phantasmagoric writing. They are post-modern insofar as they signify a break from the kind of bourgeois classical realism of a chronological narrative that comforted with its semblance to a consensual reality. Referring obliquely to the mode of realism that had, in some senses, determined the localized and limited writing of an entire generation of older Indian writers, and marking his own difference from those writers and that mode, Rushdie states:

...it seemed amazing to me that when you looked at the literature that had been produced about India, it seemed dated and delicate, and I wondered why these dainty, delicate books were being written about this

(*Author from Three Countries*, 22)

The departure from realism may be attributed to Rushdie's willingness to view reality as if it is itself a mere construct that offers people an allusion of rationality. As such, any general notion of reality becomes a deprived zone of specific, multiple, and relatively defined realities. In his novels, then, excursions in the realm of fantasy are not only as tenable and valid as reality itself, but reality itself exists only in relation to how one sees it. Reality is, Rushdie says in *Midnight's Children*,

...a question of perspective; the further you get from the past, the more concrete it seems—but as you approach the present, it inevitably seems more and more incredible. Suppose yourself in a large cinema, sitting at first in the back row, and gradually moving up, row by row, until your nose is almost pressed against the screen. Gradually the stars' faces dissolve into dancing grain; tiny details assume grotesque proportions; the illusion dissolves—or rather, it becomes clear that the illusion itself is reality.

(*Midnight's Children*, 165-166)

This is not to say, however, that the writing of fantasy fosters and promotes illusion as political ignorance. On the contrary, what becomes most "real" in Rushdie's break from nationalism and its concomitant expression in realism is his articulation of the First and Third World politics.

While Rushdie eschews realism as a mode of writing which (wrongly) relies on a consensual reality, he aligns his own fantasy writing to a subgenre of fiction termed "magical realism". (See Amaryll Beatrice Chanady, *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved and Unresolved Antinomy*). One of its notable practitioners, the Columbian writer, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, had a far-reaching influence on Rushdie. Like Garcia Marquez, Rushdie treats the fantastic as a part

of everyday life in his novels: "the unreal happens as part of reality". (Angel Flores, 191). According to Rosemary Jackson, fantasy is "a literature of desire":

...fantastic literature points to or suggests the basis upon which cultural order rests, for it opens up, for a brief moment, on to that which lies outside the law, that which is outside dominant value systems. The fantastic traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced...and made absent.... What could be termed as a bourgeois category of the real is under attack.

(Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion, 29)

While Rushdie's use of fantasy is subversive in a manner that is close to Jacobson's description, it is also specific to the use of magical realism by writers in the context of the Third World. The writing of magical realism seems to be especially appropriate in the context of the Third World, where a political, social, and economic reality that is too grim for realism constantly unfolds itself. In this sense, the enabling value of magical realism is that it offers Rushdie a method for examining post- and neo-colonial ideological structures of control.

According to Louis Althusser, repressive state apparatuses (such as the police, the army, or prison) operate "by violence", and ideological apparatuses (such as churches, trade unions, or schools) function "by ideology". Althusser's functional definition of ideology locates it as "the 'representation' of the Imaginary relationship of individuals to their Real conditions of existence" (Althusser, 181). When hailed ("Hey, You"), the individual will turn and experience an imaginary recognition of the truth and appropriateness of the recruiting ideology. In this moment of recognition, the individual becomes a "subject". This subject has represented itself as being in the place required by ideology's representations, and hence it can live its relation with the real condition of existence as if it were autonomous in that relation. This ideological interpellation of the individual

maintains social formations or the reproduction of the “prospective conditions for continuous production”. (Althusser, 145).

Rushdie may not, of course, subscribe to this understanding of ideology. Nor do the workings of ideology as outlined by Althusser translate perfectly into his novels. But certainly much of Rushdie’s writing explores relations between political structures and the individual, and the individual is hardly autonomous in these determining relations. Further, the “real” conditions of life described by Rushdie are so horrifying as to seem unbelievable. Hence, magical realism is particularly amenable to Rushdie’s project of demystifying ideological operations in the context of the Third World. It provides Rushdie with a way to cut through the façade of order and reason to reveal that “the illusion itself is reality”. Fantasy works not just as a world-view but also as a stance from which radical positions on First and Third World governments are being formulated; it provides the fictitious space into which are drawn the enormous historical and hallucinatory issues of our time: the terrible failure of post-colonial India to constitute itself as a viable democratic republic; the partitions of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, which unleashed the kind of insane violence that can only stem from the physical uprooting of an already divided people from here to there; the autocratic regime of Indira Gandhi, culminating in the vicious years of formal Emergency; the military dictatorship of Zia-ul-Haq in Pakistan; the status of Third World immigrants in racist Britain.

Referring to his criticisms of Pakistan, Rushdie articulates this operation of fantasy in *Shame*:

The book would have been banned, dumped in the rubbish bin, burned. All that effort for nothing! Realism can break a writer’s heart! Fortunately, however, I am only telling a sort of modern fairytale, so that’s all right; nobody need get upset, or take anything I say too seriously. No drastic action need

be taken either. What a relief!

(*Shame*, 72)

The passage suggests a retreat from political engagement, when, in fact, it comes at the end of a relentless description of corrupt Pakistani politics:

But suppose this were a realistic novel! Just think what else I might have to put in. The business, for instance, of the illegal installation, by the richest members of "Defence", of covert, subterranean water from their neighbours' mains... And would I also have to describe the Sind Club in Karachi, where there is still a sign reading, "Women and Dogs Not Allowed Beyond This Point"? Or to analyze the subtle logic of an industrial programme that builds nuclear reactors but cannot develop a refrigerator?

(*Shame*, 71)

The license that Rushdie gives to himself—that of a fairytale teller, a fantasist—allows him to articulate what would otherwise be non-permissible commentary. Indeed, decoding the obvious allegory that Rushdie employed in *Shame*, the Pakistani government banned the book.

In this sense, fantasy ceases to be, in fact never was, a formal literary device; it is a genre put to work, a method deployed for Rushdie's examination of ideological structures. His analysis of ideological nationalist discourses that are disseminated in various forms in Indian culture suggests that he seems to view nationalism not as an essentialist notion but as a discursive formation that is interested in producing "truth". He then goes on to subvert nationalism by the parody of its dominant discourses. This subversion is not of a simple nature. Aware that his own work operates in the ideological framework of the production of "Third World" literature, Rushdie does not set up a simple equation between ethically "right" and "wrong" positions on nationalism. Instead, within this ideological

framework, he shows how Indian nationalist discourses are ideologically interested and suggests how they may be subverted. If an earlier generation of Indian writers left unacknowledged their contradictory nationalist identifications, then Rushdie, having accepted (from the migrant's point of view) the necessity for those contradictions, makes of his text a critique of nationalism itself.

Rushdie's criticism of the nationalist "truths" produced by dominant ideological discourses takes several directions. One of these is suggested by his parody of political rhetoric—which he relates to governmental propaganda—and his parody of the ideological apparatus of the Indian media-newspaper and radios in particular. Brennan highlights the post-war context in which the Indian media operates:

Rushdie's implicit reflection on the responsibility of the media's various 'broadcasters' in the postwar era... is a reflection on the specific type of nation he is analyzing. The nexus of fiction and nationalism in this period occurs within the borders of the nation-state--that is, in the apparatuses of ideological control.

(*Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation*, 97)

As a text about the Indian media's ideological function in the post-war period and the ideological political rhetoric which fuels it, *Midnight's Children* parodies dominant nationalist discourses in order to demonstrate that the post- and neo-colonial government's assurance—that it is for the people, by the people, and of the people—is a tactical ploy aimed at disguising actual Indian heterogeneity and difference.

Midnight's Children represents a mammoth enterprise. Its writing may have been prefigured in the somewhat grandiose mission that Rushdie outlined six years earlier in his first book, *Grimus* (pub. 1975):

I became engrossed in the notion of race memory; the sediment of highly-concentrated knowledge that passes down the ages, constantly being added to and subtracted from... I have achieved the ultimate harmony: the combination of the most profound thoughts of the race, tested by time, and the cadences that give those thoughts coherence and, even more important, popularity. I am taking the intellect back to the people.

(*Grimus*, 160)

Midnight's Children is a narrative about miraculously endowed children, all born in the Indian subcontinent at midnight in August 1947, the hour of India's independence, and it is recounted by their leader, Saleem Sinai (unevenly but obviously identified with Rushdie himself). *Midnight's Children* most literally allegorizes the dynamic and myriad possibilities open to a country which has survived and overcome British colonialism; but the children of midnight lose their extraordinary gifts—India succumbs to political, economic, and social deterioration—because the world they live in cannot tolerate any vision of human perfection. "Midnight's children", says Rushdie,

can be made to represent many things, according to your point of view: they can be seen as the last throw of everything antiquated and retrogressive in our myth-ridden nation, whose defeat was entirely desirable in the context of a modernizing, twentieth century economy; or as the true hope of freedom, which is now forever extinguished.

(*Midnight's Children*, 200)

Rushdie's subversion of Indian nationalism through a parodic examination of its dominant discursive representations surfaces in many instances throughout the text. At precisely the time that India and Pakistan were divided into two separate countries—the birth of India as a free country coincided with the traumatic

Partition of 1947; the Pakistan itself was meant to ally Muslim fears about free India's being predominantly Hindu—at a time when schisms between Hindus and the Muslims ran the deepest, India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, is quoted as saying:

This is no time for petty or destructive criticism
...No time for ill will. We have to build the noble
mansion of free India, where all her children may
dwell.

(*Midnight's Children*, 118)

The undercutting of Nehru's celebratory political rhetoric here is as clear as the undercutting of the tone of his congratulatory letter addressed to the baby Saleem:

Dear Baby Saleem, My belated congratulations on
the happy accident of your moment of birth! You
are the newest bearer of that ancient face of India
which is also eternally young. We shall be watching
over your life with the closest attention; it will be,
in a sense, the mirror of our own.

(*Midnight's Children*, 122)

Elsewhere in *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie parodies the sloganeering, jingoistic, journalistic style of newspaper articles which celebrated Indian independence. Referring to the birth of his narrator, Saleem, at exactly the hour of midnight, a newspaper cutting comments on his photograph:

A charming pose of Baby Saleem Sinai, who was born
last night at the exact moment of our Nation's independence
—the happy child of that glorious hour!

(*Midnight's Children*, 119)

(To the adult Saleem's indignation, his mother was paid a mere one hundred rupees for having won the newspaper contest for the first baby to be born at India's hour of freedom.)

Further, Rushdie's depiction of the 1965 war between India and Pakistan similarly parodies and juxtaposes the contradictory newspaper and radio accounts coming from either side of the border. The effect of this parody is to show how every nationalist account is rhetorically and ideologically constructed, interested in the formulation of its own position of "truth":

One week before my eighteenth birthday, on August 8th did Pakistani troops in civilian clothing cross the cease-fire line in Kashmir and infiltrate the Indian sector, or did they not? In Delhi, Prime Minister Shastri announced "massive infiltration...to subvert the state"; but here is Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Pakistan's Foreign Minister with his riposte: "We categorically deny any involvement in the rising against tyranny by the indigenous people of Kashmir.

(Midnight's Children, 338)

As these contradictory governmental reports abound, questions regarding their validity (which account is right?) impinge relentlessly and rigorously upon Saleem's consciousness:

But who attacked? Who defended? On my eighteenth birthday, reality took another beating. From the ramparts of the Red Fort in Delhi, an Indian Prime Minister (not the same one who wrote me a long-ago letter) sent me this birthday greeting: "We promise that force will be met with force, and aggression against us will never be allowed to succeed!" While jeeps with loud-hailers saluted me in Guru Mandir, reassuring me: "The Indian aggressors will be utterly overthrown! We are a race of warriors! One Pathan one Punjabi Muslim is worth ten of those babus-in-arms."

...And on the radio, what destruction, what mayhem! In the first five days of the war Voice of Pakistan announced the destruction of more aircraft than India had ever possessed; in eight days, All India Radio massacred the Pakistan army down to, and considerably beyond, the last man. (339)

...and did great sacrifices take place or not? Was it true that the city was virtually defenceless, because the Pak army and Air Force were all in the Kashmir sector? Voice of Pakistan said: O memorable day! O unarguable lesson in the fatality of delay! The Indians, confident of capturing the city, *stopped for breakfast*. All-India Radio announced the fall of Lahore; meanwhile, a private aircraft spotted the breakfasting invaders. While the B.B.C. picked up the A.I.R. story, the Lahore militia was mobilized. Hear the Voice of Pakistan!—old men, young boys, irate grandmothers fought the Indian army; bridge by bridge they battled, with any available weapons! Lame men loaded their pockets with grenades, pulled out the pins, flung themselves beneath advancing Indian tanks; toothless old ladies disemboweled Indian babus with pitchforks... Was that how it happened? Or was All-India-Radio—*great tank battle, huge Pak losses, 450 tanks destroyed*—telling the truth? (340)

The quotation is made at length here in order to demonstrate the emergence of the thematics of a politicized position that ironically, even humorously, records the effects of an ideological nationalist “truth”. Itself inaccessible, this nationalist “truth” is discernible only in terms of its effects. Indeed, the fact that two discourses—Indian and Pakistani—compete with each other accents the fact that neither possesses the “truth”; but either discourse is dangerously believable, depending on which side of the border it occurs. Hence, Rushdie subverts the dominant status of both discourses by presenting them at the ironic point of their inter-competition.

But the most radical critique of nationalism that Rushdie offers may be located in his attack on an imagined Indian homogeneity. He maps out an unevenly interdependent relationship between the sites of the Indian body politic and the individual. When Jawaharlal Nehru tells Saleem, “[Your life], will be, in a sense, the mirror of our own”, he does not specify, “*in what sense*”. Rushdie continues,

How, in what terms, may the career of a single individual be said to impinge upon the fate of a nation? (238)

Rushdie begins to specify the sense in which the individual interacts with the nation-state. First, by virtue of his blood and upbringing, Saleem is made to represent practically all Indians. Rushdie’s most emphatic attack upon the discourses of Indian nationalism takes the form of a cheeky joke in *Midnight’s Children*: the fate of the nation is made to rest upon the all-inclusive individual. At the heart of this joke is the clever epistemological inversion of the collective/individual ethos. That is, if individuals are to be commonly understood as *determined by the larger world around them* (in terms of a “one-in-all” formulation), then Rushdie places at the center of his study one individual subjectivity and physical body that itself contains the larger world (in terms of the formulation, “all-in-one”). Saleem embodies every Indian; his personal actions move the Indian nation nationally and globally. The 1965 Indo-Pak war, in fact,

happened because I dreamed Kashmir into the fantasies of our rulers. (339)

I was the puppet-master and the nation performed my play (262)

To dismiss this one-in-all inversion on the grounds that it is obsessively egocentric is to ignore the amazingly rich ways in which it opens up multiple relationships to nationalism. For, arguably, nothing is more overdetermined and finally indeterminate than the site of the individual psyche and body. To make

that psyche and body the very ground upon which nationalism plays out its various discursive battles is to render nationalism as itself heterogeneous and problematic, constituted as it is by a subject's shifting, fluid identifications with the nation. In Rushdie's formulation, eventually, nationalism is and should be about these multiple identifications to it.

Rushdie deliberately renders Saleem's family tree as heterogeneous in his attempt to portray the all-in-oneness coalesced in Saleem that will problematize at least one nationalist "truth": unity in diversity. This heterogeneity is marked by the characters' complex shifting between positions of alienation and identification (from and with dominant and minority groups, which can themselves be further divided and subdivided). Saleem's grandfather, Dr. Aadam Aziz, is a Kashmiri Muslim who is alienated not only from pre-partition Punjab, India, because of his aversion to the city, Amritsar, to which he moves from Kashmir—"We are not like Indians, always making battles". Aziz...does not feel Indian. [33]—but also from Kashmir itself because of his progressive and liberal Western education in Germany. Timothy Brennan links this Dr. Aziz with E.M. Forster's Dr. Aziz in *A Passage to India* and makes the point that Rushdie is parodying the English novel of Empire. Brennan also traces the genealogy of "Aadam" and "Sinai" to the western biblical patriarchal tradition of Christianity (Brennan, 110). Saleem's father, Ahmed Sinai, is an Indian Muslim businessman, but the connection to Kashmir persists when his Hindu business colleagues attribute a racist stereotype of Kashmiri uncleanness to him:

These Kashmiri types, old boy: well-known fact they never
wash. (73)

The Muslim identity pits itself not only against hegemonic Kashmiri, Hindu, and Western ideologies; it is itself splintered by its two institutional manifestations, the Muslim League and the Free Islam Convocation. During the nineteen-thirties, the decade of the Quit India program launched against the British, these two Muslim organizations were fighting for very different objects: the Muslim League desired a severing from India and a separate country (Pakistan) in the event that a predominantly Hindu India gained independence; Free Islam desired continued presence for Muslims in free India. Saleem's grandfather was closely associated with the latter group.

When Ahmed and Naseem Sinai move to Bombay, they retain their Kashmiri alienness:

...we were inflected with the alienness of Kashmiri
blood, with the icy reserve of Kashmiri sky, and
remained meateaters to a man. (92)

The birth of Saleem Sinai is to be read simultaneously as the birth of free India. It also marks the culmination of a colonial socio-cultural and political history, incorporating as it does different religious and regional identities (Kashmiri, Indian, Muslim, Hindu and British) and key events of the freedom struggle against British occupation. Rushdie provides a mock-list of these on 106-109: Gandhi's Hartal movement, the Jallianwallah Bagh massacre in which the British General, Dyer, commanded Indian troops to fire and kill over one thousand peaceful protestors, the disintegration of the Free Islam convocation, and so on.

But Saleem is an illegitimate child, conceived on the wrong side of the bed. This allows Rushdie to include in Saleem's ancestry the blood of a British—William Methwold, whose ancestor apparently founded the city of Bombay—and a Hindu working-class woman—Vanita, wife of the street entertainer, Wee Willie Winkie. What Methwold's impetus to Saleem's conception obviously signifies is the end

of the Raj: Saleem is both a product of colonialism and a hope for free India's future. Entertainers, too, will "orchestrate [Saleem's] life" (101); towards the end of the novel, Saleem is befriended by the performing magician, Picture Singh, in the Magician's Ghetto, a place that becomes, for Rushdie, a metaphor for the underground workings of Indian Marxists, Socialists and Communists.

Following a plot that Rushdie deliberately takes out of any given Indian B movie, the baby Saleem is switched from Vanita's crib to Amina Sinai's in the hospital. Amina's own son, Shiva, goes to the unprivileged couple, Winkie and Vanita. Shiva, Rushdie's ironic inversion of the Hindu mythological god of procreation and destruction of the same name, goes on, because he has been cheated out of his rightful parentage, to become Saleem's fiercest rival in the Midnight's Children Conference.

The character who switches the two babies is Mary Pereira, a Bombay Christian nurse who wishes to appease her lover, Joseph D' Costa. Rushdie momentarily plays with the Third World perversions of the biblical Joseph-and-Mary couple, but his purpose seems to be to show the inexorable presence of economic inequalities. For Joseph is upset at the immediate results of Indian independence:

This independence is for the rich only; the poor are
being made to kill each other like flies. In Punjab
in Bengal. Riots, riots, poor against poor. It's in the
wind. (104)

Performing "her own private revolutionary act" (117) that she imagines will please Joseph, Mary switches the two babies, so that Shiva falls into the poor Hindu working class, and Saleem goes to the bourgeois Muslim Sinai family.

Hence, the different ethnic and religious strains that are woven into Saleem by virtue of his blood and upbringing—British, Kashmiri, Bombayite, Christian, Muslim and Hindu—render him heterogeneously Indian. Since the newly

independent Indian nationalist motto was “unity in diversity”, and since the site of the physical body axiomatically refers to organic unity, Rushdie subverts that organic unity in order to subvert that nationalist motto. He writes of the disintegration of the human body:

...a human being, inside himself, is anything but a whole, anything but homogeneous; all kinds of everywhichting are jumbled up inside him and he is one person one minute and another the next. The body, on the other hand, is homogeneous as anything. Indivisible, a one-piece suit, a sacred temple, if you will. It is important to preserve this wholeness. But the loss of my finger...not to mention the removal of certain hairs from my head, has undone all that. Thus we enter a state of affairs which is nothing short of revolutionary; and its effect on history is bound to be pretty damn startling. Uncork the body, and God knows what you permit to come tumbling out. (237)

Consequently, the next stage of Rushdie’s analysis of nationalism hinges upon the operations of the physical body, which is both site and symptom of the political body. The all-inclusive individual grotesquely and absurdly mirrors the workings of the political body to such an extent that it becomes unclear whether Saleem is causing political events to occur or whether he is merely registering their effects on the level of the physical.

As the leader of the Midnight Children’s Conference, Saleem’s special talent is the ability to be a sort of “All-India Radio” which can tune into the minds of other characters at will. But this ability is taken away from him through a series of personal and national mishaps. His facial features (replete with a Ganesh-like elephantine nose and a set of birthmark stains) are a sort of “human geography” (231), which resemble the map of India. His schoolteacher points out jeeringly:

See here—the Deccan peninsula hanging down!
...These stains...are Pakistan! These birthmark
on the right ear is the East Wing; and these horrible
stained left cheek, the West. (231-232)

Through a steady deterioration of the human body (linked consistently with such historical events as the Language Marches in Bombay, the Indo-China war of 1962, the Indo-Pakistan war of 1965, the traumatic creation of Bangladesh in 1971, the state of Indian Emergency in 1975, and so on), Saleem is finally unable to contain this heterogeneity of population, this excess of difference. His body splinters into the six hundred and thirty million pieces that represent India's population. By this, Rushdie means to signify the breakdown of the post-independence Indian nationalist ethos through Indira Gandhi's corrupt autocracy. And Saleem's physical decline, like the decline of the other preternaturally endowed children born at the midnight hour of India's formal independence in August 1947, mirrors the moral and sociopolitical decline of India.

The final straw, Saleem's forced sterilization under the family planning program led by Indira Gandhi's son, Sanjay Gandhi, renders Saleem politically infertile. Under Sanjay Gandhi's Youth Central Committee, such forced sterilizations were, for a while, almost common occurrences; typically, their victims were working-class people. Rushdie returns to this image of men being mysteriously carted off to portable tents by Sanjay Gandhi's Youth volunteers in the short story, "The Free Radio", The Atlantic Monthly (June 1983, 75-76). Both Indira Gandhi and Saleem have been "competitors for centrality" (420), by virtue of being the manipulators of Indian history:

...did Saleem's dream of saving the nation leak,
through the osmotic tissues of history, into the
thoughts of the Prime minister herself? Was my
lifelong belief in the equation between the State
and myself transmuted, in "the Madam's" mind,
into that in-those-days-famous phrase: "India is

Eventually, Rushdie seems to suggest by his examination of nationalism that midnight’s children might have presented a viable alternative government. But nationalism’s “regime of truth”, when mirrored collectively by midnight’s children, effects such devastation that they cannot escape internal differences and the strifes fuelled by Saleem’s rival, Shiva. Shiva becomes the Indian government’s military arm; he forces Saleem to betray the already split-up midnight’s children, all of whom are systematically sterilized to prevent a new generation from being born. Saleem does have a son, but, like Saleem himself, Aadam Sinai is illegitimate. He is a product of the union of Shiva and Parvati-the-Witch. A denizen of the Magician’s Ghetto and a member of the MCC, Parvati-the-Witch is also a perversion of Parvati, the god Shiva’s consort in Indian mythology (just as Shiva is a perversion of the god Shiva). According to legend she spent generations trying to seduce Shiva in various disguises, when Shiva refused to sire any offspring in his desire to break from the chain of rebirth. Parvati tricks him into sexual intercourse and the product of their union is Ganesh, a sort of monster, a half-human, half-elephant god. Aadam Sinai too is unmistakably linked to Ganesh in his elephantine scope to all the previous generations that had spawned him. He signifies both a beginning and an end of the Aziz and Sinai line for he is the only child of the generation of independence.

The practice of translation and its concomitant implications, which an older generation of Indian writers had not brought themselves to the point of addressing, forms a significant subject for Rushdie. Two exceptions come immediately to mind: Mulk Raj Anand and G.V. Desani. In novels such as *Across the Black Waters* and *The Sword and the Sickle*, Anand bravely undertook a re-invention of English by including Indian dialect and slang; G.V. Desani, in *All About H. Hatterr*, chose to sprinkle his writing with a bold pigeon English. One may argue that Raja Rao engaged in a similar project of revising the English language by Indianizing it; but the actual status of translation and its implications

are not fully addressed by him. In one sense, translation itself is one determining condition of such migrants as Rushdie and Bharati Mukherjee. Rushdie calls himself “a translated man” because he is an immigrant in a foreign country. There is, then, a sense in which translation implies a metaphoric displacement.

In the figure of Saladin Chamcha in *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie crystallizes the dilemma of the Indian immigrant to Britain. Saladin migrates to England for his education and remains there with a career in television (in much the same way as Rushdie himself did). In his anxiety to “fit” into the dominant culture, Saladin deliberately gets rid of his Bombay accent and models himself after his image of the British. But this accent cannot be erased; it crops up when he visits India and during his unconscious and subconscious moments. And in London, he devolves to a Satanic demon with horns and hooves because the “host culture” owns the “power of description and [immigrants] succumb to the picture [it] creates”. (*The Satanic Verses*, 168). Rushdie explains some of his conception of Saladin in his Newsweek interview. There he speaks of Saladin Chamcha as a type of demonized immigrant. Immigrants like Saladin, who are seen as “devils” by the native English population in England, respond to this grotesque demonization by saying:

You call us devils? ...Very well then, here is the devils
version of the world...the version written from the
experience of those who have been demonized by virtue
of their otherness.

(Newsweek, 54)

The extent of this demonization has to be read in the context of British's neo-imperialism, its new colonizing force represented by the British civilian police force which brutalizes Saladin in London. Elsewhere, Rushdie has pointed out that in Britain's “new Empire”, immigrants are stereotyped as black, even though forty percent of the black community in Britain is not constituted of immigrants. Roughly fifty percent of all telephone calls made by employers to employment

agencies specify 'no blacks'. The chairman of a building society "rejected a jingle on the grounds that the off-screen singer sounded as if he had a black voice. The irony was that the singer was actually white, but the previous year's jingle had been sung by a black man who obviously had the good fortune not to sound like one." (*The New Empire Within Britain*, 418). A British judge claimed in court that "the word 'nigger' cannot be considered an epithet of racial abuse because he was nicknamed 'Nigger' at the public school". (*The New Empire Within Britain*, 420).

We get here a picture of the conditions under which a "translated man" cannot escape being positioned as the Other in a dominant culture and cannot help forming attachments to his home country. In Rushdie's case, one form that these attachments take is a certain fascination with Indian languages. He proliferates his texts with chunks of colloquial Hindi and Urdu words for which he refuses to provide translations. His incorporation of Indian street languages in literary discourse is reminiscent of Bakhtin's insistence on the "living discourse" of the novel. According to Bakhtin, discourse in the novel is "living" because it is a "social phenomenon". (Bakhtin, 259) There is, he says, a "social life of discourse outside the artist's study, discourse in the open spaces of public squares, streets, cities and villages". (259), and Rushdie's inclusion of this "social life" suggests that, for him, the novel participates in a life that exists beyond the hegemony of standard or unitary English.

In literary practice, translation may best be given the term "acculturation", or Angel Rama's "transculturation", which is an oscillation between "the adoption of a European model and the valorization of a national difference." (Rama, 29). In this sense, every Indian writer coming out of British colonialism "transculturates" to some degree, consciously or unconsciously. For immigrant writers, however, "transculturation" is an inexorable necessity. Quite self-consciously aware that his work is part of the ideological and material production of what is called "Third World" literature, Rushdie's "transculturation" entails a shifting between a

sophisticated mode of writing (satire, parody, fantasy) and a clinging to Hindi and Urdu words that he calls "untranslatable". He writes in *Shame* :

The word "Shame". No, I must write it in its original form, not in this peculiar language tainted by wrong concepts and the accumulated detritus of its owner's unrepented past, this Angrezi in which I am forced to write, and so forever alter what is written...Sharam, that's the word. For which this paltry "Shame" is a wholly inadequate translation. (34)

Here, Rushdie's narrator (who, as always, corresponds closely to Rushdie himself) is engaged in the split compulsion to not exclude but to not altogether include the English language. The conflict produced here may be identified as the conflict between his compulsion to translate from the Urdu and his refusal to translate into the English language. As a result, Rushdie almost always seems to include the Urdu and Hindi word, to eschew translation, even if the word signifies an inaccessible referent for a Western audience.

One could assume that this inclusion indicates nothing more than a writer's localized, rhetorical choice of language or even a token gesture towards preserving a semblance to India, were it not for the fact that Indian languages seem to occupy, in Rushdie's writing, the status which Foucault describes as amounting to "an insurrection of subjugated knowledges". (*Power/Knowledge*, 81). At least one kind of "subjugated knowledge" explicated by Foucault in *Power/Knowledge* is:

a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity.

This description recalls Macaulay's dismissal of Sanscrit, in his minute on education, in the face of the imperialist status of English; it also recalls the eighteenth-century Orientalist project to make scientific, by codifying, Sanscrit, Indian religion and history. (Said, 75).

In the character of Padma in *Midnight's Children* may be found an instance of Rushdie's (partial) refusal to translate and so further reinstate what is already a "subjugated knowledge" in a world dominated by power relations. A working-class female character who cannot read, Padma is the one to whom Saleem reads his narrative, even as he is in the act of writing it. As such, she determines to some extent the conditions of reading of *Midnight's Children*. Even though, at some level, Rushdie translates for us what she has to say, her broken English is structurally marked and set apart from Saleem's and Rushdie's polished English, in a way that may signify the chasms that separate their local status.

Padma, whose ahistorical folklore and earthy immediacy function as a counter to Saleem's sophisticated, historical knowledge, is the practical critic who comments on his writing. Immensely erotic (in stark contrast to Saleem), she does her utmost to arouse his sexual attention. In her impatience, Padma wants the story to move quickly and lineally, and she especially relishes sensationalistic detail: "At last", Padma says with satisfaction, "you've learned how to tell things really fast" (109). She is both contemptuous and in awe of what she terms his "writing-shiting":

(She can't read and, like all fish-lovers,
'dislikes other people knowing anything
she doesn't...') She attempts to cajole me
from my desk: "eat, na, food is spoiling".
I remain stubbornly hunched over my paper.
"But what is so precious", Padma demands,
her right hand slicing the air updownup in

Not able to read, she situates Saleem as a privileged, even lazy past-time. This gives Rushdie the occasion to metacritically imply that the writing of novels is an activity that is bourgeois because it is denied to the working class.

Rushdie's construction of Padma seems to indicate the pitfalls of a working class which too fantastically and passively accepts its lot in the context of a modernizing economy which has been hurtled into an industrial future at the expense of the lower class. Saleem, on the other hand, bears more affinity with this modern world, but he is impotent and cannot redirect the course of modern history. Their relationship shifts between mutual dependence and distrust, reflecting, at the cutting edge, the line that separates the working class and the bourgeoisie. Saleem consistently distances himself from her editorial corrections, as if to suggest, quite honestly, this gap that lies between them.

In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie makes possible a methodology for our examination of Indian nationalism. According to the terms of this methodology, one cannot disengage Indian nationalism from its ideological and representational discourses because it is within these discourses that nationalism actually functions. Through a parody of political rhetoric and the news media, Rushdie forefronts the contradictions accompanying this representational and ideological functioning of nationalism. At least one nationalist discourse that Rushdie subverts is that which promotes an imagined Indian homogeneity. In *Midnight's Children*, Saleem's heterogeneity explodes the monolithic, unified nationalist "truth" of "unity in diversity". Further, in the figure of Padma, Rushdie seems to suggest that the translation of Indian subjects who lie beyond the grasp of English is necessary. Such a translation, which structurally re-writes standard English, has the power to indicate the socio-economic stratifications of a more "real" India that nationalist discourses have not accounted for, even while it radically revises standard English in the context of the "Third World".

BHARATI MUKHERJEE: THE "WOMAN" QUESTION IN *WIFE AND JASMINE*

We face neither East nor West: we face forward.

(Kwame Nkrumah: conference speech—Spain, 1960)

Bharati Mukherjee situates nationalism in terms of its discursive practices. But, unlike Narayan, Rao and even Rushdie himself, Mukherjee focuses attention on the position of "woman" in relation to these discursive practices. Narayan gave his deviant female characters Western names in order to excise them from the South Indian register. Rao rendered the woman an object rather than an individual who might be capable of achieving subjecthood. Even though Rushdie astutely examines the operations of nationalism, he does so from the male point of view; it is a man, and not a woman, who is granted the challenge to dismantle nationalist discourses in *Midnight's Children*. Contrarily, her prime interest resting upon the situation of the Indian immigrant woman in the United States, Bharati Mukherjee attempts a representation of women in her writing; at the same time, she draws this representation into the sphere of nationalist concerns.

In the novels of Bharati Mukherjee, one detects a departure from those concerns with literary translation which played so significant a part in the writing of Narayan, Rao and Rushdie. Instead, with Mukherjee, translation signifies the very condition of existence of the Indian immigrant. Even more, as a practice, it signifies transculturation, or the shifting between two available discourses by the once-colonized subject. A product of both colonial and post-colonial Indian history, Bharati Mukherjee comments on her generation that:

We were born too late and not late enough
to be real Indians. In the colonial ambiguities
of the mid-forties we acquired our monstrous
habit of loving paradoxes. We loved both the

freedom fighters and the red-faced officers
who carried bullets and pistols.

(Days and Nights in Calcutta, 223)

The necessarily contradictory separation of “we” and “other” in the once-colonized subject has led, with Bharati Mukherjee, to a fluidity of nationalist identifications. In an essay, she sets up the terms of her project as a writer:

I would rather be cashed in the other legacy of the colonial writer, and that is his or her duality. From childhood we learned how to be two things simultaneously: to be the dispossessed as well as the dispossessor. In textbooks we read of “our” great empire and triumphs (meaning British), “our” great achievements in the arts (meaning the Moslem Moguls) and “our” treachery in the Sepoy Mutiny (meaning “native” troops). History forced us to see ourselves as both the “we” and the “other”, and the language reflected our simultaneity. In time, after independence the mutiny became the first great patriotic uprising, a way of liberation...Perhaps it is this history-mandated training in seeing myself as “the other” that now heaps on me a fluid set of identities denied to most of my mainstream American counterparts.

(Immigrant Writing: Give Us Your Maximalists”, 29)

Here, Bharati Mukherjee is theorizing the contradictory colonial legacy that mandates the fact that the colonized subject sees herself as both “we” (the colonial subject) and the “other” (the colonized Indian “native”). She is articulating the type of contradictory nationalist identification that went generally unacknowledged with an earlier generation of Indian writers. By choosing first to

problematize notions of monolithic “Indianness” by splitting it up into “we” and “other”, and then to open up, within a contradictory space, “a fluid set of identities”, Mukherjee initiates a theory about immigrant writing as a positive force committed to a reinvention and multiplicity of perspectives that together might challenge hegemonic nationalist discourses. She also positions herself against the stability of mainstream American writers, referring not to the post-modern fiction of late capitalist North America, but to the minimalist style of American writing in the seventies which, she claims, has now led to the well-packaged, but thematically vacuous, *American novel*.

Mukherjee’s challenge to hegemonic nationalist discourses takes at least two forms. The first is her examination of the Indian woman who, in the Indian geographical and cultural context, takes upon herself the roles of Sita and Savitri (Indian mythological figures who powerfully represent the ideal Indian wife in Indian socioculture, and who played a large part in Rao’s setting up of normative femininity). In the radical breakdown of the traditional ethos of Sita-Savitri upon the Indian woman’s emigration to the United States may be found Mukherjee’s challenge to nationalist discourses. For this breakdown has the effect of targeting Indian nationalism as a patriarchal structure which manifests itself in the maintenance and celebration of traditional Indian femininity.

The second aspect of Mukherjee’s challenge to hegemonic nationalist discourses shifts to the United States and lies in her re-examination of North American ideological concepts of the “melting pot”. These concepts emerge as shallow because they claim to include gender-stratified otherness non-problematically. In fact, there are, Mukherjee maintains, immigrant women who are not all of them quite “melttable”, who do not desire to “melt down” in a country in which immigration itself has moved from the traditional (European) stock to the non-traditional (Asian) kind [These descriptions are from the interview of Mukherjee with Geeta Kothari]. Thus Mukherjee’s characters may be seen to signal a critique of patriarchal Indian nationalism; at the same time,

however, Mukherjee also produces a critique of American nationalist discourse of “the melting pot”. In the case of Dimple in *Wife*, a double disintegration on the Indian and the American fronts leads to her mental breakdown; in *Jasmine*, the main character frees herself from received notions of herself because she begins to see them as mere constructs, and this recognition enables her to then re-imagine and reinvent herself in new modes of thought and behaviour that are neither Indian nor American but both and also beyond both of them.

Having studied the two forms of challenge to hegemonic nationalism that Mukherjee offers in *Wife* and *Jasmine*, we will be in a position to examine her stance on immigrant writing, which posits reinvention of the “self” as “other” and, consequently, identity as a matter of multiple “fluid set of *identities*” (emphasis mine). It eventually points to a meaningful, yet as we will see, problematic, critical intervention in mainstream First World literature.

Born in the mid-forties, Bharati Mukherjee left Calcutta for an M.F.A. and then a Ph. D. in English at the University of Iowa. She taught creative writing at Columbia, New York University, Queens College, and McGill University in Montreal, before assuming a professorship at the University of California at Berkeley. Viewed together, Mukherjee’s novels like *Tiger’s Daughter*, *Wife*, *Jasmine*, and short stories—*Middleman and Other Stories*—constitute a study of both different and similar Third World perspectives both at home and abroad, where her characters are positioned as marginalized in a dominant culture.

In *Wife* (1975), Mukherjee writes about a young woman’s marriage and subsequent emigration to the U.S. At its start, the main character, Dimple, is portrayed as a middle-class teenage Bengali girl on the brink of an arranged marriage. The onset of Dimple’s puberty coincides with another anxiety, that of presenting herself as marriageable material for prospective husbands:

On sunny mornings the sight of boxer shorts

hanging out to dry on a neighbor's balcony
made her blush. At night she hallucinated.
Sometimes when she entered the bathroom
in the dark, the toilet seat twitched like a
coiled snake.

(*Wife*, 12)

At the same time, Dimple is obsessed with the fact that her breasts are too small; convinced that she will become an embarrassment to her family as a spinster, she idealizes herself as Sita, the ideal wife.

Dimple models herself after Sita, both before marriage by preparing for the role and after, when

[H]is disapproval was torture; all her life she
had been trained to please. He expected her,
like Sita, to jump into fire if necessary.

(*Wife*, 28)

Her dilemma is that she is caught between two discourses: the traditional discourse (of Sita), which she has internalized, and the progressive discourse of belligerent female editors of magazines in English, which she reads while trying to improve her English. The former is on the brink of collapse because her attempt to be the perfect wife is impossible in its idealism; the latter is inaccessible to her because her lower middle-class background and lack of higher education inhibit entry to a world of politicized women's movements. In silent protest against what she sees as an invasion of her body, and in preparation for her emigration to the U.S., where she wants to make a new start away from the family of her in-laws, Dimple secretly aborts her baby by skipping rope in the bathroom until she drops.

In New York, her life turns into a nightmarish round of Indian dinner parties, sprinkled generously with avid television viewing and reading of *Better*

Homes and Gardens. Her inability to cope with the newness of her surroundings is exacerbated by her nostalgia for home and her husband's refusal to let her work outside the house. Among the people around her are supposedly liberated Indian women like Ina, who, to Dimple's envy, is comfortable around Americans and who belongs to women's groups. Ina exemplifies acculturation at a certain cost, but she is beyond the pale for Dimple, for whom wearing pants means feeling naked:

If I wear pants to eat pizza in the winter, who knows what I'll be wearing to eat at the Diary Queen next summer.

(*Wife*, 155).

I can't keep up with you people. I haven't read the same kind of books or anything... I just like to cook and watch TV and embroider, and would you believe it, I got ninety-eight percent once in my needlework class?

(*Wife*, 169)

Dimple is increasingly unable to draw distinction between television and the real world, which is itself unreal to her. Living in a high-rise apartment building and watching television news about rape, murder, and theft, she finds the idea of violence gradually becoming an irresistible temptation to her, a way to "make one extravagant gesture in her life". (153). Finally, she cracks under the pressure of maintaining a traditional role in an unfamiliar culture and stabs her husband to death.

Mukherjee's next novel, *Jasmine* (1989), narrates the story of an impoverished farmer's daughter called Jyoti, who is born in the village of Hasnapur, Punjab, India, to which her parents moved from Lahore during the Partition. The fifth unwelcome daughter of a mother who bore nine children and

who tried to strangle her at birth, Jyoti grows up to be a good reader and writer. She is the first girl to be taught English by her schoolteacher:

“God’s cruel”, my mother complained, “to
waste brains on a girl”.

(Jasmine, 40)

When she is seven, she is told by an astrologer that she will be a widow. This prediction turns out to be accurate.

At the age of fourteen, Jyoti marries Prakash Vih, a city boy from Amritsar who is about to graduate and send off job applications to the U.S. What impresses her most about him is that he speaks English:

To want English was to want more than
you had been given at birth, it was to want
the world.

(Jasmine, 68)

Prakash is a well-meaning, ambitious modern man who wants Jyoti to make a break from her feudal and patriarchal past. He renames her Jasmine in order to make her “a new kind of city woman” (77). He also refuses to have children because she is only fourteen, and her “kind of feudal compliance was what still kept India an unhealthy and backward nation” (77). Living in a tiny apartment and saving money for Prakash’s study in the U.S., Jasmine and Prakash are caught in the communalist crossfire between Hindus and Muslims in Jullundhar, Punjab. Prakash is eventually shot in a sari store by a Khalsa Lion, member of a militant Sikh group, while protecting Jasmine from the group’s denigration of her as sari-clad prostitute.

Jasmine refuses the doomed life of widowhood because her husband had liberated her from cultural backwardness:

Prakash had taken Jyoti and created Jasmine,
and Jasmine would complete the mission of
Prakash.

(Jasmine, 97)

Prakash had been admitted to a Florida university and had already obtained an American visa. With her brother's help, Jasmine forges documents and takes an illegal chartered flight to Europe, from where a trawler carries her and other illegal immigrants to the Gulf Coast of Florida. Upon their arrival, the captain of the trawler, a Vietnam War veteran, takes her to a seedy, deserted motel where he rapes her; soon after, she stabs him. Before he had touched and consequently adulterated the contents of her suitcase (the suit Prakash and she had bought for his stay in America, a white sari marking her status of widowhood, and a small statuette of the god Ganpati), her intention had been to walk to the university Prakash had been admitted to and set fire to herself. But now she sets fire to her suitcase, burning what she sees as her past.

In Florida, she is taken over by a kind Christian woman who ensures her passage to New York. After a depressing stay with an Indian family there, she finds a job as a live-in babysitter for the girl of an American couple. Taylor Hayes is a professor of particle physics and his wife, Wylie Taylor, is a book editor. In their apartment, Jasmine starts to feel "American":

I wanted to become the person they thought
they saw: humorous, intelligent, refined,
affectionate. Not illegal, not murderer, not
widowed, raped, destitute, fearful.

(Jasmine, 171)

As the marriage between Taylor and Wylie is falling apart, Jasmine falls in love with Taylor:

I fell in love with his world, its ease, its
careless confidence and graceful self-
absorption.

(*Jasmine*, 171)

He calls her Jase but he doesn't want to change her:

He didn't want to sanitize the foreignness
...I changed because I wanted to. (185)

I bloomed from a diffident alien with forged
documents into adventurous Jase. (186)

But into this peaceful scenario walks Sukhwinder, the Khalsa Lion who had shot her husband. Fearful of being recognized by him, Jasmine flees to Elsa County, Iowa, where she knew Duff, the adopted girl she was taking care of, had been born.

In Iowa, she finds a job in a bank and meets Bud Ripplemeyer, a middle-aged banker, whom she marries. He calls her Jane. Jasmine says:

I have had a husband for each of the
women I have been. Prakash for Jasmine,
Taylor for Jase, Bud for Jane.

(*Jasmine*, 197)

They adopt a fourteen-year-old Vietnamese boy whom they call Du. Jasmine connects strongly with Du; she sees them both as marginalized in a dominant white American culture. The depressed agricultural economy in the mid-West makes Bud's job as a banker precarious. He is shot by a bankrupt client and paralyzed from his legs down. Jane continues to take care of him, fending off his jealous ex-wife and mothering Du. But when Du hears from a Vietnamese friend

that his sister has arrived in Los Angeles, he leaves Iowa to join her. Some days after, Taylor and Duff arrive from New York; they are en route to California and ask Jasmine to come along. Leaving a message for Bud with his ex-wife, Karin—"I have to see Du...I'm not leaving Bud...I'm going somewhere" (240)—Jasmine leaves with Taylor and Duff in their car. What awaits her is "the promise of America"; what she leaves behind is "old-world dutifulness" (240).

In *Wife and Jasmine*, what seems to be taking place is an examination of the Sita-Savitri socio-cultural role in India and the status of Asian immigration in the U.S. One may ask how, in these two narratives, Mukherjee challenges either Indian or American nationalism in her examination of the Sita-Savitri Indian role or her representation of the U.S. from the Asian immigrant's perspective. To a small extent, the answer to this question is implicit in the phrasing of this question. The breakdown of a traditional socio-cultural role model entails a certain failure of nationalist discourse about that role model; cultural representation from a marginalized perspective (that of the immigrant's) brings home the conditions under which this perspective is, in fact, marginalized in dominant nationalist discourses.

What should be at stake for us, though, is a larger historical process by which dominant representations (of "Sita", of "the melting pot") become the signifiers of what can then be called national cultures. How are these representations constructed and how are they deployed as nationalist?

In the case of the colonized Indian subcontinent, what was considered "non-Western" was consistently extracted as "nationalist" by Indian intellectuals. Partha Chatterjee, historian and member of the Subaltern Studies collective in India, has shown this move to be a characteristic one, and one that complicated the entire nationalist quest for difference. Indian nationalism defined its agenda of "non-Western" difference within the very structures of Western nineteenth-

century logical discourse. More recently, Julie Stephens has studied this contradiction in the context of nationalist female representations:

...the rejection of 'the West', including Western women, has been part of a nationalist tradition. The opposition between the 'Indian woman' as chaste spirituality or maternal sensuality and the unchaste, cold, sexual consumerism of the 'Western woman' served to delineate a feminine space that had *fortunately* escaped the effects of colonialism, a space one could designate as "Indian" and, because "non-Western", 'national'.

(Stephens, 103)

It is in this context that Sita and Savitri figure largely in Indian nationalist thought. As "non-Western" signifiers of ideal femininity, they should be understood as part of the nationalist agenda of creating difference. And even though Gandhi worked to empower the Indian "Sita" who had subjugated herself for the sake of ideal "non-Western" femininity, Stephens shows that, still, "the liberating experience for women is that of nationalism" (104). In the literary context of female representation, a similar nationalist agenda extracted the "non-Western" side of the Western/non-Western division. Not by accident did Indian critics seek idealized representations of women from writers like Raja Rao; R.K. Narayan did not give his deviant female characters Western names by mere chance. Idealized female representations gratify because they point to a space that is "Indian" as opposed to Western; female characters who stray from the ideal are best rendered as Western(ized). However, in the history of the Western literature and culture also, women have been idealized as the "fairer sex", as the object of male veneration. Hence, the point needs to be made that, as a patriarchal discourse, nationalism perhaps utilizes female idealizations in order to put a national culture's best foot forward, as it were. What seems to be most efficacious about this utilization is that it conveniently ensures different and multiple

manipulations of the female subject, who does not self-represent but is represented in national culture as the culture's most perfect emblem. The issue of gender that has been discussed in connection with Indian nationalist practice should be seen as applying to Mukherjee's depiction of American nationalist culture in a slightly different manner. While this issue is too broad to be dealt with here, it seems that dominant discourses of nationalism, including American, have always tended to pit themselves against, yet depend upon, a functionally oppositional Other for their own articulation. In this manner, the function of the black female slave in nineteenth-century American culture may be compared with that of the contemporary Indian immigrant woman in that both serve as indispensable negative signifiers for what white America was or is not.

If one recognizes the discursive role that Sita and Savitri myths play in setting up a powerful tradition of Indian nationalism, one will see how in *Jasmine* and to a small extent, *Wife*, the breakdown of the Sita-Savitri discourse signals a breakdown of the aspect of Indian nationalism that wrapped itself around idealized female representation.

In the *Ramayana*, Sita is the wife of the prince Rama of Ayodhya. Due to the plotting of a jealous stepmother, Rama was sent into exile along with his wife and brother. While in exile in the forest, Sita is abducted by king Ravana of Lanka. After a bloody battle, Rama rescues her. Upon their return to Ayodhya, Rama is crowned as king, but his people's suspicions surrounding the possibly adulterous relationship between Sita and Ravana lead Rama to banish Sita from his kingdom. Rather than bear this strain on her blemish-free character, Sita prepares to burn herself on a funeral pyre in full sight of the people. But the fire god intervenes and saves her. Sita's trial by fire stands as proof of her purity and innocence. In a sequel to the *Ramayana*, there is another cruel twist to the story. Rama's subjects are not entirely convinced by her trial by fire, and Sita, who is pregnant by that time, is exiled from Rama's court. Many years later, she has the

brief satisfaction of seeing her twins recognized by Rama as his sons, at which time Mother Earth acknowledges her innocence by swallowing her.

Another popular myth valorizes Savitri, wife of prince Satyavan. Earlier in life, Savitri had been warned by a seer that Satyavan was to die at the end of a year; undeterred, she marries him. At the appointed time, the Spirit of Death, Yama, comes to carry him away, but he is so impressed by Savitri's fearless devotion to her husband that he rewards her by returning Satyavan to her.

To view these myths as historically distanced from contemporary Indian society is to forget their ideological role of reminding middle-class Indian women to their true estate as wives: to serve the husband is to attain true salvation. In *Days and Nights in Calcutta*, Mukherjee discusses the Indian socio-cultural context in which these two mythological women play such a dominant role:

The trouble, it seemed to me, was that even in the India of 1973-74 with its woman Prime Minister and its impressive lists of women in politics, medicine, law, journalism, and labor unions, the average woman modeled her life not on these modern examples, but on Sita and Savitri of ancient Hindu literature. The stories of Sita and Savitri were kept alive by oral tradition, while the modern models were accessible to only the urban few who could read newspapers.

(*Days and Nights in Calcutta*, 231)

In both *Wife and Jasmine*, Mukherjee sustains a criticism of the traditional Sita-Savitri function in patriarchal Indian society. The extent to which this function is internalized by the young Indian girl coming of age in a traditional Indian society is made clear in Dimple and Jasmine. Dimple's self-abnegation does not allow her to break out of an ill-matched marriage to an uncaring husband precisely because

the strength of the Sita tradition overrides any consideration of her own subjecthood. Torn between the two discourses of Sita and women's liberation (the "modern model" Mukherjee refers to), she tends towards the former because it is recognizable to her. Even though Jasmine is told by an astrologer that her husband will not survive the marriage, she marries him, much as the mythical Savitri marries Satyavan against all odds. Her wifely devotion takes her to the U.S., but already the power of the Savitri discourse has been muted. Prakash envisions a modern India which will transcend feudalism, sexism, caste, class and religion. His making over of Jasmine is part of his making over of himself as a citizen of this new India. Hence, even though the determinant here is still problematically male in nature, Prakash attempts to force Jasmine away from the Savitri discourse of self-abnegation. Yet in time even this "modern" discourse gives way to an "American" one.

Mukherjee's America is the immigrant's America. Her concept of the U.S. relies on this country's sheer power to constantly transform itself by offering to Asian immigrants the possibility of remaking themselves, not as Indo-Americans who have to fit into a "native" culture, but as individuals who make themselves over as Americans in their own image. Jasmine constructs her own image of what America signifies to her.

Equipped with the availability of this kind of self-constructing fluidity in the U.S., Jasmine does not seem to mind that it is the men who name her Jase or Jane, for with each new naming comes her opportunity to measure the old name against the new, to mark both the gaps and the continuities between the discourses that claim to contain her. She eventually leaves Bud precisely because "her genuine foreignness frightens him", and he tries to "Americanize", to domesticize her by calling her Jane:

Me Bud, you Jane. I didn't get it at first.

He kids. Calamity Jane. Jane as in Jane

Russell, not Jane as in Plain Jane.

Whereas Dimple does not subvert the Sita role so much as she becomes a victim of it, Jasmine does explode the Savitri role. While Dimple is a victim of the nation-making, Sita-recreating process, Jasmine does, for our purposes, suggest a substantial threat to the Indian nationalism which discursively constructed the Sita-Savitri role model as a dominant representation of national culture. For without losing her otherness in the U.S., Jasmine is still not simply "non-Western". She inhabits new discourses with ease, without forgetting the way in which earlier ones constituted her identity. She seems to recognize that identity is inseparable from the discursive function that it performs. Identity is a textual construct in *Jasmine*; as such, it can be made and remade, even become a set of many identities, since discursive functions vary from one national culture to another. To Prakash, Jasmine is a modern Indian woman; to Taylor, Jase is a foreigner to be respected for her otherness; to Bud, Jane is the American whose foreignness has been neutralized. The value of Jasmine's fluidity is that it focuses our attention on the discursive functions of national identity, even as it refuses to be appropriated by dominant and monolithic nationalist discourses.

Another dominant nationalist discourse is American. In the case of the U.S., Mukherjee's questioning of dominant representations of national culture is clear. At least one of these representations is concerned with the mainstream American ideology of "the melting pot". This ideology conveys the idea that people of different cultures blend in the U.S. into a pleasing blur of white, red, brown, black and yellow hues. Having accounted for minorities in this genial, uncritical way of non-problematic domestication, the ideology is at liberty to dispense with them. In fact, however, even the mainstream American concept of "the melting pot" has traditionally been based on a white immigrant experience in the U.S. "Who", asks Mukherjee "speaks for us, the new Americans, from non-traditional immigrant countries?" (*Immigrant Writing: Give Us Your Maximalists*, 1).

This question is appropriate at a time when minority immigrants in the U.S. are predominantly Asians and Chicanos, not Europeans. Speaking of her experience of formal naturalization at the Federal District Court House in New York, Mukherjee says:

The old pieties of immigration no longer hold. A Norman Rockwell would have been hard-pressed to find the immigrant-icons of an earlier era—the hollow-eyed and sunken-cheeked were not in evidence. There was a notable lack of old ladies in black babushkas, with wrinkled, glistening cheeks. (Their closest ethnic embodiment, a beautiful Russian woman sitting in front of me, was reading Nabokov's "Speak, Memory" during the long waiting period.) A Dominican man next to me joked as we sat down after pledging allegiance, "Hey, now we can make a citizens' arrest!" Behind me, Chinese teen-agers passed copies of *The New Yorker*.

(Immigrant Writing: Give Us Your Maximalists, 1)

In the same essay, speaking of these non-traditional naturalized citizens of what Mukherjee calls a "new America", she repeats her urgent question: "Such energy, such comedy, such sophistication and struggle and hunger to belong—yet who tells their stories?" (*Immigrant Writing: Give Us Your Maximalists, 28*).

To a large extent, Jasmine speaks from the immigrant perspective of the Other in white mid-Western America:

In Baden, the farmers are afraid to suggest I'm different. They've seen the aerograms

I receive the strange lettering I can decipher.
To them, alien knowledge means intelligence.
They want to make me familiar. In a pinch,
they'll admit that I might look a little different,
that I'm a "dark-haired girl" in a naturally
blonde county...I'm from a generic place,
"over there"...I'm not a Lutheran, which
isn't to say I might not be Presbyterian.

(*Jasmine*, 33)

What Jasmine is describing in a tongue-in-cheek manner here is the process by which difference, otherness or foreignness are comprehended by the farmers of Baden, "a basic German community" (11). Their tendency is to ignore otherness by domesticating it ("They want to make me familiar") non-problematically in their own recognizable terms. She looks only "a little different" in "a naturally blonde county"; she might have come from anywhere "over there"; she might or might not be Presbyterian.

An even more dangerous appropriation of otherness takes place in encounters between Jasmine's adopted Vietnamese son, Du, and his high school history teacher, Mr. Skola. Mr. Skola recounts one of these to Jasmine at a PTA meeting:

"I tried a little Vietnamese on him", Mr. Skola went on, "and he just froze up".
I suppressed my shock, my disgust. This country has so many ways of humiliating, of disappointing. How *dare* you? What must he have thought? His history teacher in Baden, Iowa, just happens to know a little street Vietnamese? Now where would he have picked it up? There are no harmless, compassionate ways to remake oneself.

(*Jasmine*, 29)

Mr. Skola's insensitivity to Du's attempts at remaking himself as an American and his callousness in trying out on Du his white American knowledge of Vietnamese acquired during the war typify the attitude of a dominant culture towards immigrant minorities.

The process by which a mainstream dominant culture dispenses with Jasmine and Du is not limited to a sketchy social study of the imaginary Baden county. Instead, this process is spread across the country, but it concentrates its practice in the mid-West and especially along the border with Latin America. Jasmine and Du watch a cable channel's news program showing an INS raid on a lawn factory in Texas. The INS agents capture two illegal aliens from Mexico who are working at cane furniture for "some insane wage" (27). One Mexican throws up, but the "INS fellow wouldn't uncuff him long enough to wipe the muck off his face" (27):

A woman in a flowered dress said, "I don't think they're bad people, you know. It's just that there's too many of them. Yesterday I opened the front door to get the morning papers and there were three of them using my yard as their personal toilet."

The reporter, a thin, tense man with razor burns, stopped a woman in an Olds. "To tell the truth", she said, "I don't know what to feel anymore". The reporter got ready to move off to someone else, but she stopped him. "Steve, my husband, lost his job. That was last November. We were doing so good, now we can't make the house and car payments. Are you listening, Mr. President?"

(Jasmine, 27)

This news report sets up the ideological relations between immigrant and dominant groups, and in doing so brings in the third factor of the repressive apparatus of state control in the form of the INS (the Immigration and Naturalization Service). The first woman makes clear her moral stance (“I don’t think they’re bad people”), speaking as one decent white woman to one decent white reporter. Categorizing Mexican illegal aliens as “they” and “them” allows her the distance between her own clear-cut identity and an amorphous mass of brown bodies which dirty her front-yard like animals. The second woman insinuates a connection between her husband’s unemployment and the presence of Mexicans in the state. Jasmine responds to her by shouting to herself:

What kind of crazy connection are
you trying to make between Mexicans
and car payments? Who’s the victim
here? And what about Du? Mr. President,
what about Du?

(*Jasmine*, 27)

Supposedly impersonal, the news report is heavily biased, since only the mainstream white populace gets to represent itself; Jasmine goes unheard in her representation of Du. The INS exerts its authority in a similarly biased manner, with its ruthless treatment of the Mexican workers as animals. The problem is that the “border’s like Swiss cheese and all the mice are squirming through the holes”.

(*Jasmine*, 28).

Mukherjee’s attack on American nationalism in *Jasmine* demonstrates that one of its dominant representations is of a white North America in which coloured immigrants are just barely accommodated on the margins. It is these coloured immigrants, specifically, but not limited to, female immigrants, whom she wishes to speak for when she maps out the creative project of an “ex-colonial, once-third-world author” in the essay *Immigrant Writing: Give Us Your*

Maximalists! Colonial history had, she maintains, forced her to see herself in the dual terms of “self” and “other”. The perspective of the “other”, when the “other” shifts from the colonized Indian “native” under Britain’s imperialist campaign to the Asian immigrant in white America, unleashes in her “a fluid set of identities denied to most of [her] mainstream American counterparts” (*Immigrant Writing: Give Us Your Maximalists*, 29). In her memoirs, *Days and Nights in Calcutta*, Mukherjee discusses the particular moment at which she discovers this shift in perspective. She finds herself helplessly irate at a socially upper-class man’s rough treatment of a poor laborer on a Calcutta street because

the rickshaw puller near Nizam’s was suddenly not just a Muslim resident of Calcutta slum, but he was also me, a timid, brown naturalized citizen in a white man’s country that was growing increasingly hostile to ‘colored’ immigrants.

(*Days and Nights in Calcutta*, 250).

However, in a manner that is problematic and that would be discussed later, Mukherjee’s concerns with the marginalization of immigrants in dominant culture seem, during certain moments, to override, even obfuscate, her concerns with gender and class.

What Mukherjee’s re-examination of the American nationalist discourse of “the melting pot” finally leads her to is the outline of a new literary project that will revise the contours of mainstream American fiction:

The problem appears to be that both inside and outside America, “American fiction” has become synonymous with the mainstream, big advance, well-promoted novel or story collection, and that American fiction—clever, mannered, brittle—has lost the power to

transform the world's imagination.

(Days and Nights in Calcutta, 28)

Caught up in the mechanisms of big-time capitalist publishing, American writing has failed to notice that “an epic was washing up on its shore” (*Days and Nights in Calcutta*, 28), in the form of the hundreds of untold stories of non-traditional immigrants. It is, Mukherjee rightly insists, this new scene “which was never been in greater need of new perspectives.” (*Days and Nights in Calcutta*, 29).

A serious qualification to her project enters when Mukherjee claims immense ease in representing any non-traditional minority from any social class in her fiction:

Chameleon-skinned, I discover my material
over and across the country, and up and down
the social ladder.

(Days and Nights in Calcutta, 29)

While it would be a mistake to make her own privileged background, both in India and the U.S., the sole determinant for a politically correct reading which eventually denounces her, the “we” that Mukherjee refers to when she talks about a generation of “ex-colonial” people is a highly specific group of socially upper-class Bengali individuals. She refers to her “Brahminical elegance” as constituted of “top family, top school, top caste, top city” (28); *Days and Nights in Calcutta* quite adequately reveals that the social “set” she acquaints herself with is evenly upper class in social structure. Mukherjee does not address how this specific privilege allows her to jump to the generalized “we” of India or of an entire Third World spectrum. Further, the “we” of this beleaguered spectrum is finally and strangely gender- and class-free. For one may ask, in what sense exactly does a rickshaw puller in a Calcutta slum speak to her of her own situation as “other”, university professor of English, in America? How and why does the connection between the two “others” override any consideration of gender and social class?

It can be suggested that to read Mukherjee's immigrant writing in relation to the larger issue of her representation of gender and social class need not necessarily be seen as limiting or as negating the entire effort of her challenge to hegemonic nationalist discourses. Instead, the point can be made that this relation between writer and text opens up the most irreducibly contradictory space that the Westernized woman of privilege who is an "ex-colonial, once-third-world author" operates within: namely, the space within which a not-quite-not-Western female representation of "real" Third World minorities takes place. In terms of Mukherjee's contribution to and expansion of contemporary American literature, this representation is valuable because it may lead to a picture of the U.S. which contests and consistently revises the "truths" generated by mainstream First World fiction. In the history of knowledge, and for our purposes, in the history of literary studies, significant advance is only possible when interruption and revision of prior "truths" render them not absolute and inviolable but contestatory.

AMITAV GHOSH AND ANITA DESAI: LIBERATING THE FIXITIES OF SINGLE NATIONAL IDENTITY

We think caged birds sing, when indeed they cry.

[John Webster: *The White Devil*, 1612.]

Amitav Ghosh in *The Shadow Lines* and Anita Desai in her novel, *Bye Bye Blackbird* have endeavored to erase those areas of 'representational' and 'ideological' separateness that give rise to segregation among nations. At this juncture we may once more recall that there has been a three-way reading of nationalism: firstly, the essentialized notion of an Indian national identity as professed by the nationalist leaders who participated in Indian struggle for independence; secondly, the nationalist writers'—e.g. Narayan and Raja Rao's—way of reflecting the *ideologically constructed Indianization* in their works; thirdly, the deconstruction of that essentialized national identity by the writers and critics of the recent time. The first two approaches towards nationalism have often been acclaimed as the 'true' representation of Indian nationalism. However, it has been already shown that in the name of nationalism, what they have done is the reinforcement of the Western attitude of discrimination towards the 'Orient'. Thus the challenge put forward by the recent writers, has resulted in the demystification of the concept of a separate national identity and has paved way for 'Non-National Neo-Universalism'. Amitav Ghosh and Anita Desai represent the modern Indo-English writers, who are engaged in unmasking the fact that the long cherished Indian national identity has actually been an immediate consequence of Orientalism; its origin did not lie in a moment before colonialism but in the moment at which the imperialist project constructed the 'Other'. In *The Shadow Lines*, Amitav Ghosh has encompassed the pre-independent undivided India, Britain in the Second World War as well as the contemporary India, Britain and Bangladesh (East Pakistan) to establish the futility and meaninglessness of the 'shadow lines' that keep sprawling among people and countries. Taking a look at

them from a historical perspective, the narrator finds them as inseparable and identical as one's reflection in the looking glass. The 'shadow lines' is in fact a metaphor for the shadowy divisions between people who have so much in common as to be almost others' image; and the novel enables the protagonist to accept them and then to soar above and beyond these divisions.

The child narrator who has almost identified himself with his mentor, Tridib, confesses:

Tridib had given me world to
travel in and he had given me
eyes to see them with.

(The Shadow Lines, 12)

Long before he actually moved out of Calcutta, his world had expanded to Cairo, Colombo etc. Tridib had told him of the desire that can carry one beyond:

the limits of one's mind to other
times and other places, and even,
if one was lucky, to a place where
there was no border between
oneself and one's image in the
mirror.

(The Shadow Lines, 29)

Two of Tridib's stories point out the fact that people respond to similar events in similar ways, despite the national boundaries. The first one is about Mayadebi's conversation with Lionel Tresawsen. She had gone to London in 1939 and had observed that the looming war had made people behave charitably towards other. Tresawsen, who had returned from Germany responds:

but it's the same over there
--in Germany--though of

course in a much grotesque
way. It was odd coming back
here—like stepping through a
looking-glass.

(The Shadow Lines, 66)

The other story connects the blitz affected London to the riot affected Calcutta. The anxiety of the mothers for their children due to public violence like poisoning the water tank or dropping bombs in toffee tins unites them beyond the boundaries of time and place.

Ghosh employs the recordings of the Indo-Pak war of 1965 to heighten the complication that arises not out of wars but out of the irony that it is fought by people in places which were part of once one country. The narrator's grandmother, Tha'mma, living in Calcutta was born in Dhaka and she fails to comprehend how her birth place "had come to be so messily at odds with her nationality" (132). For safety, Tha'mma tries to persuade her old uncle, Jethamoshai, to leave for India in 1964. But the old man refuses:

I don't believe in this India-Shindia.
It's all very well, you're going away
now, but suppose when you get there
they decide to draw another line
somewhere? What will you do then?
Where will you move to? No one will
have you anywhere. As for me, I was
born here, and I'll die here.

(The Shadow Lines, 215)

The old man has not accepted those 'shadow lines'. Soon through the death of Jethamoshai and Tridib in the civil strife in Dhaka, which was as a consequence of riots in Srinagar, Tha'mma reluctantly learns, like her uncle that border confirm identity even though they are meant to affirm difference. Seething under

civil strife, violent riots and looming war, the Indian subcontinent becomes “a land of looking-glass events” (231). The distance in cities becomes inconsequent as the narrator unravels the mystery of Tridib’s end. The repercussions of the Srinagar incident had reached across the national border and the narrator learns that “distance is not a corporeal substance but only an illusory idea” (232). Later the narrator measures the distances between cities on Tridib’s atlas placing countries into compass circle. He finds that the so called foreign cities are nearer to Calcutta than Delhi. Moreover, the events like Tridib’s death prove that cities like Dhaka and Calcutta, inspite of the ‘shadow lines’ bounding them as separate nationalities, remain:

more closely bound to each other
than after they had drawn their
lines—so closely that I, in Calcutta
had only to look into the mirror to
be in Dhaka; a moment when each
city was the inverted image of the
other, locked into an irreversible
symmetry by the line that was to
set us free—our looking-glass border.

(The Shadow Lines, 233)

That the distance in time and place becomes immaterial in uniting or separating people is suggested by bringing out the likeness in two houses: Mrs. Price’s London house with its cellar becomes identical to the Raibazar house with its underground room. As children both Ila and narrator had played in the underground room in Ila’s ancestral home of Raibazar. But the room had reminded Ila of the cellar room in Mrs. Price’s house where she played with her son Nick. In London, the narrator is twice left alone with Ila in the cellar room. Each time it reminds him of the underground room of the Raibazar house.

Bafflement of Tha’mma at the absence of

...trenches perhaps, or soldiers
or guns pointing at each other,
or even just barren strips of land.

(*The Shadow Lines*, 151)

between India and East Pakistan (Bangladesh) provides a clue to the fact that the 'shadow lines' are imposed not only from without but they also exist within, where people vaguely think "that across the border there existed another reality" (198). In the narrator's steady 'diasporic' outlook all 'shadow lines' are erased and the relief work, organization of peace marches, newspaper reporting, mutual accusations and absolute supreme art of sacrifice both from the Hindus and Muslims only provide the mirror image for the other. The novel *The Shadow Lines*, beginning with the narrator's superimposition of Tridib on himself, through the projection of characters, events and places against one another (the narrator and Ila, Tha'mma and Ila, Dhaka and Calcutta) affirms the shadowy nature of the border and finally asserts the supreme power of imagination that helps one to be liberated from the falsity of distinction and the fixity of a singular identity, to cross beyond even one's own image in the mirror.

In *Bye Bye Blackbird* Anita Desai not only gives the merits and demerits of both the native and the foreign land, but also shows how a British girl like Sarah can become almost a perfect "Indian wife" or how Dev, who cherished hatred for Britain and the British, can transform into an admirer of the "land of opportunities" (19). Adit, the hero in *Bye Bye Blackbird* is born in a middle class Bengali family and had come to England to enjoy the freedom. Here he fell in love with an English girl Sarah, and got married to her. Adit was attending a party where Sarah had also been invited and then it was

her shyness and rectitude that brought out the protective in Adit whereas all the other guests and the hostess had only made him feel uncertain and

possibly even humiliated.

(Bye Bye Blackbird, 73)

It was love at first sight and in the very first meeting itself, he expresses his love to her, complementing:

You are like the Bengali girl, Bengali
women are like that reserved, quite.
May be you were one in your previous
life.

(Bye Bye Blackbird, 73)

Sarah had to suffer and face discrimination for getting married to an Indian. Her own people would not spare her and enjoy every opportunity of teasing her:

Hurry, hurry, Mrs. Curry.

(Bye Bye Blackbird, 32)

Even at school, when surrounded by her colleagues, she is always self-conscious, feeling glad if escaped having answered personal questions. They compel her to explain various recipes of cooking curries or would enquire regarding the whereabouts of her parent-in-laws, and seeing her reluctant and stammering while trying to answer these questions they would remark cruelly:

If she is ashamed of marrying an
Indian husband, why did she go
and marry him?

(Bye Bye Blackbird, 37)

While Adit is found declaring his choice emphatically:

I love it here. I am so happy here.

I hardly notice the few drawbacks.

(Bye Bye Blackbird, 164)

Sarah despises the treatment meted out to her just because she got married to an Indian. And when Adit asks her whether she would be able to go to India leaving the beautiful England with its silent grey church at the hilltop, Crimson blue rose vines, tufted grass and nostalgia laden violates, she answers promptly:

When I think of all the Millers of
England, I could leave at once.

(Bye Bye Blackbird, 83)

She has known and loved India through the photographs and has succeeded in wiping out the 'shadow lines' of alienness; Sarah thus successfully links her western heritage with her preference for the East.

The chapter of Adit is closed with his return to India. But here is Dev, another emigrant who had come to England to pursue higher study. He was fully determined that he would not stay in England where he has to bear all the insults and he often tells vehemently to Adit:

I wouldn't live in a country where I
was insulted and unwanted...If the
British were still in India you would
be one of those Babus who used to go
crawling after them, drooling if they
noticed you so far as to give you a kick.

(Bye Bye Blackbird, 163)

Later on, there is a slow but blatant change in his attitude:

The life of an alien appears to be enthrallingly
rich and beautiful to him, and that of a

homebody too dull, too stale to return to ever.
Then he hears a word in the tube or notices an
expression on an English face that overturns
his latest decision.

(*Bye Bye Blackbird*, 86)

At the close of the fiction one finds him completely bewitched and succumbs to the charms and future perspectives of his life in London, when instead of quitting the job and going back to India with Adit, he decides to stay in England and joins the tourist bureau in which Adit has previously been working. Dev's slow change from Anglophobia to Anglophilia has been brilliantly described:

And so he walks the streets and parks of the city, grateful for its daffodil patches of sunshine, loathing its sooty, sodden dampness. Eats toffee apples in Petticoat lane and fishes limp sausages out of pools of fat in Lyons Corner House. Lies in the grass under the green canopies of Kew Gardens, and narrowly escapes being run over and crushed to death twenty times over in Piccadilly Circus. Stands in the dark, wistfully gazing at the peacock-blue and rose-red paper flowers in a Mexican boutique, then is enthralled by the massive, blank bulk of Battersea power station... It is strange summer, in which he is the bewildered alien, the charmed observer, the outraged outsider and thrilled sight-seer all at once and in succession.

(*Bye Bye Blackbird*, 95-96)

Thus like *The Shadow Lines*, *Bye Bye Blackbird* depicts the gradual transformation of the characters from a region-bounded 'national' entity to a global citizen of international identity. Both Sarah and Dev have crossed the

invisible demarcations of the specific nationalist constructions and have thrived for a broader identity, beyond time and place.

CONCLUSION

The moon belongs to everyone
The best things in life are free.

(Buddy De Sylvia and Lew Brown: *Song*, 1917)

In the nineteen-sixties, critics of Indian writing in English, such as Narasimhaiah and Iyengar, were concerned primarily with legitimizing Indo-English literature in the larger sphere of "English literature". To this end, they employed a critical discourse which did not make clear its own theoretical premise. This premise could, however, be identified with the earlier twentieth-century liberal, humanistic thought of such Western critics as Lionel Trilling and F.R. Leavis because it sought the balanced but finally non-theoretical articulation of literature's relation to society. Consciously or unconsciously, both liberal humanists and Indo-English critics shirked the theorization of this relation because it would entail the study of literature as itself participating in the maintenance of social formations through the ideological apparatus of the academy. Further, as liberal humanists, early Indian-English critics produced notions of an imagined essence and presence (that of Indianness) in order to posit Indo-English literature as part of the larger tradition of English literature.

In doing so, the Indo-English critic participated in the critical language of liberal humanism that is now under radical scrutiny. For instance, the language of presence and essence bases itself on a transparency of "being"; but the ideas of presence and essence themselves cannot be considered outside the scope of textual re-presentation. Nowhere is this language more deadly than when re-presentations of presence and essence seek to delineate a national culture in the name of "truth". Two theoretical concerns come together here, that of the nationalist re-presentation of an imagined essence and presence and that of the discursive effects of "truth" that this representation of Indianness produces.

Further, the Indo-Anglian critics assumed a national identity that had escaped the effects of Orientalism. Their claim to essentialist Indianness and an Indianness that is actually present to itself presupposed the absence of Western influence. For they were engaged in the nationalist quest for the construction of a non-Western Indian national identity. This national identity had, however, been constituted by Orientalism; its origin did not lie in a moment before colonialism but in the moment at which the imperialist project constructed the "Other". Hence, the "Other" that is Indian cannot function in simply oppositional ways to the British colonizer. In fact, it is in the complicit nature of the relationship between Indo-English studies and Western discourse that one sees the complexity of the constitution of the "Other". Both Indian writers and Indian critics were shaped by the very Western discourse that they intended to overlook in the construction of Indian national identity. Hence, the following contradiction: in the language of imperialism and within the Western history of Orientalism and Western discourse of liberal humanism, Indo-English studies constructed an essentialized, supposedly self-present national identity that represented itself as "true" to Western readers. In other words, the Indian-English critics' and authors' representation of non-Western Indianness and the discursive effects of the "truth" of this Indianness took place in a context already informed by Western discourse and history.

More recent critical studies of the seventies and eighties have continued the earlier nationalist essentializing of Indianness. Among these studies is the work of Naik, Sarma and Sanyal. Even when a critic like Meenakshi Mukherjee calls for a reading of Indian writing in English which will place this writing in the Indian, not the Western, literary tradition, her own writing is disseminated in the context of an international publishing market and is read in that context. The Indo-English criticism of Feroza Jussawalla is cast in a newer mold. Jussawalla uses Stanley Fish's theory of interpretive communities to establish a context in which Indian writing in English may be read in relation to India's actual multicultural, multilingual situation. However, she does not clearly articulate the

theoretical framework within which her readings make significant advances over earlier critical work. There may be a need for an interpretive community in Indo-English studies, but why does Jussawalla use Stanley Fish if she wishes to finally return to the ancient Indian critical tradition for moral directives on reading Indian literature in English? Further, Jussawalla ignores a significant problem with Fish's definition of an interpretive community. Fish does not take into account the fact that communities, by the very nature of their definition, exclude as much as they include. No community contains everyone; communities contain "members". Who determines the inclusion and exclusion of members in the interpretive community neither Fish nor Jussawalla makes clear. This community is, after all, determined by the ideological structures of academic institutions; the tacit consent between its select members to understand a common set of rules has the effect of furthering, rather than problematizing or offering as an object of study, the smooth functioning of the ideological machinery of the academy.

The use of Western methodologies by Indian critics is not in question, since the publishing of literature, and especially Indian literature in English, goes on in the arena of *international capitalism*. In this economic arena where literary work functions as commodity, national boundaries and nationalist concerns are only faintly discernible. Indeed, much contemporary Indian writing in English has itself left the sphere of national concerns. In the writing of Upamanyu Chatterjee, Amitav Ghosh and Anita Desai, Western and Indian influences cannot even be separated. T.N. Murari has written a sequel to Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*, (*The Imperial Agent*) which narrates the story of early Indian revolutionary history from not an Indian's but the grown Kim's perspective. Further, as the historical work of Subaltern Studies demonstrates, a large part of the Indian intellectual burden has been to master Western theory so that Indian history can be re-written from the perspective of the once-colonized subject.

Now, a study of Indian writing in English immediately implies the study of a highly political and global category of literature about (and not necessarily in)

the Indian subcontinent that records the conditions of multicultural, multilingual, Third World, post-colonial discourses. One needs to study the roles of representation and discursive effects in Indian post-colonial writing in English. For these reasons, Indo-English studies should not be exempt from questions of the power of cultural representation and the role of this representation in nationalist discursive practice; they should be seen as participating in these questions and, indeed, globalizing their implications.

Among recent developments in post-colonial theory, the argument that there can never be a simple opposition between “self” and “other” is very strident. Unlike the arguments of the later Fanon and the early Said, the colonized subject is never simply and completely opposed to the colonizer. There is, on the other hand, an ambivalence which tries to break the model of master and slave and suggests a profound disturbance in the authority of colonial discourse. Homi Bhabha’s model of the self/other dichotomy where it is hard to ascertain whether the native voice is “mimicking” or “mocking” is a handy reference to demonstrate the intricacy of this antagonism.

When Italy was formed from several principalities, Massimo d’ Azeglio wrote:

We have created Italy. Now all we need
to do is to create Italians.

(The Creation of India, 3)

In terms of India also, it may be candid to follow this argument except for the restraint placed upon such assumptions by the rigours of nationalist sentiment and citizenship. All the same, despite having different political centers, those in Punjab have a greater cultural cohesion with Pakistan than with the people of Cochin; or the Bengalis will share more in terms with ethnicity with Bangladeshis than with the Tamils. And yet when the nation is defined, Nehru will imagine an

India that has always existed for thousand of years, but had been suppressed. In *The Discovery of India*, Nehru writes:

What is this India, apart from her physical and geographical aspects? What did she represent in the past? What gave strength to her then? How did she lose that old strength? And has she lost it completely?

(Nehru, 49)

A few lines later:

India was in my blood and there was much in her that instinctively thrilled me. And yet I approached her almost as an alien critic... To some extent I came to her via the West, and looked at her as a friendly Westerner might have done... Did I know India?... India could not have been what she undoubtedly was, and could not have continued a cultured existence for thousand of years, if she had not possessed something very vital and enduring, something that was worthwhile. What was this something?

(Nehru, 50)

This is one way in which cultural identity may be articulated: a search with the acknowledgement of being an “alien”, a “Westerner”. That is why there is a sense of “discovery” for Nehru, of an India he does not quite know. After wandering over the Himalayas and besides India’s massive rivers, the Ganga and the Brahmaputra, after visiting old monuments and ruins, experiencing the charm and antiquity of the Kumbh Mela, Nehru ultimately does mind what he is looking for:

Thus slowly the long panorama of India’s

history unfolded itself before me, with its ups and downs, its triumphs and defeats. There seemed to me something unique about the continuity of a cultural tradition through five thousand years of history, of invasion and upheaval, a tradition which was widespread among the masses and powerfully influenced them.

(Nehru, 52)

Nehru has been cited as a textual instance of an essentialized cultural identity which possesses fixed roots and a past. Nehru's "discovery" is a "recovery" of a past "which is waiting to be found, and which, when found will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity." (*Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*; 225) This kind of identity implies notions of oneness and collectivity, of shared histories and cultural codes as have outlined Negritude history.

The metaphor of "discovery", in itself, is significant ever since Columbus "discovered" the New World. Later, the natives, in turn, "discovered" their lost or hidden heritage. In both cases, identity-formation involved imagination based on the existence of pre-conceived ideas. The "other" was always someone different from themselves, but more vitally, someone they had already imagined would be different. Imagination and discovery together conspired to keep the "self" apart from the "other".

It may be relevant to point out that the adventurers, of course, displaced people since colonialism was a wholly diasporic movement. Colonialism involved the enterprise of widespread migration and re-settlement. Many white men settled into these plantations farming which further spurred diasporic movement when slaves were transported into these plantations or indentured labour was required. This border-crossing resulted in massive creolization of identities as the diasporic communities came into contact with indigenous cultures and got transformed. The

modification was not one-sided: the indigenous community that came into contact with the masters and their slaves or workers became mixed cultures too. "Native" identity was no longer readily available to them. Nehru himself has been quoted to be, in his own words, an "alien critic", at best a "friendly Westerner". And yet, these are appellations Nehru is not very much at home with. He is looking for a history that is uniform and agreeable, an "inheritance" more tangible and material than a diasporic cultural identity.

Among the types of representation of cultural identity articulated so far one is that which is culturally unique, relying mainly on common cultural experiences such as folk traditions, religion, rural dialects, even the "sacred" geography of the land or in order to present a "true self". Such an identity possesses collectiveness, nationality and a sense of commitment. Working on the salient aspects of collective history and descent, this type of identity becomes extremely relevant in anti-colonial struggles where a culturally imagined unification must work side by side with mass mobilization, the primary motive being the establishment of an independent nation-state. The emerging nation-state, consequently, witnesses rapid appropriation of workers, peasants, minorities, and the lower orders, and enlists their participation. Such identities have a major role to play in all "pan" movements which are built on the notion of having to dig out, to discover, or unearth, or to re-tell the past in an endeavor to represent "what we used to be" or "how we are". One cannot deny the use-value of the discovery of such a "hidden history" in imparting a sense of harmony and collectivity.

Stuart Hall, in his elaboration of cultural identity, dispels such a mythic construction:

Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject

to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past...identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.

(Identity, Community, Culture, Difference; 225)

For Hall, there is nothing more ignominious than speaking of "what we used to be" when history has intervened between then and now. The native identity we are spoken of is split and fragmented and cannot be articulated as "one experience" or "one self" since cultural identity involves both "becoming" and "being" (Stuart Hall, 225). Though there may be some commonalities between "what we used to be" and "what we have become" there are enormous differences too created by history which has come in-between. The first category would willy-nilly wash away all traces of history undergone, the play of power, change and manoeuvre, even though all representations of a putative past are themselves acts of constructions. But the second type takes into account the trauma of colonialism, of the various positions one has occupied or has been forced to occupy by the existing patriarchy, which, in other words, is the history of change and difference.

In Derrida's terms, even if one can recover a kind of "sameness" of identity, meaning or signification always differs or is deferred. The word "differance" shows us that any attempt at meaningfulness involves the agitation of our subtle thoughts: while there can be no one final meaning or solution as we move from one interpretation to another, traces of all these may be recovered. Cultural identity can be at best a selective and partial category in this second sense. The binaries of self and other which were elaborated earlier are thus always subject to disturbance and never closed systems of identification. There would be always something "left over", a trace that begs to differ and begs to defer. (Stuart Hall, 230).

In terms of such an understanding, identities can never be defined by “essence of purity”, but are constituted by an acknowledgement that they live “with and through” difference and despite it. (Hall, 235). From this view, Nehru’s attempts at defining a nation-space called India will have to take into account the class of people who constructed it, a national intelligentsia grounded in the study of English language and literature, and co-opted, to a large extent, by Western thoughts and ideas. This is a way by which the confrontation with colonialism may not be seen only as an active—passive phenomenon but a complex transaction which is a two-way process, not a simple relationship. (*Colonial Transactions: English Literature and India*, 15). This encounter cannot be seen simply in terms of opposites such as black/white, man/woman, birth/death, good/evil but as a process involving a good deal of “mutual contagion and subtle intimacies.” (Leela Gandhi, 129). The whole drama of traces and left-overs is enacted in a “third space” (Hall, 211), an imprecise location where both the postponement of meaning and its restoration can take place.

Instances emerge when one examines the response of formerly colonized societies to the political and cultural authority of Europe. It may be possible to refute the oft-repeated charge that colonized societies have suffered enormously or have been utterly ruined by citing the experience of the “destroyed” indigenous societies, which has also been that of recovery and resilience (though not primarily). In the process of regeneration, dominated regimes have sometimes changed the nature of the imperial culture. Themes of resistance may occur not as binary oppositions to the imperial episteme but envisaged more as a transformation or as “resistance to absorption”. (*Post-Colonial Transformation*, 14). Such indeterminate acts of resistance may be referred to as “interpolations” whereupon the colonial subject interrupts or intervenes into the dominant discourse. The native acts as the “agency” and transforms the hegemonic structure based on interstitial unequal relationships between the colonizer and the colonized. (*Post-Colonial Transformation*, 15). These are categories of

confluence and conflict, of disruption as well as continuity from which Nehru's idea of a monologic history cannot be invoked as a unified category. As E. San Juan Jr. says:

What renders precarious Nehru's striving
for a unified agenda of progress for India
is the brute fact of diversity, the centrifugal
polyphony of voices and secessionist impulses
that British imperialism could barely synchronize.

(Beyond Postcolonial Theory, 209)

When such postmodernist polysemic idioms are transferred to the world of colonialism, we get, in terms of language alone, a mixture of pidgins and Creoles. Identities, whether linguistic, political, racial or cultural, are likewise creolized and hybridized. Hybridity is useful in understanding the relationship between colonizer and colonized, not as self and other, but by emphasizing their mutual interdependence rather than through the extremes of binarism which subdue and neglect the unnamed and undefined spaces between the opposite taxonomies. The reason for this neglect is the imperial will to power which relies on eliminating areas of ambivalence. The categorization of race—black, brown, yellow—is one of the disasters of imperialism, a classification which is based on creating generalizations regardless of irreducible difference. This has helped to perpetuate the binary of a progressive and scientific white race as against a primitive and barbaric non-white race.

This has been the way to show that there can never be a mere polemicization; the colonized subject is never simply and completely opposed to the colonizer. On the part of the colonizer too, there is both attraction and repulsion at the same time. This ambivalence tries to break the model of master and slave and suggests a profound disturbance of the authority of colonial discourse. Bhabha has cited Macaulay's "Minute" as an example: Macaulay lays the spadework for the reproduction of English-men through the

institutionalization of English in India. (*The Location of Culture*, 85-92). A class of Indians were to be produced who would act as interpreters between both parties. Further, these classes of people were to be "Indian in blood and colour but English in tastes, opinions, in morals and in intellect." ("Minute on Indian Education", *Macaulay: Prose and Poetry*, 729). The "Minute" implicitly states that the Indians were to mimic the English which would be the necessary tool of subjugation. But Macaulay is also producing a hybrid species for he seems to suggest that the "imperial discourse is compelled to make it so in order to make it work". (*Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, 140). One can argue that colonial ideology would never really advocate that colonial subjects should be exact replicas because that would be too threatening, and so, mimicry becomes the way in which the native creates himself as a caricature, as "almost the same, but not quite." (*Of Mimicry and Man*, 86). The "Minute" which is the unambiguous statement of the intellectual difference between the British and the Indians, now seems to be telling another story: it can also be seen as an example of the partiality of representation, the "left over" of Derridean "differance", a meaning which is in "excess" of what it apparently represents.

In the same way, history is shown to be enacted "between-the-lines" owing to the existence of "a map of misreading" in the interpretation of recordation. (*Sly Civility*, 95-6). For within the symbolic space of civility that informs colonial rule, there exists enough room for despotism when addressing the nation, so that the system of ethics governing colonial rule develops chinks in its civilizing mission. The conceptualization of ambivalence within the nation and its governance, when stretched further, takes us to the point where despotism begins to repeat itself in the docility of the native and evolves into such a position where civility's other—despotism—regurgitates in images and shades of native resistance and thereby gives strength to the stereotype of the other as despotic. Such displacements have the interesting function of even threatening colonial command as in the confession, for instance, where "the native refusal to satisfy the colonizer's narrative demand" frustrates this "strategy of surveillance." (*Sly*

Civility, 99). The space of colonial discourse is almost always “preoccupied” by the native whose response then gets tempered with a skepticism resulting in paranoia and anxiety for the colonizer.

Central to these arguments is the displacement of the concept of “fixity” and stereotyping which characterize the discourse of colonialism as “major discursive strategy” (*The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism*, 66) especially in the works of Edward Said. In order to understand “the productive ambivalence of the object of colonial discourse”, or the “otherness”, it is important to extend scrutiny to forms of both identification and difference, what Bhabha calls “phobia and fetish”:

Despite the ‘play’ in the colonial system
which is crucial to its exercise of power,
colonial discourse produces the colonized
as a social reality which is at once an ‘other’
and yet entirely knowable and visible.

(*The Other Question*, 70-1)

It is thus that colonial discourse can never be unambiguously one-sided; it remains open-ended, comprising of both fear and attraction, sameness and difference.

The nature of transnational identities allows us to criticize Said’s dividing binaries of the oppressor and the oppressed. Said has addressed Orientalism from an exteriority, limiting the role of the “oppressed” and thus ignoring, in Bhabha’s words

those terrifying stereotypes of savagery, cannibalism,
lust and anarchy which are the signal points of
identification and alienation, scenes of fear and desire,
in colonial texts.

(*The Other Question*, 72)

While Orientalism will remain a discursive construction, the part played by the subject in his/her own enunciation cannot be separated from the discourse of the colonizer. Such a view would question and restrict the unproblematic power/knowledge relationship which according to Said establishes colonial control and mastery. As Bhabha writes:

The taking up of any one position, within a specific discursive form, in a particular historical juncture, is then always problematic --the site of both fixity and fantasy. It provides a colonial 'identity' that is played out—like all fantasies of originality and origination—in the face and space of the disruption and threat from the heterogeneity of other positions. As a form of splitting and multiple belief, the 'stereotype' requires, for its successful signification, a continual and repetitive chain of other stereotypes.

(The Other Question, 77)

It is through the constant interplay of recognition and disavowal, identity and its lack, or "narcissism and aggressivity" that colonial power upholds itself in relation to the stereotype. Also, it is in the play of "masking" the stereotype in order to conceal the lack of fixity that one can locate the "phantasmatic quality" in the representation of that very stereotype. Bhabha says

Stereotyping is not the setting up of a false image which becomes the scapegoat of discriminatory practices. It is a much more ambivalent text of projection and introjection, metaphoric and metonymic strategies, displacement, overdetermination, guilt, aggressivity; the masking and splitting of 'official' and

fantasmatic knowledges to construct the positionalities
and oppositionalities of racist discourse.

(The Other Question, 81-2)

However, despite the “shifting positionalities” of these categories, there is no marked departure from Said’s analysis that colonial discourse, nevertheless, appropriate these categories as strategies of control.

Yet the idea of ambivalence as both mimicry and mockery, resemblance and menace, in producing the political effects of discourse is significant in any study of identity. In other words, the self-as-other and the other-as-self both serve in making colonialism a very problematic category, and not one in which “slippage”, “excess” and “difference” between binaries can be easily discounted. (*Of Mimicry and Man, 86*). In this way, we may create a different identity for both the colonizer and the colonized from that which we have been accustomed to in both imperial and nationalist historiography. Such criticism erodes the direct relationship between power and knowledge and introduces a degree of acculturation which is the result of perceiving identity as a process of rapidly eroding self-images for the colonizer corresponding to the reversal of the “oriental” as he/she is now visualized. The Nehruvian model of nation, by comparison, has a unique physiognomy which closes utterance even though he tries to root out the monologism of religion and a caste-based identity. (*San Juan, 207*).

The West has invaded post-colonial societies largely in the cultural sphere where resistance is vulnerable owing to cultural colonization. But imperialism, or for that matter, neo-colonialism, cannot always be seen as a top-down pressure politics in the light of the above analysis. In fact, globalization is a very complex and hybrid process: on the one hand, for example, Indians can exhibit their national energy in an outpouring of support for their cricketing icon, Sachin Tendulkar, but on the other unflinchingly witness commercial breaks in which

their hero profits on the American Pepsi. Thus “post-colonial transformation” “operates powerfully in the volatile interactions of mass, folk and popular culture” and gives evidence of the “nature of the agency involved in the appropriation of images” and ideas which represent both national and global authority. (*Post-Colonial Transformation*, 219). As Salman Rushdie provocatively asks:

If the young people of Iran now insist on
rock concerts, who are we to criticize their
cultural contamination?

(*Learning to Love Uncle Sam*, 223)

Thus, the concept of nationalism is based at once on sameness and difference, the paradox of which can only be reconciled following Rabindranath Tagore’s notion of ‘Visvobodh’ or the vision of ‘Non-National Neo-Universalism’.

Tagore’s objections to nation/nationalism lie in its very nature and purpose as an institution. The fact that it is a social construction, a mechanical organization, modelled on certain utilitarian objectives in mind, made it unpalatable to Tagore, who always valued creation over construction, imagination over reason, “expression” over want, natural and organic over the manmade and contrived. In Tagore’s view

Construction is for a purpose, it expresses
our wants; but creation is for itself, it
expresses our very beings.

(*Construction versus Creation*, Soares 59)

He believed that the nation as a formation, based on needs and wants rather than truth and love, could not contribute much to man’s moral fulfillment or to the dignity of human beings. To Tagore, race was a more natural, and therefore acceptable, social unit than the nation and he envisioned a world where races would live together in amity, keeping their “distinct characteristics but all

attached to the stem of humanity by the bond of love.” (Qtd. in Radhakrishnan, 173).

Tagore was of the view that since nationalism emerged in the post-religious laboratory of industrial-capitalism, it is but an “organization of politics and commerce” (*Nationalism*, 7), that brings “harvests of wealth” (*Nationalism*, 5) by spreading tentacles of greed, selfishness, power and prosperity, and sacrificing in the process, “the moral man, the complete man...to make room for the political and the commercial man, the man of limited purpose” (*Nationalism*, 9). Tagore dismissed nationalism as “the organized self-interest of a people, where it is least human and least spiritual” (*Nationalism*, 8). He saw it as a recurrent threat to humanity because it trampled over the human spirit and “upset man’s moral balance, obscuring his human side under the shadow of soul-less organization” (*Nationalism*, 9).

Tagore also found the fetish nationalism a source of war, hatred, mutual suspicion between nations and militarism. Sandip argues in *The Home and the World*, “country’s needs must be made into a god” (61) and one must “set aside...conscience...by putting the country in its place” (224). This deification of the nation, where it is made to occupy the place of god and conscience, breeds exclusivism, fanaticism, cultural particularism, paranoia and xenophobia, thus every nation considering another a threat to its existence wage war against it for self-fulfillment and self-aggrandizement. Tagore explains:

The Nation, with all its paraphernalia of power and prosperity, its flags and pious hymns, its blasphemous prayers in the churches, and the literary mock thunders of its patriotic bragging, cannot hide the fact that the Nation is the greatest evil for the Nation, that all its precautions are against it, and any new birth of its fellow in the world is always followed in its mind by the dread of a new peril.

(*Nationalism*, 17-18)

Critics concur with Tagore's arguments that nationalism breeds violence and contains a discourse of binarism, which perpetuates the process of victimizing and othering of nations by one another. Gellner, Anderson and Tom Nairn have pointed out the irrationality, prejudice, hatred, sentimentality, collective egoism and aggression that nationalism generates, and Leela Gandhi explains it in the following words:

East or West, we are now aware of the xenophobia, racism and loathing which attends the rhetoric of [national/cultural] particularism. Nationalism has become the popular pretext for contemporary disquisitions of intolerance, separating Croatians and Serbians, Greeks and Macedonians, Estonians and Russians, Slovaks and Czechs, Armenians and Azerbaijanis, Israelis and Palestinians, Hindus and Muslims.

(Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction, 108)

Tagore's lectures on nationalism drew many angry responses, even from those of kindred spirit, such as D.H. Lawrence, who spitefully denounced the "wretched worship-of-Tagore attitude" as "disgusting" (Kripalani, 278). However, not all were offended; not everyone misunderstood him. The French Nobel Laureate, Romain Rolland, greeted him in a salubrious personal letter:

The reading of Nationalism has been a great joy for me; for I entirely agree with your thoughts, and I love them even more now that I have heard them expressed by you with this noble and harmonious wisdom which, being your own, is so dear to us...

(Kripalani, 277)

Tagore's animosity to nationalism should not make us think that he was not patriotic. He believed in a symbiosis of the East and West, a "deep association" or a living relationship between the two cultures; a creative unity that was possible

only when the East had discovered its soul and its separate identity. Moreover, his profound love for his 'swadesh' is manifest in his many immortal songs and poems. But his love and intensity for the land transcended the bounds of a narrow, selfish and self-aggrandizing nationalism and carried such depth, generosity and broadness that his compositions were adopted as national anthem in three countries. Despite the fervour, Tagore never allowed his love for his country to stand in the way of his love for truth, justice and humanity—he was not given to a national consciousness but a world-consciousness, a **Visvobodh** in which every country would keep alight its own lamp of mind as its part in the illumination of the world. As Nikhil says in *The Home and the World*,

I am willing to serve my country; but my
worship I reserve for Right which is far
greater than my country. To worship my
country as a god is to bring a curse upon
it...

(*The Home and the World*, 26)

and as Atin says to Ela in *Four Chapters*,

The patriotism of those who have no faith in that
which is above patriotism is like a crocodile's
back used as a ferry to cross the river...That the
life of the country can be saved by killing its
soul, is the monstrously false doctrine that
nationalists all over the world are bellowing
forth stridently. My heart groans to give it
effective contradictions...

(Qtd. in Iyengar, 109)

And indeed, effective contradictions Tagore gave all through his life, through his paradisiacal imagination that envisioned a world of love, equality and unity of all mankind. By challenging the prevailing political system of nationalism—with

inspiration from Tagore—with a more wholesome outlook of global unity and cultural confederation between nations, the modern Indo-English writers should strive to avert the all-consuming nightmare before us and establish lasting peace and harmony in human society.

Towards the end of the Introduction, it has been indicated that the parameters of this study were not to be understood as positing another more politically correct “truth”. But eventually, perhaps any polemical analysis runs the risk of prescriptively suggesting the “right” methodology as opposed to the “wrong”. My own analysis cannot escape the implication that one representation of nationalism should give way to another one. This other representation of nationalism is politically responsible; it values contradiction and displacement because it is in these that dominant discourses parading as “truth” in the history of nationalism and in the history of literary studies can be disrupted and revealed. We suggest that to offer a representation that disrupts the hegemonic history of another and to use a language that claims political responsibility are, finally, not merely inevitable but productive as well. Since, in the history of knowledge, representations work paradigmatically, there may be an irreducibility and a positive value in making representation itself the object of study. In particular, the category of literature is implicated in the issue of representation. The writing of literature is not an unmediated act. Literature does not present as much as represent “reality”; it also disguises the operation of re-presentation itself in the process of presenting an Other, alien national culture to the West. Hence, one productive result of a recognition that Indian-English literature participates in the work of literary re-representation is that representation itself can be studied not as a localized but as an internationalized, global issue.

During different parts of this study, we have discussed Indian novel writing in English in the context of representation and discursive formations. By reading R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao within this context, we demonstrated that their nationalist identifications disrupted their apparently evenly distributed

affinity with Indian nationalism, that their use of translation reinstated, rather than redefined, the status of the English language as a dominant discourse. The texts of Rushdie and Mukherjee, on the contrary, have the effect of thematizing nationalism, gender and class as a discursive formation and a representational issue. Finally Amitav Ghosh and Anita Desai have endeavored to erase those 'shadow' lines of "representational" and "ideological" separateness that give rise to segregation among nations. In their novels we can hear the resonance of Tagore's 'Non-National Neo-Universalism'.

It has been tried to show that Indian-English studies have functioned not only representationally but also ideologically. This ideological functioning may be read as further globalizing current critical issues surrounding the role of academy in maintaining social formations or in the reproduction of the "prospective conditions for continuous production." (*Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, 145). Like representation, ideology itself is a productive object of literary study. Since the academy functions ideologically, and scholars and teachers are necessarily implicated in this ideological functioning, one needs to work against, to test, the boundaries of the ideological structures that determine us, so that, to some extent, we can begin to determine them.

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