

Vernacular Englishes: Language and Democratic Politics in Post-Liberalization  
India

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## **Abstract**

This project is a comparative study of twentieth and twenty-first century Indian English novels, Hindi novels, diasporic and Bollywood films, hybrid Hindi-English prose of Hindi newspapers, and India's language policy. The field of world literature thus far has upheld two problematic divisions of "world" and "literature": first, it has positioned the world against the "provincialism" of national and local contexts; second, it has engaged with globally circulating literatures as unrelated to globalizing media cultures. In contrast, I show that to fully grasp the cultural hegemony of world languages and literatures, scholarship must reckon with their heterogeneous linguistic environments and their political and economic ambits of circulation. Through an expansion of literary space, "Vernacular Englishes" recasts debates in world literature and postcolonial studies that rely too neatly on the vernacular to challenge global, transnational, and national frames of analyses.

I argue that meanings of a colonial and global "English" are forged within an interplay of translatability and untranslatability with "the vernacular." To this end, I highlight the legislation of English as India's associate official language: one that appeases linguistic minorities (who have protested the upper-caste Hindu bias of Hindi, India's official language) and secures the (neo)imperial democratic character of the postcolonial state. I also draw attention to the fact that marginalized castes, classes, and language groups have routinely used the "elite" language of English to make political demands on the state. This representative power of English in postcolonial India, its imagined and desired capacity to speak for other vernaculars, in effect, vernacularizes

English itself. The growth of mass media after the 1990s neoliberal economic reforms in India has further popularized English words and phrases in Hindi language media. In its recent availability outside of traditional privileges of class, urbanism, and education, the English language accumulates meaning as both a globalizing and a vernacularizing force.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

This dissertation makes two key arguments. First, global englishes are always also vernacular englishes. How can they not be? Second, contrary to its characterization in recent theoretical work as eminently untranslatable and spatially limited, the vernacular is both translatable and mobile. Through such a theorization of the vernacular, this work also demonstrates the untenability of models that oppose the vernacular to English as an ex-colonial language in postcolonial India.

In the chapters that follow, I approach twentieth- and twenty-first-century Indian Anglophone literature comparatively along with a previously unexplored corpus of texts that includes Hindi literature, diasporic and Bollywood films, hybrid Hindi-English language in Hindi newspapers, and India's post-Independence language policy. I show that the meanings of a colonial and global "English" are themselves forged within salient assertions of the vernacular, and that the globalism of presumably free-floating, dull, and dulling global englishes is, in fact, buttressed by its claims to vernacularity. Paying close attention to language politics in post-liberalization India—specifically between Hindi and English—I demonstrate that an encounter with English, the (neo)imperial language of power, is not always accompanied by a hesitation or a rejection, often privileged as nativist responses in postcolonial literary studies.

Casting globally present English as vernacular englishes recognizes that there are many different experiences and mobilizations of what is considered *a* language, and that the global does not exist in a realm distant and different from the local. Read within their heterogeneous linguistic and mediated environments, vernacular englishes, at once both

local and global, materialize what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has described as a globalectical vision of literary studies. Such a vision derives "from the shape of the globe, [it] is the mutual containment of hereness and thereeness in time and space, where time and space are also in each other. [It is] the Blakean vision of a world in a grain of sand and eternity in an hour" (Thiong'o, 2012: 60). It makes visible the different ways in which English as a language of power must be but often cannot be read, spoken, heard, and seen in the world today. Approaching a globally hegemonic language through the critical lens of the vernacular further enables the contestation of the position of English as the favored literary vernacular in the field of world literature and Anglocentric postcolonial studies. This is not simply because the privilege and limits of the language establish the privilege and limits of the field, but more because our conception of the English language itself can no longer be limited and a privilege.

In her 1995 essay "In the Name of Comparative Literature," Rey Chow invited scholars to examine the multiple languages and cultural enclaves that already exist within English and to grasp the premise of language as power in the spirit of decolonization, not of diversity. Twinning the idealism of worldliness, valuable in itself, with the materialism of the world, I bring to the study of English literature an awareness of the formation of the discourse on English in other linguistic and media contexts such as Hindi language newspapers, popular political debates, and Bollywood and Indian diasporic films. Placing literature in the world, opening it up to and tracing its interconnections with other media forms, invigorates the study of literature by highlighting its connections to people's lives and experiences. This renewed vision of "world literature" reckons with the synchronous

and competing imperatives that shape and comprise both the world and literature. Thus, it names the “global relations of force” and remains “attentive to the worldliness of language and text at various levels of social reality, from the highly localized to the planetary as such” (Mufti, 493). A renewed vision of world literature further acknowledges in these “global relations of force” a lived, locally-oriented, and *mundane* worldliness that contests any easy and elite cosmopolitanism. Most of the sites of textual production examined in this dissertation remain marginal to the discipline of comparative literature and to the fields of world literature and postcolonial studies. However, they offer specific instances in which the local and the global dimensions of the world are simultaneously negotiated. Further, if we keep the plurality of englishes in mind then we see that, to borrow Rebecca Walkowitz’s phrase from *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature* (2015), all gloriously and monolingually Anglophone literature “starts as world literature” (Walkowitz, 2)—not so much because it has been written for translation, but because it is written *in and as* translation.

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The “proper order of studies in comparative literature” has almost always aspired to trace what Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett described as the “gradual expansion of social life, from clan to city, from city to nation, from both of these to cosmopolitan humanity” (Posnett, 86). This expansion of humanity’s scope is geopolitical and tracing it has meant highlighting paths of literary circulation that not only lead away from homes (Damrosch 2003) but also do not necessarily culminate in the cosmopolitanism attributed to

European and North American centers (Adejunmobi 2005, Thornber 2009, Ramazani 2009, Desai 2013). The field of world literature also shares the discipline's suspicion of provincialism. Amid numerous attempts to define the world in world literature, one thing remains common: the world shuns the onesidedness and provincialism of nation. In "Conjectures on World Literature" (2005), Franco Moretti ascribes "only one justification for the study of world literature (and for the existence of departments of comparative literature)," which is to be "a thorn in the side, a permanent intellectual challenge to national literatures—especially the local literature" (Moretti, 68). In *What Is World Literature?* (2003), David Damrosch similarly suggests that world literature exceeds the geographical and political limits of the national, as it manifests a specific mode of circulation and of reading in the world beyond the site of origin, the cultural "home," of the text (Damrosch, 5). "A product of different streams and influences from different points of the globe" (Thiong'o, 2012: 49) and free of local regimes of censorship (Damrosch, 18), the world is more welcoming with its promise of bigger and more liberal audiences (18). The salient cosmopolitanism of the field is "a nuanced, localized cosmopolitanism" (22), as the world relies on the category of the vernacular to violate and to regulate it.

The vernacular can refer to a language, to a "sensitivity" (Shankar, 22), to an aesthetic, and to knowledges (Chatterjee and Aquil 2008), and it is perceived as synonymous or commensurate with the non-standard, the non-hegemonic, the local, the particular, the common, the non-western, and oftentimes, the indigenous. The field of world literature resorts to a calculus of power and a hierarchy of scale that minoritizes

and localizes the vernacular against the world, casts it as a mark of radical difference, as the field aspires to a breadth and inclusivity unattainable through national and local literatures. Permanently oppositional in search of “life-worlds” of languages (Shankar, 134), of processes of “social translation” (Shankar, 111), and of translation zones (Apter 2006), the vernacular risks being mobilized as a kind of conceptual subalternity. The vernacular is viewed in opposition to the hegemonic forces of national and global languages and literatures, and pegged at the subaltern end of an asymmetrical relation between them in a way that determines its political horizons. The vernacular is determined by its structural poverty, which makes its meaning slippery. For instance, Emily Apter in *The Translation Zone* (2006) gathers vernacular languages with “argot, patois, creoles, pidgins” (9) in a “topologically diffuse” (11) translation zone—all similarly menacing to national commitments. Likewise, Subramanian Shankar, in *Flesh and Fish Blood: Postcolonialism, Translation, and the Vernacular* (2012), advances the vernacular broadly in opposition to the transnational, the global, the cosmopolitan, and the national. In his argument, the vernacular resists systematization and abstraction; it is that which remains “untranslatable” as an instance of “extreme cultural difference” (Shankar, 138). The concept of “social translation”—“a collective, oral, gradual and anonymous” (Shankar, 111) process—bridges the linguistic to the social to remind us that translation does not take place in hermetically-sealed contexts.<sup>1</sup> This “collective

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<sup>1</sup> In order to make his argument, Shankar first distinguishes between language and its social dimensions, and then conceptualizes “social translation” to account for the “social encounter between languages” (111). However, his theorization neglects the fact that all translation is social translation, and that translation cannot but be social. The *longue durée* perspective suggested by Shankar—compelling in itself—is perhaps better grasped through V. N. Voloshinov’s theorization of the verbal sign as arising from a social organization.

translation” takes a broad view of language, literature, and history, and proposes a way to think of the effects of translation as cumulative, transformative of the contexts that produce them, and persistent. Shankar mines as an opportunity the resistance of the vernacular to translation and its defiant untranslatability into grand narratives of modernity, nation, and the world. Shankar cautions against dwelling on the damning *metaphor* of translation, as it eclipses translation’s value as a practice and makes it more mysterious. He argues that if read contextually (comparatively?), even violent and unsuccessful acts of translation can expand the postcolonial archive, which in turn enriches postcolonial theory. His approach is reminiscent of that of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who apprehends translation as an enabling violation.<sup>2</sup> In a gesture of defiance, then, the untranslatable vernacular poses a challenge to the preeminence of global and national frames of analysis, to universalist categories of knowledge, and to disproportionate focus on historically and globally hegemonic languages.

The quality of untranslatability attributed to the vernacular has been understood in different ways, as simply an impossibility of a literal translation, an ontological otherness that cannot travel across, and a theoretical impasse. Attention to untranslatability can unlock both “a geopolitical specificity and theoretical reach against the fine grain of aesthetic comparison” (Apter 2009: 584). Most recently, in her theorization of the untranslatable, Apter writes that her notion of untranslatability is not unlike Walter Benjamin’s notion of translatability in “The Task of the Translator” (1923); “qualified as

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<sup>2</sup> In postcolonial theory, untranslatability is a gesture of resistance to dominant Eurocentric frames of analysis. In different ways, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in “The Politics of Translation” (1993), Abdelfattah Kilito in *Thou Shalt Not Speak My Language* (2002), and Tejaswini Niranjana in *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context* (1992), all mobilize a conception of the impossibility of and an injunction against translation.



something that cannot be communicated in language, a kernel of ‘the foreign’ that remains, an ineffable textual essence only realizable in the translational afterlife, or a sacred literalness of the revelatory word that great literary works strive for but rarely ever achieve” (Apter, 2009: 584). Apter’s effort to navigate the temporal and the geographical through the untranslatable favors “located-ness” as a challenge to “aesthetic comparison,” and even escapes language.<sup>3</sup>

Still, the vernacular, as Sheldon Pollock reminds us in “Cosmopolitan and Vernacular in History” (2000) does not (cannot?) stand outside history and language. A recuperation of local contexts to ethically populate the world of world literature is guided by an anxiety to detect a transhistorical locus of authenticity. Imputing untranslatability and a located-ness to the vernacular loses sight of its moment of production—forgetting that the vernacular is not “autochthonous” (Pollock, 2000: 591) but produced and read as such. It also shies away from acknowledging the centrality of the vernacular to the spread of global capital and to the creation of the imagined community of the modern nation state. The vernacular itself incarnates political asymmetries; thus it cannot be a seat of radical politics that furnishes a repudiation of and a refuge from national or global forces.

Indeed, historical studies of the vernacular (Anderson 1982, Tsu 2010, Zhou 2011, Ertürk 2011) have been less inclined to approach it as always marked by radical difference or geopolitical specificity. Benedict Anderson specifically draws attention to

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<sup>3</sup> I agree with Apter that there is always a constitutive untranslatability in language. However, my discomfort arises from what Ajay Skaria calls “her tendency to ‘substantivize’” that untranslatability. In different contexts, Apter attributes untranslatability to both classical and vernacular texts and languages. For instance, in *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (2008), Apter associates untranslatability with (classical) languages of sacred texts. Apter traces the injunction against translation and cultural equivalences in Abdelfattah Kilito’s *Thou Shalt Not Speak My Language* to the Arabic of the Quran where “the duty to *not* translate is derived from the Islamic tradition” (Apter, 2013: 253, italics original).

the “revolutionary vernacularizing thrust of capitalism” (Anderson, 40), to the fatality of human linguistic diversity, and to technologies of communication in the rise of nation states. Similarly, in the context of Turkish alphabet reform that replaced Perso-Arabic script with Latin phonetic alphabet, Ertürk conceives of vernacularization as a hegemonic process that privileges one specific variant of a vernacular (Ertürk, 15) as it forges a unitary nation and language from a multilingual society. In the modern philological history of the subcontinent, Mufti uses David Scott’s phrase to describe the vernaculars as “conscripts of modernity” (Mufti, 493), and shows that the process of vernacularization systematically *created* Hindi under the sign of the “indigenous” as a claimant of the modern nation state against Urdu and, briefly, against English.<sup>4</sup> In his study of Sanskrit cosmopolitanism in pre-modern India, *The Language of Gods in the World of Men* (2006), Pollock theorized the vernaculars as *desi*, as rooted in land and not in people. In the same spirit, Miriam Hansen’s “The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism” (1997), although it accords a dubious primacy to Hollywood, conceptualizes the U.S. film industry as a global vernacular that articulates a *particular* experience and still has a translatable and a transnational

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<sup>4</sup> In the context of premodern and early modern India, scholarship in the discipline of history has shown that the vernacular ways were not in fact entirely divorced from our understanding of what is modern. Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, in *Textures of Time: Writing History in South India 1600-1800*, make an important attempt to wed the vernacular with the modern when they question the assumption that there was no history writing in India before the colonial encounter. Instead they suggest that historians adopt more attentive reading techniques to observe the existence of factual historiography that provided credible sources and secular explanations, and concerned itself with the life of the state. Likewise, Sumit Guha in “Speaking Historically: The Changing Voices of Historical Narration in Western India, 1400-1900” (204) studies the relation of the historical narrative in Marathi to structures of power, and the changes it underwent over time. The anthology *India’s Literary History: Essays on the Nineteenth Century* (2004) by Stuart Blackburn and Vasudha Dalmia brings a critical historical approach to nineteenth century literary cultures, placing them within sociocultural politics, to bring attention to the processes of canonization and inventions of traditions.

resonance (Hansen, 68, my italics). These historical studies suggest the constitutive role of the vernacular in giving form to—through their invention, circulation, and translation—the hegemonic structures of the nation, for instance. Yet they also seem to insist on the local provenance and an inevitable and innate indigeneity of the vernacular. Consider, for instance, Anderson’s definition of “vernacularization” as the transformation of spoken *local* languages through the force of print-capitalism. Similarly, in Hansen’s formulation, the “globality” of Hollywood is manifested in its transnational resonance, and its “vernacular” character issues from its articulation of a particular, a U.S. American, experience. As a result, the vernacular *becomes* global—though it certainly does not start as one. Likewise, in the essay “The Cosmopolitan Vernacular” (1998) Pollock suggests that “not only [does] the vernacular reconfigure the cosmopolitan, but [...] the two produce each other in the course of their interaction” (Pollock, 1998: 7). In this mutually transformative vision, it is still “the *localization* of the globalizing literary-cultural practices and representations of Sanskrit [that] constitutes a model instance of cosmopolitan vernacularism” (7). The vernacular continues to be imagined as that which is spatially-limited—local—rather than as a category that simultaneously comprises global, national, *and* local dimensions.

However, Hindi, which is often read as a vernacular relative to English, cannot lay an undisputed ethnic or a genealogical claim to either a place or a people.<sup>5</sup> It is not an indigenous language because it was engineered over the nineteenth and twentieth

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<sup>5</sup> This line of argument seems to culminate in the linguistic division of states after independence. For instance, B. R. Ambedkar’s argument in favor of the linguistic division of states secured the vernacular to a place and to a people, but ironically, leaves the English language for the nation at large.

centuries in British and postcolonial India (Rai 1984, King 1994, Bayly 1996, Rai 2000). It is this constitutive transhistorical elision marking the engineered idiom of Hindi that naturalizes as the vernacular—authentic and properly national—what is really a language of no place and no people.<sup>6</sup> As a language that is positioned as national and official in India today, Hindi is not inherently or eternally local, subaltern, or powerless. Therefore, the term vernacular—as it invokes properties or *claims* of indigeneity, locality, and powerlessness—is not always appropriate for a number of modern Indian vernaculars, including Hindi.<sup>7</sup>

The time of world literature may, indeed, be the time of global capitalism. As Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels pointed out in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), it is as a result of expanding markets across the globe that national one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness are increasingly impossible. Yet the world sought in world literature is not the same as the globe: “The globe is on our computers. No one lives there,” Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak tells us, and proposes that the planet overwrite the globe (Spivak, 2003: 72). Spivak’s call to planetarity in *Death of a Discipline* (2003) is motivated by her acknowledgement that “alterity remains underived from us; it is not our dialectical negation, it contains us as much as it flings us away” (73). Globalization, Spivak writes, is the imposition of the same system everywhere, and in a parenthetical statement,

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<sup>6</sup> I am grateful to Shaden Tageldin for this insight, which also provides a framework to consider the global dimensions of a nationalist Hindi. Besides the efforts made within the state administration, the native claims of the Hindi language are routinely also bolstered through events like the *Pravasi Bhartiya Diwas* (Non-Resident Indian Day), through the global network of the Hindu Right Wing outfit, *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* (World Hindu Council), and through worldwide events to celebrate “Hindi Day.”

<sup>7</sup> By the same line of argument, English is not always or inherently or only a vernacular in India. Instead, as I show, it is positioned as a vernacular and can be read as a vernacular in specific contexts.

extends this critique of the analytic of the global to that of the current transmutation of “the literatures of the global South to an undifferentiated space of English [...] rather than [to] a differentiated political space” (72). While I agree with Spivak’s dissatisfaction with the category of the global, her argument misses a critical opportunity to examine the inherent heterogeneity of the processes of globalization that many scholars have written about (Appadurai 1990, Glissant 1990, Gibson-Graham 1996). It also misses the ways in which the so-called “local” shapes and contests the global, and the differentiated space of English itself that emerges in this view as it *becomes the local*.

The field of world literature has always been suspicious of “globalization” construed as the assault of commercial exchange on literary discourse. Even for Goethe, *Weltliteratur* assumed “the double guise of on the one hand signaling positively the intimate commerce, the exchange of ideas between like-minded writers around Europe and on the other hand, negatively, that of the ever-faster and ever-increasing commercialization, including in the province of ‘letters,’ that [he] saw happening around him” (D’haen, 8). Understandably, then, Damrosch is as much concerned with the ways in which something is read as literature, as he is by the circulation of those literary texts. Channeling Goethe’s aversion to mass culture, and privileging *literatur* not *lektur*, he classifies “global literature” as that which is “read solely in airline terminals, unaffected by any specific context whatever” (Damrosch, 25). Guided by the assumption that there is a set of rules and a body of literary work identifiable as English which is then “wounded...with the slings and arrows of warped speech” (Apter, 2006: 155), Damrosch approaches globally situated English and other language hybrids, shaped within the

cultural influence of media, as destructive or refractive (Damrosch 24) and assumes that these hinder the literary critic's access to a true worldliness.

With a Goethean vision rather than a Marxian one, Damrosch defines "Global English" as "nothing more than a minimum competence, a bland, watered-down commercial and touristic language whose use could dampen down the linguistic richness of English even in its original home locales" (Damrosch, 225). This definition, bemoaning growing literacy in the absence of an accompanying literariness, is ironic. Damrosch's focus on the mode of circulation of texts and their translations draws from his conviction that studying the growing presence of English across the world can enrich the study of literature itself: a conviction that is also belied by an unwillingness to engage with the role of mass culture in this process. In the chapter "English in the World," Damrosch discusses three Anglophone writers: P. G. Wodehouse, Rudyard Kipling, and G. V. Desani. The cosmopolitanism of these writers, of scholarly interest in itself, is not sufficient reckoning with the far-reaching scope of "English in the world," which circulates in media and markets and is available to many outside of privileges of class, education, and urbanism. Clearly, it is impossible to ignore the "disneyfication" (Damrosch, 17) of the "globe," even if it seems homogenizing and brings no apparent literary value, since any vision of cosmopolitanism takes shape within capitalist circuits. "True" and ideal cosmopolitanism, of the kind imagined here, is not only a mark of privilege but it is also theoretically impossible. It is for this reason that Damrosch must align "world literature with a *nuanced, localized* cosmopolitanism" (22, my italics), though he never defines what those epithets imply.

In contrast, Apter examines the phenomenon of what she calls “CNN Creole.” Apter characterizes it as a “new” kind of language that emerges as brand names intersect with the languages of their reception. It is a result of global media diffusion, “specifically the worldwide roving of consumer product names within regional languages, idiolects, and hybrid creolized tongues” (Apter, 2006: 161). Apter approaches CNN Creole through its impact on literary expression, especially in postcolonial contexts, “in which the politics of indigenesness has been rightfully suspicious of globalism, posing it as a threat to native language and cultural integrity” (164). In response, Apter reads CNN Creole as a “zone of translation,” a spatial category that is, as I mentioned earlier, “topologically diffuse” in the wake of receding distinctions between urban and rural, center and periphery, pre- and post- industrial, pre- and post- capitalist. As a result, her analysis of literary texts such as Irvine Welsh’s *Trainspotting* (1993), for instance, struggles between her own theoretical impulse to de-emphasize the binaries of center and periphery, outside of “provincial and local prejudices,” *and* her political task to name the indigenous and the global, as well as with the interaction between the two. Her readings neglect to account for colonial and precolonial relations between English and other western languages and the languages of the so-called global periphery, as she hastens to fix an unsullied indigenous.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> In the Indian context, Arthur Burnell and Henry Yule’s 1903 *Hobson Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical and Discursive*, for instance, is as much an example of global englishes as the hybrid prose of vernacular newspapers that I examine in Chapter 4. To be clear, my objective in this dissertation is to complicate the theorization of the vernacular as necessarily indigenous. In doing so, I do not wish to discredit the political gesture of identifying (as) the indigenous – for instance, Mahasweta Devi uses it to complicate the homogeneous claims of a Hindu nation in her work.

Putting pressure on such a conception of the local (often used synonymously with the indigenous), Francesca Orsini provides a productively complex vision of the local in her essay “The Multilingual Local in World Literature” (2015). Orsini makes a case for the “multilingual local” as it co-constitutes the global in a field that “persist[s] in viewing any local that is not a ‘center’ as derivative, peripheral, unimportant” (Orsini, 2015: 351). She writes,

When we move from the study of languages to that of literature and culture, [...] to insist on terming the bilingual situation an “encounter” or a “contact zone” risks reproducing a historical consciousness that, perniciously in the case of India, views Persian and Sanskrit and Hindavi (and their speakers) as belonging to “different cultures,” only to be surprised by the amount of “contact.” For this reason, I prefer the framework of a “multilingual local.” (352)

Orsini’s multilingual vision is integral to re-thinking the dynamics of the local and the global. Inasmuch as the categories of the vernacular and the local overlap, her essay also provides a reminder that the local is never divorced from the global. Orsini writes about the early modern Awadh context in India when, within Pollock’s conceptualization, at least Persian and Sanskrit would be considered *margi* (cosmopolitan) languages. In present day India, such a multilingual local would, naturally, include English. Even as it insists on a complex vision of the local *against* the accepted centrality of the global, Orsini’s multilingual local provides a way to understand the *co-presence* (not simply the “co-constitution”) of local and global dimensions at the same level. Orsini’s



characterization of contexts, texts, and languages as part of the multilingual local that “co-constitutes” the global still deflects attention away from the ways in which the “local” is also the “global.”

What if we take seriously Nirvana Tanoukhi’s reformulation of Neil Smith’s argument that “there is nothing inevitable about global, national, or urban scales” (Tanoukhi, 83)? What if contrary to Posnett’s vision of *widening* the field of study, we *deepen* it? What happens if encounters with English and other “hegemonic” languages are not encounters of a narrowly construed cosmopolitan privilege?<sup>9</sup> Far from untranslatable and oppositional, can the vernacular—“a very particular and unprivileged mode of social identity—the language of the *verna* or houseborn slave of Republican Rome” (Pollock, 2000: 7)—be translatable, a position of advantage, and a gainful claim?

In the context of these provocations, I turn to the English language in postcolonial India, specifically in the period after the neoliberal economic reforms of the 1990s. The field of postcolonial literary studies itself has focused overwhelmingly on “fragments of the colonial past” (Coronil in Yaeger, 637) and approached English as mostly a foreign, colonial, and non-native presence in a former colony. As it severs the link with a mother tongue, the encounter with a colonial language is read as a moment of loss and alienation. Only recently has Rey Chow (2014) diverged from this line of thought and theorized postcolonial languaging as negotiable prosthesis that “overturns” and “transforms” the

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<sup>9</sup> I use the word “encounters” to refer to the encounter of a subject with language. Such an encounter, as Orsini reminds us, is never simply between (or in this case, with) diagrammatically separated languages. In fact, the vernacular mode of English, considered through language legislation in India, highlights the fact that English was appointed as an associate official language in proxy for the other Indian languages which did not receive an exceptional status.

negative burden of colonial language.<sup>10</sup> Outside of literary studies that focus on postcolonial India, especially in the discipline of history and anthropology (Chandra 2012, Sadana 2012, Chatterjee 2008), a fresh consensus seems to be emerging on the subject of English in India. English is seen as not necessarily “mark[ing] the lasting success of British colonial culture, the inevitability of an Anglo-American globalization, or the rise to the dominance of a pan-regional and cosmopolitan middle class” (Chandra, 2012: 4) and “is signified less and less as a colonial remnant and more as a contemporary global attribute” (Sadana, 21).

In popular discourse, every now and then, *The BBC World* or *The New York Times* announces that the linguistic landscape of India is changing; that English is the unofficial national language, the *lingua franca* that is quietly replacing Hindi. As I will show, the competition set up between Hindi and English is misleading and unproductive. However, it is true that English words and phrases are increasingly used in other language media, as for example on Hindi news channels, by Bollywood song writers and spiritual gurus, and in Hindi newspapers. Especially after the neoliberal economic reforms of 1991 in India, more and more English words are *seen* on billboards and signages, and *heard* on radio, television, and in public places at large. Yet as the English language is wrenched from its colonial provenance and attached to a neocolonial and global circulation, there is little exploration of the way in which the language does not

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<sup>10</sup> Chow also writes, “Although much has been written in the field of Francophone studies on the connections between colonization and language by authors such as Fanon, Derrida, Albert Memmi, Hélène Cixous, Assia Djebar, Abdelkébir Khatibi, Édouard Glissant, Nancy Huston, and their contemporaries, a comparable set of critical reflections on languaging as a visceral and emotional as well as intellectual limit experience is, to my knowledge, relatively lacking—and long overdue—in Anglophone postcolonial studies” (14).

always spell a “negative burden.” In the work that follows, I approach the English language through the lens of the vernacular to trace the limits and the promise of English in postcolonial India as it assumes a remarkable ubiquity in the 1990s and after. My objective is to capture the presence of English both locally and globally, in public and in private domains, as it is spoken assuredly and read tentatively.

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The year 1991 was a significant watershed moment when the protected Nehruvian welfare state economy gave way to a neoliberal economy. The period following this year has been referred to as “post-liberalization,” though it is important for other reasons as well. In *Religion, Caste, and Politics in India* (2010), Christophe Jaffrelot writes that there was an unprecedented surge in the relevance of caste and religion in Indian politics during the decade of the 1990s. It was a major turning point in India’s post-Independence history and it was almost as if “India’s twenty-first century began in the 1990s” (Jaffrelot, 2010: xvi). Jaffrelot identifies four “processes” that have contributed to the transformation of Indian politics since the 1990s: the plebianization of politics; the ethnicization of democracy; liberalization and ensuing exacerbation of social inequalities; and rapprochement with the United States. Below I will briefly discuss each of these processes to present a fuller picture of the post-liberalization period.

One of the most important events catalyzing these shifts occurred on August 7, 1990, when the then government under prime minister V. P. Singh accepted the suggestions made by the report of the Mandal Commission that twenty seven percent opportunities in state administration and in all Public Sector Undertakings be reserved for

Other Backward Classes (OBCs). New Delhi, especially, saw a number of protests from a range of upper castes condemning this special quota for the OBCs. In September of that year Rajiv Goswami, a young student from the University of Delhi, set himself on fire. He survived the bid to immolate himself but became the face of anti-reservation agitations as the incident sparked more protests in other neighboring states as well.

The category of the OBCs for administrative purposes has been defined as a residual one of all *socially* and *educationally* “backward” groups not recognized as Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in the Indian Constitution. OBC is not supposed to be a caste-specific category.<sup>11</sup> As a result, its specific composition has remained debatable in India, and the category of the OBC has emerged as a formidable force in Indian politics. Broadly, members of all religious communities who have historically been excluded from the mainstream and who are economically disadvantaged can be considered OBCs.<sup>12</sup> However, its dynamism exceeds its conventional definition. Satish Deshpande has written that it is more productive to visualize OBC as

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<sup>11</sup> By contrast, the category of the “Scheduled Caste” was defined specifically in light of the need to address the long-standing practice of untouchability in India.

<sup>12</sup> Each state maintains its own list of OBCs. A community that maybe considered OBC in one state may, indeed, enjoy political power in another state. The traditionally agricultural community of the Jats, for instance, is politically very influential in traditionally agricultural states such as Punjab and Haryana in India. However, as a farming community, the literacy rate among the Jats has been very low. In 2016, the government decided to remove the Jats from the Center’s list of OBCs as they were no longer considered socially or economically backward. This led to violent agitations in the states of Delhi and Haryana. In recent times, there has also been impetus to include in the OBC category prosperous upper castes who may have faced some economic woes and who generally resent the “preferential treatment” meted out to the OBCs. For instance, the Patels, who have traditionally been powerful landowners and businessmen, recently agitated for inclusion in the category of the OBC. Ironically, lower caste members who had changed their names to hide their caste or who may have converted to another religion to escape the stigma of their caste routinely struggle to provide a “caste” certificate to claim the benefits of reservation for the OBCs.

an active meaning-giving category that helps define the most elusive political grouping in independent India, the ‘upper’ or ‘forward’ castes. When only the SCs and the STs were being counted, the upper castes were able to travel incognito with the OBCs as part of a ‘general category’ accounting for three-quarters of the population. Once the OBCs acquired a distinct national identity after the Mandal moment, the ‘public secret’ of Indian politics stood revealed—namely, that the Hindu upper castes, numbering no more than 15-20 per cent of the population, were undoubtedly our most powerful and pampered minority. (Deshpande, 1)

Faced with this revelation, political formations with Hindu upper castes as their core constituency were forced to seek a broader identity, and the Hindutva movement emerged (in part) as a response to Mandal. The Bhartiya Janata Party (commonly referred to as the BJP, the Hindu right wing political party in India), which had supported the V. P. Singh government from outside, attempted to shift the political debate from Mandal to Ayodhya. Ayodhya is the city in the state of Uttar Pradesh which is the site of the Babri Mosque-Ram Temple conflict. According to the Hindus, the land on which the sixteenth century Babri Mosque was built was the birthplace of the Hindu god, Ram, and was allegedly destroyed by one of the Mughal generals. Historically, both Hindus and the Muslims have worshipped at the site.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> In the nineteenth century, another Hindu denomination called the Nirmohi Akhara sought legal permission to worship their own deity there at the temple-mosque site, which was denied. In 2010, the Allahabad High Court ruled that the disputed land in Ayodhya be divided into three parts for the Hindu, Muslim, and the Nirmohi Akhara communities in India. More recently, the Modi government has shown interest in building a temple at the site.

To shift the public discourse from the divisive subject of reservation and the OBCs, one of the leaders of the BJP, Lal Krishna Advani, set off on a “*Rath Yatra*” (Chariot Journey) in September 1990. Advani had wanted to take the journey by foot, like a pilgrimage, to educate people about the Hindu claim to Ayodhya and to unite them against Indian Muslims. However, since a journey on foot would have been much slower, Advani decided to take advantage of technological advancements and redesigned a Toyota mini bus as a chariot of yore. He started from the Somnath Temple in Gujarat and ended the journey at Ayodhya. There was significant communal backlash against the *Yatra*, and Advani was even briefly arrested under the National Security Act. The communal sentiments reached a head on December 6, 1992, when a large crowd of Hindu fundamentalists destroyed the sixteenth century Babri Mosque in the city of Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh, India, in an attempt to reclaim the birthplace of Ram. The event led to terrible intercommunal rioting, and BJP gained immense political mileage from this moment.

The growth in media forms as a result of the neoliberal economic reforms played an important part in amplifying the message of the Hindutva movement. In *Politics after Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Shaping of the Public in India* (2001), Arvind Rajagopal attributes to television an important role in making this Hindutva consciousness a reality. Rajagopal focuses his attention on the formation of the Hindu public in India as interpreted by television serials based on the epics *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, in the last years of the 1980s. These shows took the message of Hindutva into the living rooms of lower and middle class Hindu viewers.

At the same time, the print media industry, which I discuss in chapter four, also experienced what is known as the “vernacular print revolution.” As a result of technological advancements that made it possible to get news cheaper and quicker and the influx of much greater corporate advertising, the circulation of newspapers in Hindi started matching and then exceeding that of English language dailies. In their essay, “Subliminal Charge: How Hindi-Language Newspaper Expansion Affects India” (2009), Peter Friedlander, Robin Jeffrey and Sanjay Seth write that most of these newspapers were owned by wealthy Hindus. However, the expanding newspaper industry was guided by and geared towards publishing news that was relevant to the lives of the masses.<sup>14</sup> The interests of the wealthy owners of the newspapers were, thus, at loggerheads with the interests of those masses. According to Rajagopal, Hindi medium newspapers became *Hindu* newspapers during the Ram Temple movement, and the Sangh Parivar’s (the family of Hindu nationalist organizations) influence over the Hindi press was felt even up to 2001 (Rajagopal, 2001: 160). Many local news items (a few of which may be mere rumors) which appeared in the Hindi language dailies did not appear in English language papers. As newspapers spread to smaller towns and cities in the country, the way news was reported also changed. More and more freelance reporters and stringers (who also functioned as resident editors) were employed. Sevanti Ninan in *Headlines from the Heartland: Reinventing the Hindi Public Sphere* (2007) writes that how well a stringer reported depended on “whether or not he also collected advertising, what his caste and professional background was, why he had come into the profession, and how much

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<sup>14</sup> As I will show in Chapter 4, this goal was made possible by the translational nature of English used selectively in Hindi newspapers.

gumption he had as an individual” (Ninan, 113). As a result, the language of the Hindi newspaper, which had been an important venue for the development of modern Hindi, also underwent a shift. The standard modern Hindi of the newspapers included more and more English words and, in specific editions, the local dialects of the stringers. Ironically, Robin Jeffrey and Sevanti Ninan have both described this amplified infusion of English and local dialect forms as a “localization” of Hindi.

This link between market and religious fundamentalism changed the social landscape of India. Rupal Oza in *The Making of Neoliberal India: Nationalism, Gender, and the Paradoxes of Globalization* (2006) argues that India’s encounter with global capital and the concomitant loss of sovereignty resulted in a displacement of control onto national culture and identity, especially in efforts to fortify rigid sexual and gender boundaries by emphasizing India’s difference from the “west.” Thus, while the state’s role in mediating global capital flows had weakened, the nation state itself had not become irrelevant. As we will see in the case of film censorship in India in Chapter 5, this was the time of increased state censorship and of a growing number of court cases against cable and satellite television companies for televising explicit content. On another level, India declared its nuclear weapons capability in 1998, enhancing a “nationalist” fervor. A little later in 2004, the BJP government launched an English-language advertising campaign called “India Shining” that captured the economic prosperity of the time and the smiling faces of the growing middle class. The phrase converted the country into an internationally marketable brand. Despite the failure of the slogan to deliver (the BJP did not come back to power), and the scathing critique the campaign received,



“‘India Shining’ has subsequently become a catchword to celebrate India as an emerging global power” (Anwer, 314).

In what Oza conceptualizes as “spaces of arbitration” —not inherently local and global enclaves—that which was seen as local consistently clashed with that which seemed global here. For instance, in the face of, on the one hand, decidedly Hindu visions of femininity that were shown on mythological shows like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, and on the other hand, India’s crowning in a number of international beauty pageants, the role and place of women in a neoliberal “modern” India was particularly unclear. Language played an important part in the process of determining the role and place of women and in recalibrating their mobility within and outside the home. In fact, language proved to be a crucial venue in the “tortured negotiations of modernity, sovereignty, and culture in globalizing India” (Oza, 2).

A good eight years prior to 1999, which was declared as the “Year of Sanskrit” by the BJP government, and nine years before the then BJP prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee spoke in Hindi at the United Nations Millennium Summit, the English language itself underwent an important resignification. English remained an important marker of the world outside, and became crucially constitutive of the home as well. In 1991, when the rupee was devalued as a result of a balance of payments crisis, the then finance minister, Manmohan Singh, wrote a Letter of Intent on behalf of the government of India to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This letter pledged India’s acceptance of the IMF’s terms of its economic bailout, and it received criticism from various corners for doing so. However, it was also criticized in national press for using American spellings;

using “z” instead of the British “s” was as shameful as accepting IMF’s reform package, and perhaps a clearer shorthand to expose India’s growing deference to the United States. This instance marks a shadowing of British colonial power by the new imperium of the United States through an ironic acceptance of the British spellings. English as a British language appears more of one’s own as British English is fashioned as more Indian than the U.S. American. Though the foreign exchange reserve recovered soon after and ended the control of the IMF and the World Bank, India opened up to the free market in the years to follow. This has resulted in an increased number of multinational corporations operating in India, a rise in transnational corporate funding, and the looming cultural presence of the United States. Today, English continues to grow in its symbolic and literary power. It is not only an exclusionary technology of governance (it is that) but it is also ubiquitous in media and consumer culture, accessible outside of formal institutions of education.

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But even before the rise of Hindutva politics and India’s openness to the free market, the abiding presence of English was not only courtesy of the Queen of England, but also of Jawaharlal Nehru. In newly independent India, it was the language in which the birth of the nation and the death of Mahatma Gandhi were announced over the radio. Nehru likened English to the link between the people of India and the rest of the world, to a vast treasure, and to the language of science and technology. In an inauguration of a forum on radio in New Delhi, Nehru called English the “the key that would unlock the vast treasures of all scientific and humanistic knowledge” (Nehru in Mathai, 59). He went

on to compare the English language to the technology of the radio which would not only bring knowledge from the world but also disseminate India's knowledge to the world. It was, for him, a language of dialogue and a "medium" (59). In fact, English functioned as a "medium" at many levels: it was a medium of communication, a medium for the development and transmission of Hindi, and it was very much the midway, the medium, in a nation of multiple and competing languages.

Nehru held an almost Benjaminian vision of language growth where all Indian languages would grow by contact with each other into a robust national language. In the case of Hindi, as we will see in Chapter 2, this was specifically a translational contact with English and other Indian languages. Nehru was one of the most influential advocates of English in India. His conception of English as a medium and a technology recurs often in the writings of others as well, though not always in such precise words. However, this bidirectionality—indeed multidirectionality if we open up the discussion to consider languages besides just Hindi and attend to the multilingualism of those languages—of influence imagined between English and other Indian languages has only recently been acknowledged in postcolonial and South Asian studies (Chandra 2012, Shankar 2012, Sadana 2012, Gajarawala 2012). I would expand both Shefali Chandra's and Rashmi Sadana's statements, which I cited in the previous section, to say that in its presence in India, English is not simply a global or a colonial language. It would be accurate to say that English certainly owes its existence to colonial histories and global imperatives, but in its imagined and manifest role and life in India, it exceeds both. The worldliness of

English takes shape within a force field of diverse languages and media forms, and it must be read comparatively.

To give an example of the way in which the meanings of English are shaped variously, in the January 25, 1948, issue of *Harijansewak*, Gandhi justified publishing his weekly journal, *Harijan*, in English by strategically *delinking* the empire of the English language from the British Empire: “The British empire will go because it has been and still is bad; but the empire of the English language cannot go” (Gandhi in Hingorani, 131). In his 1935 address to the 24<sup>th</sup> Hindi *Sahitya Sammelan* (Hindi Literary Convention), Gandhi had already identified English as a “world language” (34) to be learnt whether one wished to do so or not.<sup>15</sup> It was central to “the acquisition of modern knowledge, for the study of modern literature, for knowledge of the world, [and] for intercourse with the present rulers” (34). However, given its foreign provenance, it could never be accorded the status of a national language or the medium for education. Now, Gandhi urged his readers to not let the English language “transgress its rightful place” (131). Hindustani—indigenous, inclusive and easier to learn—was a more unifying language and a practical choice for that role.<sup>16</sup> To privilege English as a link language within India was “sad,” and amounted to “slavery” to “an alien language” that had “impoverished *our* languages” (131, my italics). At first, Gandhi’s statements over time seem to offer the recognition of the place of the English language in the world, but not in

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<sup>15</sup> “Founded in 1910 by Madan Mohan Malviya, Hindi *Sahitya Sammelan* was one among many organizations through which militant Hindus lobbied in favor of Hindi.” (Jaffrelot, 2007: 218).

<sup>16</sup> In order to counter the threat of the English language, Gandhi advocated for Hindustani, by which he referred to an integration of the Hindi and Urdu languages written in Devanagari script. The populist energies of this Hindustani make it very different from the Sanskritized *manak* (standard) Hindi that was later proposed as India’s national/official language.

the nation: a line of reasoning that has persisted in nationalist political discourse in India and in postcolonial literary studies. However, despite his disavowals, Gandhi mobilizes a vision of English as prosthesis when he detaches it from its colonial provenance, and purposes it to connect an independent and growing India to the rest of the world. Positioned outwards like Nehru's radio, English also helps Indian leaders to communicate with and hear the leaders of the world. As Gandhi makes a case for learning the language, he seems to suggest that there is a rightful place for English in post-Independence India. This place, obviously, is not at the center of the nation for him; it may not even be inside the space of the nation. However, this is a place that is determined as much by national imperatives as it is by those global or neocolonial, and it can be traced to an anticolonial gesture where the knowledge of the world strengthens the national character of India.<sup>17</sup> In a manner of speaking, perhaps Gandhi is anticipating the likeness of the English language with the universal equivalent of money. The use of English becomes tradeable for a spot on the world stage from where India becomes intelligible and influential. Learning and using English, in specific context, seems like a small price to pay for connecting with the world and for establishing the presence of India on a world platform. In doing so, Gandhi also acknowledges the insufficiency of Hindi as a language of international communication.<sup>18</sup>

The continuing institutional presence of the English language in India today is a result of careful and deliberate legislation after India's Independence in 1947. English,

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<sup>17</sup> I am grateful to Shaden Tageldin for this perspective.

<sup>18</sup> Gandhi does not imagine the possibility of addressing the world and its leaders in Hindi. More recently, however, leaders of Hindu nationalist persuasion, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Narendra Modi, have both spoken in international fora in Hindi.

which is rarely approached as a vernacular in comparative or postcolonial literary studies, was in fact legislated in postcolonial India as an associate official language in the interest of the “common people” (*Report of the Committee of the Official Language, 1958, 12*)— a phrase that appears not only in various constituent assembly debates during language legislation but one that is still regularly used in reports from the Department of Official Language. As for Nehru, English was the language that linked the people because all linguistic constituencies were able and willing to converse in it.<sup>19</sup> Access to English had never been *systemically* prohibited to specific sections of the society. Unlike Hindi, English also did not elicit strong responses that sharply polarized the nation. It was almost as if, as an ex-colonial language, English was similarly foreign to everyone in the colonized land, and thus, was well-positioned to address the nation from an equidistance from all competing linguistic cultures. English was not only the conduit to ideas of political modernity, of democracy, of science and technology, and of secularism, it was also the language that was deemed the most democratic, the most secular, and itself a technology. Its alleged foreignness, its untranslatability into native categories, which is evident in Gandhi’s discomfort around English, was the greatest advantage of English. A classed and a caste-inflected language steeped in a history of colonial violence, English today symbolically protects various other Indian languages and simultaneously also replaces them. In a lecture titled “Disciplinary English: Theory, Third Worldism, and Literary Study in India,” Aijaz Ahmad (1994) identifies a “genetic cultural link” (Ahmad, 1994: 60) between the status of English as “the chief cultural and communicational

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<sup>19</sup> In fact, the enduring life of English in India, in a very salient way, actually rests on the fantasy that English is or can be available to everyone without any ritual injunctions.

instrument in the centralization of the bourgeois state in the colonial period, [and] the continued use of English in the dominant systems of administration, education and communication after independence[, which] indicates the greater elaboration and deeper penetration of the state into all aspects of civil society” (60). The liberalism of the British Empire informs the liberalism of the independent Indian state. The association of English with Hindi, which had already assumed the space of the vernacular, endorsed the same status for English as well. This representative power of English in post-independence India, its imagined and desired capacity to speak for other vernaculars, in effect vernacularizes English itself.

English becomes a vernacular in alliance with and against Hindi. It is for this reason that Hindi and English are still regularly mobilized as competing political discourses. As recently as the summer of 2014, India witnessed widespread youth protests *against* the Narendra Modi government’s decision to make the English language the mandatory medium of Civil Service examinations. With this proposed change, aspirants would not be allowed to choose the linguistic medium in which they wished to take the exam and would be forced to read and answer questions in English. Traditionally, the Civil Service exam has only contained one section that tests the proficiency of English that must be cleared with a minimum of pass marks, while the rest of the exam is in Hindi or another Indian language of the candidate’s choice. The proposed change would have required that the candidate have an advanced proficiency in the English language—usually a result of expensive “private school” education. In the debates and protests that ensued, Hindi became the face of “Indian languages”

disadvantaged by the regime of English. Though the issue was cast as anti-English and pro-Hindi, it really was at once a question of desiring access to a language of power and of rejecting its interpellative force by refusing to answer questions in that language.

Indeed, English occupies a complex position for lower class and lower caste students. On the one hand, the knowledge of English unlocks many real and metaphoric doors and, on the other hand, the path to English is itself paved with the immeasurable violence of class and caste disparities. In an article titled “English Speaking Curse” (2008), with a wordplay on the numerous courses teaching conversational English that are mushrooming across the country, Anjali Puri writes about the many students of lower-caste and poorer backgrounds who have committed suicides when unable to cope with the burden of learning English in schools and universities (Puri, 1). Many others, like the Dalit activist Ashwini Kumar, relentlessly reject its undemocratic dominance in the administrative and legal systems that have further perpetuated the marginalization of the historically marginalized communities.<sup>20</sup> English is sought as the panacea for caste and class based injustices and is, at the same time, one of the most enduring manifestations of those injustices. It is for these reasons that the formalization of English as the sole medium of Civil Service examination was met with intense resistance as it catapulted the exam to a high class and caste domain. “Contemporary language politics [in India] hinges on the politics of both caste and class” (Sadana, 21), and access to English has for long remained contingent on education and urbanism. This state of affairs

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<sup>20</sup> Ashwini Kumar is a Delhi-based Dalit activist and an adjunct instructor at a college in New Delhi. In his monograph, *English Medium System* (2014), he identifies the English language as the chief means by which the modern Indian state furthers caste-based violence. The phrase “English Medium System” colloquially refers to the many privately-run English medium schools in India, but also indicts the entirety of the Indian state as an “English Medium System.”



makes the proliferation of English in the everyday, globally-produced local and locally-produced global experience of the non-elite people an important shift in language politics in India. The presence of English outside of institutional forms in state administration, education, and the judiciary, presents a much-needed respite from the violence of Hindi. However, in different ways, it also replicates that violence.

The priority of English in state administrative and corporate realms has often relegated Hindi to a subordinate status. This fact disadvantages those who only know Hindi (albeit in dialect forms) and cannot reach the English language. In her 1992 book, *The Lie of the Land: English Literary Studies in India*, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan wrote that the meaning of English was fixed in India because English was foreign (Sunder Rajan, 10), and the English language was an “asset enjoyed by the English-speaking upper classes” that “constituted the most visible divide between the ruling classes and the ruled” (15). The lack of English was a “*handicap* suffered by the rest, traditionally known as the masses” (15, my italics).<sup>21</sup> For instance, an editorial titled “अँग्रेजी की नज़र में हिन्दी” (“Hindi in the Eyes of English”) in the April 22, 1997, Hindi national newspaper, *Dainik Jagran*, criticized a recent cartoon by R. K. Laxman for portraying Hindi as a language of errand boys.<sup>22</sup> Laxman, who was also the brother of the English-language writer, R. K. Narayan, created a syndicated series of editorial or pocket cartoons called “You Said It” over five decades from the early 1950s. This series of cartoons chronicled life and

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<sup>21</sup> Note the implicit comparison of English to a bodily appendage as its absence constitutes a physical incapacitation and a disadvantage.

<sup>22</sup> The article does not mention the exact date of publication of the original cartoon. Laxman was publishing in the *Times of India* at the time, which is the most widely-circulating English newspaper in India. However, I did not find this cartoon in its previous issues. Despite the absence of the cartoon, this article is significant for the sense of hurt it displays and the discussion of the idea that Hindi is the language of subordinates.

politics in India through the eyes of the “common man,” a bespectacled observer who provided the perspective of the reader of the daily newspapers. With respect to the subject of language politics, many of Laxman’s cartoons highlighted the inadequacy of Hindi as a national language (see figures 2.1 and 2.2). Published in Hindi and English newspapers, the specific cartoon discussed in the *Dainik Jagran* editorial allegedly showed a scene in a government office where the officers waited for an errand boy to translate a state memo from the Hindi for them. The “common man,” who was meaningfully peering in from the outside, appeared confused at this linguistic division of labor (Sachan, 8). Laxman’s cartoon, as described, drew attention to the limited potential of Hindi as the language of administration amid a culture that celebrated English as the sole means and measure of advancement. In the context of Laxman’s other work, the cartoon could be read as taking jabs at the political engineering of Hindi as a pan-Indian language of official work. Nonetheless, as noted in the editorial, Laxman’s cartoon also endorsed the colonial and upper caste elitism of the English language in India with the suggestion that only officers spoke English and that subordinate employees spoke Hindi. According to the editorial, the cartoon offensively insinuated that knowledge of Hindi only prepared one for jobs like that of an errand boy. The editorial remarked that the condition of Hindi was so bad that anyone could say anything against it. No one protested the misrepresentation of Hindi. Yet to call Hindi the language of errand boys, the editorial insisted, was not only an insult to an Indian language but also a sign of our times that devalued national culture. “आज हिन्दी की ऐसे ही स्थिति है। जब जिसका जी चाहता है हिन्दी के खिलाफ कुछ भी कह देता है। और उसके विरोध में कोई स्वर भी नहीं उठता [...] हिन्दी को चपरासियों की भाषा बताया जाना एक भारतीय भाषा का

अपमान है” (This is the condition of Hindi today. People say whatever they want whenever they want against it. And no voice rises in protest...To call Hindi the language of errand boys is an insult to an Indian language) (8).<sup>23</sup>

The suggestion in “अँग्रेजी की नज़र में हिन्दी” (“Hindi in the Eyes of English”) is that English-speaking people and culture view Hindi, a defenseless *Indian* language, as the language of subordinate employees. The writer is as appalled by this class-based distinction between Hindi and English as he is by the insult to an Indian language in favor of a foreign language. The class inflection of the editorial’s critique is as important and noteworthy as its nationalist critique. Indeed, under British colonialism and in the early decades after independence, the knowledge of English has been the unmistakable difference between the governing and the governed in India. In the absence of the British colonizer, this difference has taken the form of specifically class-based differences in postcolonial India. For instance, Yogendra Yadav compares the “inequality” reproduced by the English language to inequalities based on gender or race. In his column for the English language newspaper *The Indian Express*, Yadav writes that a linguistic discrimination is so obvious and omnipresent that “[w]e take it for granted. Advertisements for English speaking courses, ever mushrooming English medium ‘public’ schools, everyone at social conversations trying to impress one another with their limited English, parents speaking to their children in rudimentary English. We see and experience it every day. But we dare not name this linguistic apartheid” (1). However, the

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<sup>23</sup> The Hindi word “चपरासियों” can be literally translated as “peons.” In my English translation, I have used the word “errand boys” to capture the twin sense of subordination that the editorial invokes and condemns: subordination in official rank as well as a social subordination.

segregation that the *Dainik Jagran* editorial sets up between Hindi and English is at odds with the interdependence between them that comes across in Laxman's cartoon (as it is described). Evidently, while English has emerged as the language both of governance and of self-governance, it has done so not in opposition to but in concert with Hindi. The cartoon seems to suggest that it is along with Hindi—the officer and the subordinate together—that English performs a centralizing role in state administration that closes the gap between the nation and the state. How do we understand the twin existence of English as a commercially produced and legally protected language of the people? What is the role of an informal encounter with this language of empowerment in activating (or impairing) political subjectivity? In persistently asking these questions, we will arrive at a point where we will no longer be able take the transparency of reference to the English language as global or as foreign for granted.

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The enshrinement of English in the Constitution of India as an associate official language and the subsequent role of English as a supplement to Hindi in different contexts reveal acts of translation that are made possible by their own strategic impossibility. English is so foreign in India that it can never replace Hindi but can only be the means to supplement it. In this act of supplementation, the foreignness of English distinguishes it from an insufficient Hindi, and characterizes its compensative modernity. The *dialectic* of translatability and untranslatability results from the “kernel of foreignness” that Apter identifies in her theorization of the untranslatable as she draws on Benjamin's notion of translatability to formulate its purported antithesis. In fact, contrary

to Apter's reading, Benjamin presents a model of translation that is decidedly non-communicative, where what voyages to the realm of translation is that which goes beyond communicating the subject matter, that is, the "untranslatable." Through this, Benjamin introduces an interplay of translatability and untranslatability in every translation.<sup>24</sup> In drawing attention to the different ways in which the foreignness of English makes it both translatable and untranslatable, and in theorizing English in its vernacular form as translatable, I recast the concept-metaphor of translation into a question of translatability. By this I mean that instead of thinking in terms of the possibility or impossibility of a translation, I pursue the ways in which a language or a text is *made* translatable. I agree with Naoki Sakai's argument in *Translation and Subjectivity: On "Japan" and Cultural Nationalism* (1997) that the translatable and the untranslatable are not inherent in a text but, in fact, take shape after the act of translation. Thus, I examine translation as a strategic gesture of commensurability and do not see it as inherently impossible or a failure. As I will show in the chapters that follow, the matter is never so simple that certain English or Hindi words just cannot be translated. Instead, this staged impossibility of translation usually calls our attention to the political reasons and conditions that make these texts and words *seem* untranslatable. In fact, the theoretical drawback in different conceptions of translation and (un)translatability in postcolonial studies and now in studies of the vernacular is this: translation is imagined as an absolute equivalence and not as a process of *making* equivalences. It is the un/translatability of

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<sup>24</sup> I am grateful to Shaden Tageldin for drawing my attention to the interplay of translatability and untranslatability, rather than simply an untranslatability in Walter Benjamin's vision of translation.

any translation that best illuminates the circulation of English in the world and reveals English as a vernacular with both local and global energies.

In response to the hierarchical and historical conceptualizations of the vernacular, I propose a positional vision of the vernacular as both locally and globally oriented, translatable, microstructural, and non-elite. Vernacularity, I argue, is not an inherent quality of a language or a text but a stance that draws its critical value from its un/translatability. Understood as such, the concept of the vernacular is still important to imagining collectivities and to the study of the humanities. However, this not because of its status as a site of unsullied and timeless indigeneity or untranslatability that troubles grand narratives but because of its *strategic*—crucial and constructed—affinity with a people and a place. In this context, I find Miriam Hansen’s definition of the vernacular compelling. She writes that the vernacular combines “the dimension of the quotidian, of everyday usage, with connotations of discourse, idiom, and dialect, with circulation, promiscuity, and translatability” (Hansen, 60). The vernacular by virtue of its mass appeal has popular and populist energies which, as in the rise of the Hindutva politics, imbue it with a political legitimacy that would be at odds with its theorization as “powerless,” “subaltern,” or “minoritarian.” Hindi is not only not always a vernacular as is conventionally understood, its vernacular form is also not simply local or lacking. Likewise, as I show in the chapters that follow, the English language also manifests its global hegemony by virtue of its vernacular forms which comprise both local and global dimensions. The continued dominance of English in the world does not always depend on a deep cultural knowledge that is restricted to elite domains. As such, English may or

may not be needed to converse with the world (leaders) as Gandhi imagined but it is most powerful in ubiquitous brand names which can be reproduced endlessly, often by unfair and unsavory labor politics in sweatshops. In its mass circulation, English becomes easily graspable by those who put their faith in its ability to manifest a reality that does not reproduce more native inequalities. English simultaneously empowers those occupying minority positions and furthers hegemonic goals, even as it also undercuts both. The global does not always mean elite and the local does not always mean non-elite. In fact, as I show, in its global circulation, English is often used by non-elite figures. Thus, what is missing from our conception of the local and the global is not that one shapes the other but that together these dimensions sustain larger hegemonic structures.

In *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1986), Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari define minor literature as the deterritorialization of a major language through a minor literature written in the major language from a marginalized or minoritarian position. The “minor” here does not refer to a literature written in a “minor” language or in a formerly colonized language. Rather, a “minor literature” is written in a major language, or as in the case of formerly colonized countries, the colonizers’ language. Minor literature is thoroughly political, “the individual is inextricable from the socius” (Deleuze and Guattari, 11), and as a result, it has a collective and political enunciative value. Deleuze and Guattari’s study of Kafka’s work has met with criticism for “reifying a restrictive modernist canon” (Kronfeld 1996), for “misconstruing Kafka’s knowledge of Yiddish and Hebrew” and for mistaking his “idiosyncratic relationship to Jewish languages and culture [as representative of] the dominant issues haunting the vast network of Jewish

literatures—a network that spans the cosmopolitan centers, the colonial peripheries, and the complex relations of power inscribed in and between these locations” (Levy and Schachter, 93). Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari’s minority-majority vocabulary only affirms a centered configuration and a calculus of power that are antithetical to the conception of the simultaneous, competing but also collusive forces of the minor and the major(itarian). I find Deleuze and Guattari’s theorization of minority as a philosophy that distinguishes itself from identity politics compelling. However, their insistence on the terminology of the minor and the major seems counterproductive to that end. As they say, the minor, *marked* as belonging to a minor position even in a major language, is deeply political, which begs the questions: when is literature not political, and why must minor literature be singled out as such? Similarly, it is not sufficient to say that the local constitutes the global and produces the latter, as does Orsini in the argument delineated earlier on pages 13 and 14. Instead, we need a framework to examine the ways in which these local and global tendencies and claims can be understood simultaneously. To say that the one produces the other preserves a nesting order and prioritizes, if not privileges, one over the other. It still does not give us a vocabulary to recognize global, majoritarian, and hegemonic claims made through (and in) local, minority, and non-hegemonic stances. As I suggested through the examples of Nehru and Gandhi, and as I will explain further in the following chapters, contrary to its designation as a global and a colonial language of power, the English language in fact regularly functions in non-binaristic ways as a vernacular in postcolonial India. It is the global dimension of the vernacular that enhances the national (local) character of postcolonial India for these leaders. In the



recognition of the global dimensions of vernacular englishes lies the recognition of the non-binary dynamics of the local and the global. Re-positioning the vernacular thus is one means by which we can deepen the scope of comparative studies as we widen it.

The vernacular, as I use the term, maintains a double—if we wish to insist on the binarism of local/global and minor/major—vision. It also infuses a populist energy into the “world” of world literature that is becoming increasingly rarified. As the following chapters will illustrate, the vernacular mode of English presents a locus of authenticity and of political legitimacy not because of its geographical or ethnic specificity but because of its infinite reproduction. My theorization of the vernacular brings an acknowledgment of familiarity and intimacy fostered not by a natal enduring connection but by mass-mediated ubiquitousness and by historical contingencies.

As such, this conception of the vernacular also highlights the sociality and a communicative impulse of a verbal sign. Even though Benjamin subordinated communication to the *mode* of translation, the idea of un/translatability, as it activates the vernacular *mode* of English and catalyzes its spread, introduces a critical idea of communication. This communicational impulse was already present in Nehru’s conception of English as the opportunity to converse with the world. In a similar way, the stance of foreignness that is mobilized in un/translatability draws attention to the way in which the English language, as verbal, also expands through citations and re-invocations into a visual and an iconic discourse. I rely here on V. N. Voloshinov’s theorization of the verbal sign as dialogic. In *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1973), Voloshinov draws attention to the risks of an ahistoricized and de-socialized vernacular

when it is treated purely as an oppositional practice. Approaching the Saussurean dichotomy between *la langue* and *la parole* critically, he defines any kind of verbal communication, a verbal sign, as dialogic, and argues that “its specificity consists precisely in being located between organized individuals, in its being a medium of their communication” (Voloshinov, 12). The proliferation of English language in the Indian Constitution and on television screens, I suggest, always but variously invokes and congeals English as foreign, democratic, radical, and/or conservative. The un/translatable energies of vernacular englishes render the vernacular as anything but a provincial category, conventionally understood. Instead, vernacular englishes appears complicit in producing majoritarian discourses of a democratic nation state and in undoing the oppositionality of the world and the nation to mediate global capital flows. The democratic impulse of vernacular englishes does not derive automatically from the rise in communicational technologies. Instead, it emerges in the un/translatability of English in a postcolonial context such as India, where it can be claimed by disparate demotic energies.

The communicative impulse of Voloshinov’s theorization of utterance as a social phenomenon also provides an opportunity to better understand Shankar’s “social translation,” which I introduced on page 5. Voloshinov writes that a “word is not an item of vocabulary but has been used in a variety of contexts and utterances by others before [...] Any utterance—the finished, written utterance not excepted—makes response to something and is calculated to be responded to in turn. It is but one link in a continuous chain of speech utterances” (69-70). Instead of assuming a broad temporal sweep to consider the transformation of the meaning of a presumably *foreign* word or a concept,

which in Shankar's example is "modernity," perhaps it is more productive to examine the ways in which the idea of English modernity endures by absorbing and rejecting different meanings in different contexts. For instance, in Chapter 4, I study the Hindi newspaper *Dainik Jagran*, where I analyze the presence of specific English words in its different sections and the dialectic of un/translatibility governing their presence. This analysis shows the transformation of colonial and global notions of modernity associated with the English language into a vision of modernity that is more in line with Hindu nationalist leanings. Each time we confront an English language word in a Hindi language context, we are not encountering the word for the first time as part of a colonial discourse. Instead, the word evokes the long history of English *in* multilingual India which informs both its translatability and its untranslatability.

To be sure, un/translatability does not always issue from a deep awareness of the literal meaning of a sign but often attaches to its unintelligibility or to the text as image in its visual form. In its vernacular mode, English still commands authority but one does not need to know the English language to *know* it when they see it. Indeed, it is the unintelligibility of English—evoking a stateliness and a foreignness—that often becomes the message, and shapes the message. In *Vernacular Palaver: Imaginations of the Local and Non-Native Languages in West Africa* (2004), Moradewun Adejunmobi discusses the appeal of certain cultural forms like "World Music" and Nigerian video film that rest on the appearance of foreignness and on the absence of language intelligibility. Adejunmobi writes:

Languages technically defined as non-native to particular communities can, depending on the circumstances, signify values other than those of foreignness and cultural extrinsicality when used in activities that generate local audiences. The language of cultural texts can, for example, also reference affective affiliations such as those manifested in shared aspirations and desires, in addition to marking inherited and chosen ethnicities. [...] In the case of Nigerian video film, as a form of urban popular culture, a non-native language, English, has become implicated, not so much in the definition of ethnic identity, as in the construction of desire and social aspiration. (Adejunmobi, 2004:119)

English in India need not always be literally intelligible to its interlocutors to address or to communicate with them. In other words, unintelligibility is not the same as untranslatability, and it can very well be translated. In fact, very often “English” is read (and its message communicated) precisely by calling forth its status as an inscrutable object of desire in an increasingly Anglophone world. In postcolonial India, English certainly spells social aspiration and desire. However, more than that, it also ushers in a promise of equality and parity through its role as the associate official language of the state. To rewrite Adejunmobi’s argument: it is not always that English evokes values other than that of foreignness and extrinsicality, but its foreignness and extrinsicality become positive values for those seeking deliverance from *the oppressive regime of the familiar*, the native Hindi. As it need not always be “read,” English also need not always be spoken. Instead, it can bestow the qualities associated with it when, for instance, it is

worn as the brand name of a T-shirt. The global circulation of the English language today (which I study through the geopolitical context of postcolonial India) depends on its status as a commodity, as a brand, and as an object.

The commodity form of English displays a dialectic of exchange value and use value, which is similar to the dialectic of translatability and untranslatability. The material uses of the English language or the object with which it is associated are enhanced by the exchange value of English—its evocation of aspiration, desire, democracy—in comparison with other languages in India. As such, this dialectic heightens the sacrality associated with the notion of the vernacular. However, in this theorization, the sacrality does not issue from a radical difference but in fact, from the material status of the vernacular as a fetishized commodity.

In “The Problem of Fetish, I” (1985), William Pietz understands fetish as originating in cross-cultural encounters “only in conjunction with the emergent articulation of the ideology of the commodity form that defined itself within and against the social values and religious ideologies of two radically different types of noncapitalist society” (Pietz, 7). As it transcodes and transvalues objects of two different social systems, Pietz identifies four basic characteristics of the fetish: “irreducible materiality; a fixed power to repeat an original event of singular synthesis or ordering; the institutional construction of consciousness of the social value of things; and the material fetish as an object established in an intense relation to and with power over the desires, actions, health, and self-identity of individuals whose personhood is conceived as inseparable from their bodies” (10). In global circulation—as the use value of commodities is

determined by the exchange value of English—the language itself assumes form as a fetish. In contrast to the goddess-like figurations of English—as we encounter them in the following chapters—the fetish of English lies in its material embodiment of a mobility and an inclusion. Very often in the texts under study, the English language appears on clothes and on public signages and posters full of promise to effect change. Understood as fetish, the vernacular of English relocates the authenticity conventionally attributed to it in its reproducibility of the material and visual form.

It is a visual English that specifically incarnates the fetishistic qualities of vernacular englishes—often literally taking the form of money. The English language—as image and not text—becomes tradeable and exchangeable for opportunities of social advancement, for preferential treatment, for anonymity, for association with notions of modernity, and for freedom from native caste regimes. For instance, in the film *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) discussed in Chapter 5, the protagonist’s visual knowledge of the English language literally becomes cashable on the game show. As it becomes the equivalent which transcodes social, political, and economic advancement, English itself takes the form of a currency. As in the case of money, the exchange values of English are also forged within a social context and are in excess of its possible use values. The recalibration of the dialectic of exchange and use-value renders the English language as the universal equivalent by virtue of its historical *foreignness* and *extrinsicity* to a postcolonial scene.

In this context, I find useful Lydia Liu’s discussion of the similarities in the theoretical articulations of the linguistic and the economic. In *Tokens of Exchange: The*

*Problem of Translation in Global Circulation* (1999), Liu points out that in *Grundrisse* (1858), Marx himself draws an interesting comparison between translation and monetary transaction for the purpose of theorizing the problem of the universal equivalent that concerns both.

Language does not transform ideas, so that the peculiarity of ideas is dissolved and their social character runs alongside them as a separate entity, like prices alongside commodities. Ideas do not exist separately from language. Ideas which have first to be translated out of their mother tongue into a foreign language in order to circulate, in order to become exchangeable, offer a somewhat better analogy; but the analogy then lies not in the language, but in the *foreign quality* of the language. (Marx in Liu, 1999: 22, my emphasis).

As Liu tries to place the problem of translation within the political economy of the sign, three important ideas come to fore. One, the process of signification and substitution that allows commodities to be exchanged, not as themselves, is theoretically akin to linguistic translation. Two, both monetary alienation and linguistic estrangement stem from the foreignness of language. It is “foreignness” or *Fremdheit* of language that produces value when a verbal sign or a commodity is exchanged with something other than itself. “The act of monetary exchange, like the act of linguistic translation, depends on a socially recognized universal equivalent, which seems to homogenize everything or to reduce everything to a common denominator” (Marx in Liu, 1999: 22). In this process, the foreignness of the other must be conquered in order for the other to assume exchange-

value in the marketplace. In *Capital* (1867), Marx argues that value “does not have its description branded on its forehead; it rather transforms every product of labour into a social hieroglyphic. Later on, men try to decipher the hieroglyphic.” The word hieroglyphic, Liu points out, “evokes ideas of ‘foreignness,’ ‘impenetrability,’ and ‘primitivity’” (Liu, 1999: 22). The third important point about the arbitrariness and contextual nature of value, stems from her discussion of Ferdinand De Saussure. Liu draws attention to Saussure’s emphasis in *Course in General linguistics* (1916), on the proximity of political economy and linguistics when he writes, “as in the study of political economy, one is dealing with the notion of value. In both cases, we have a system of equivalence between things belonging to different orders. In one case, work and wages, in the other case, signification and signal” (Saussure in Liu, 1999: 25).

Whereas for Marx exchange value can be analyzed and quantified in terms of labor and time, Saussure sees an entirely arbitrary relationship between the signifier and the signified. Linguistic value remains for him a matter of internal relations within a linguistic community. “A community is necessary in order to establish values,” says Saussure, and “values have no other rationale than usage and general agreement. By corollary, an individual acting alone is incapable of establishing value. Liu goes on to identify two prerequisites for existence of value: a similarity so that things can be compared and enough dissimilarity that they can be exchanged. Taking cue from Saussure, she explicates that a particular concept is simply a value which emerges from relations with other values of a similar kind. If those other values disappeared, this meaning too would vanish.



The dialectic of translatability and untranslatability in the circulation of vernacular thus transfigures into a dialectic between exchange and use value as well. As we will see in the following chapters, the foreignness of English—not because of its primitivity but because of a dubious modernity—is similarly translated and remade continuously. The value of English—both monetary and social—derives from English being read as foreign in a way that associates it with qualities of social mobility, globalism, and modernity and oftentimes, political elitism that make intelligible the unintelligible. In this fetishized form of vernacular englishes, notions of foreignness and familiarity appear redefined along the lines of Voloshinov’s distinction between a native and an alien word. Voloshinov writes that the dead language that the linguist studies, abstracted from its ideological impletion, is an alien language, and that the reality of life lies in the “creative regeneration” of language, not in its cadaverous immutability. The meaning of a sign for Voloshinov does not precede the sign but emanates from a struggle within a concrete social situation. This vision of the dialogic nature and the “creative regeneration” of a sign renders English in its vernacular form as a native language.

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The following chapters illustrate the different ways in which the English language—as a technology and as a medium of democracy, of communication, and of translation—appears as a vernacular in postcolonial India. I approach these chapters also in the spirit of sharpening the diffuseness of Apter’s translation zone and the broad temporal sweep of Shankar’s social translation, to illuminate a new worldliness of the English language and of the Indian Anglophone novel. To this end, I will focus

exclusively on the dynamics between Hindi and English through a variety of literary and filmic texts. Through this work, I wish to present the differences in the discourse around English in India as it takes form in Hindi novel, print media, film, and Anglophone literature. As instances of the growing global presence of the English language, these texts are a powerful reminder that *global* englishes are also always *vernacular* englishes. Their globalism, in fact, manifests in the use of English by locally-situated people where oftentimes form achieves priority over content. It is the compelling un/translatibility of these vernacular englishes that is the key to understanding the global scope of English, which can further clarify the modes of circulation that have come to define the field of world literature.

My objective in this work is to bring attention to the ways in which English is not simply a part of macrostructural, dominant, and distant realms of colonialism and neoliberal globalization. Instead, I show that as a result of its legislation in India and its proliferation in mass media and markets in the world, English is very much a part of the *vernacular* landscape of postcolonial India. Such a theorization is not a disavowal of the hegemonic and violent role of English in colonial and neoliberal global processes but, in fact, a closer look at it. My argument is not a celebration of a benign vernacularity of English that renders it intimate and neglects its violent past and present. Instead, this work is an examination of the unquestioned terms on which any discussion of an (ex)colonial language in a colonial context is staged. Recognizing the diversity of vernacular englishes around the world challenges the automatic assignation of values to the so-called global regime with which a dominant language like English is associated. In

doing so, it refuses—in a much-needed critical gesture—to cede power to dominant frames of analysis and study of Anglophone postcolonial literature and culture.

The next chapter, “India Demands English,” analyzes two texts that crystallize arguments for the indispensability of English in India after independence and provide a critical history of post-independence language legislation in India: Isaac Mathai’s *India Demands English* (1960) and Shrilal Shukla’s *Raag Darbari* (1969). This chapter focuses specifically on the role of English in the democratic process. I show that the English language was discursively assembled as “democratic” to secure the political engineering and “neurotic” (Rai, 2005: 190) rise of a standard Sanskritized Hindi. In debates on the subject of national and/or official language, a complicated conception of democratic practice emerges. This conception is not simply one of democracy as “representation” but of democracy as an address. In this democratic address, the English language does not occupy an oppositional stance towards Hindi and other languages but lies in proximity as prosthesis to them. English emerges as a locus of political legitimacy by lending voice to Hindi as it is used to address to a nation. I characterize this relation of proximity as that of heterolingualistic catachresis of what Lydia Liu calls a super-sign. English remains foreign enough, untranslatable, to be conciliatory and modern, but at the same time, it is also rendered translatable, common, and democratic, as it comes to represent other vernaculars denied the exceptional status of Hindi. Both Hindi and English, unacceptable in themselves for the task of representing a nation, take refuge in each other, defer their meaning to each other, to project as national, modern, democratic, conciliatory and common. Together they function as a self-sufficient vernacular, as languages understood

and desired by all Indian people, even as other vernacular languages remain subordinate in official status. English becomes vernacularized through its alliance with Hindi and against English as it is recruited to supplement a perceived lack in the latter. I find Naoki Sakai's theorization of "heterolingual address" helpful in conceptualizing the democratic address of Hindi and English to the entirety of an Indian people, as the uneven act of heterolinguistic catachresis reveals more differences in the Indian polity than it conceals.

Chapter 3, "Illegitimate Speakers," undertakes a comparative study of three Indian Anglophone novels, Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935), Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008), and Vikas Swarup's *Q&A* (2006), and two Hindi short stories by Ajay Navaria titled "Cheers" (2012) and "Yes, Sir" (2012). With unlikely lower-caste and lower-class speakers of the English language, these texts demand that we reassess the relationship between the English language and subalternity. While recognizing the deeply unequal process of neoliberalism, this chapter draws attention to the ways in which the recent proliferation of English in mass media forms—in its informal availability—further loosens the injunctions against a language of power. In its un/translatibility, the English language provides a strategic space from where to launch a critique of the secular and universalist foundations of the casteist postcolonial state.

Chapter 4, "Between Home and the World," pursues, in direct and indirect ways, the gendered formation of the English language. Mrinal Pande, an influential Hindi journalist and media commentator, welcomed the increased exposure of women to global themes and the English language in mass media (especially Hindi newspapers and women's magazines) with the following statement, "the days of you (speaking to the

woman reader) not being able to reach anywhere because you are a woman or because you speak Hindi are over” (Pande in Sahay, 66). Her statement not only refers to an unprecedented mobility bestowed by English but also the mobility *of* English as the vernacular that promises greater possibility of representation in contrast to Hindi. In this chapter, I examine English-Hindi hybridity found in two very different texts—Geetanjali Shree’s Hindi novel, *Mai* (1992), and the women’s magazine of the Hindi newspaper, *Dainik Jagran* (1942- )—to map where categories of the global and the local crystallize between the home and the world. In contrast to the impulse to locate women in a realm of linguistic purity, I argue that in the neoliberal economy, it is an intentionally hybrid vernacular language that polices gender identities.

Chapter 5 is titled “Cinematic Englishes.” It steps beyond the written form of global englishes to its spoken and visual forms in Bollywood and diasporic films. It opens with a survey of the different ways in which the English language appears—visually and aurally—in films. Through a close analysis of three films, Mira Nair’s *Kama Sutra* (1996), Deepa Mehta’s *Fire* (1996), and Danny Boyle and Loveleen Thadani’s *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), and through a study of censorship practices in India, this chapter puts pressure on what we understand as the English “language.”

Through an expansion of literary space, the chapters ahead challenge the dominant Anglocentrism of postcolonial studies, and recast debates in world literature and postcolonial studies that rely too neatly on the vernacular to challenge global, transnational, and national frames of analysis.

## Chapter 2: India Demands English

“Language is made for the people and not people for the language!”—

Isaac Mathai, *India Demands English*.

In a dream sequence in his 1969 novel, *Raag Darbari*, Shrilal Shukla personifies “Democracy” and describes him as squatting on the ground next to the bed of Vaidyaji, feudal lord and the head of Shivpalganj’s political mafia.<sup>25</sup> Vaidyaji finds Democracy feeble-looking and suppliant, but what surprises him the most is that it incessantly repeats the words *huzoor* and *sarkar*. He realizes that Democracy “cannot even speak *shuddha* (pure) Hindi, let alone English!” (उसकी शकल हलवाहों जैसी है और अँग्रेज़ी तो अँग्रेज़ी, वह शुद्ध हिन्दी भी नहीं बोल पा रहा था।) (137). This vision of “Democracy” as unlearned in either of the two official languages of India is a confusing one for the dreamer. It animates Shukla’s satire on corruption and the deteriorating political climate in the Nehruvian era. *Raag Darbari* is full of references to the misdirected government propaganda that addresses farmers in English, the incongruity of English on billboards in rural India, and the officialese of the *babu*.<sup>26</sup> Yet, in this moment, it is not the presence but the *absence* of English that is comical.

Used to address authority figures, the Hindustani words *huzoor* and *sarkar* can be translated as *sir* and *sir/government* respectively. Spoken by Democracy, these words indicate the extent of Vaidyaji’s control over the people of Shivpalganj. However, in their incessant repetition by such a beseeching figure of democracy, the words also verge on

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<sup>25</sup> Parts of this chapter appeared in *South Asian Review*, vol. 35, no. 3, 149-165. All translations from the original Hindi of *Raag Darbari* are my own.

<sup>26</sup> In British India, *babu* referred to a native Indian clerk. In more contemporary usage, it could simply imply a government officer, and is often used to describe an “urban, Westernized, English-educated person” (Khair, 9).

the nonsensical. Democracy grows feebler stripped of its tongues: English and *shuddha* Hindi. Why is the vision of Democracy bilingual? And why is English so important to that vision, such that its absence can only elicit horror and laughter? My first foray into the vernacular life of English is through its place—as a language and as a symbol—in postcolonial India’s democratic politics. I examine two texts about the English language in independent India: Isaac Mathai’s petition to prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru, *India Demands English* (1960), and Shrilal Shukla’s Hindi novel, *Raag Darbari* (1969). Both texts agree that English is a foreign presence in India yet simultaneously also make claims for its centrality in an independent India. This is because, I show, the English language occupies a position not in opposition but in proximity to other languages in India, including Hindi. The relation of conflict often set up between a colonial and a “native” language, in the case of English in India, is not really one of conflict but has always been one of supplementation.

In a move that is akin to a “mask of conquest” as described by Gauri Viswanathan in *Masks of Conquest: The Beginning of English Literary Studies in India* (1989), what we see is a bidirectional masking and a bidirectional conquest between the discourses of Hindi and English. In a more complex (though not necessarily sanguine) perspective on the bleak vision of globally popular English eroding “local” language and literary cultures in the Anglophone world, we notice that the discourse of English in fact secures the idea of a caste-based Hindu Hindi. In *The Fall of Language in the Age of English* (2015), Minae Mizumura argues that the growing spread of English is destroying Japanese literary culture and exhorts the government of Japan (and those of other

countries and literary cultures similarly threatened) to establish strict policies to counter it. Contrary to Damrosch who deplors the dampening down of the linguistic richness of English, Mizumura is concerned with the dilution of the languages that English comes into contact with. This view not only perpetuates the jingoism of a national language, even though that language is threatened, but also fails to imagine moments of resistance or creative interaction between two languages. Both *India Demands English* and *Raag Darbari* illustrate the ways in which the foreignness of English language in India assumes translatable and untranslatable features that make it a pivot in the imaginings of an independent democratic nation. In the un/translatability of English in post-Independence India, we encounter a new worldliness of the global language, one that does not lie in a hierarchical order with the local but, in fact, is *both* local and global.

One of the reasons that English comes to occupy such a central role in the democratic process in post-Independence India is because democracy itself is imagined as an address. A national language, as it is conceived in deliberations before and after Indian independence, was not so much a language that represented the nation but more a language that everyone in the country could hear and speak. In this way, the idea of language in its official and “national” capacity is tied to the idea of the people and their access to it. As such the two modes of democracy as representation and address suggest two different relations of language to “objects”: of metaphor in the task of standing for, and of metonymy in the act of standing with and standing as. English, as imagined in the Constitution, *stands with* Hindi to *stand for* the multiplicity of language communities in the country. While English announces its own colonial, class, and caste biases, it also



remains foreign enough to be variously claimed, most tantalizingly and strategically, outside of caste-based decrees. Removed from all competing indigenous languages and desirable in its promise of modernity, English presents itself as an aspirational and a likely vernacular in both retrospective and prospective senses. English claims a historicity because of its colonial past, it looks forward through possibilities of internationalism in the era of decolonization, and it promises another future through entry into the global free market in the most recent wave of globalization.<sup>27</sup>

In this process of making English one's democratic own, translation occurs at two levels. First, the relationship between Hindi and English, in their imagined roles as two exceptional official languages of the Indian republic, is one of translation. Second, the idea of democracy itself is a translation akin to the translational logic of nationalism theorized by Vicente Rafael in *The Promise of the Foreign: Nationalism and Technics of Translation in the Spanish Philippines* (2005). In post-Independence India, a vision of democracy is achieved by the obliteration of the foreignness of English and Hindi and its replacement with the collective promise of English and Hindi as the vernacular. Instead of acting in opposition to one another, English and Hindi function in a relationship of proximity, which lends both to a near-schizophrenic symbolism of anti-elitism and elitism. Neither Hindi nor English is, strictly speaking, a vernacular. Together, however, they occupy the discourse of the vernacular in different ways by virtue of this translation.

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<sup>27</sup> I am grateful to Shaden Tageldin for pointing out the different ways in which English remains an integral part of the national imaginary, and for bringing to my attention Roman Jakobson's essay "Two Aspects of Language and Two Aspects of Aphasic Disturbances" (1956) where he distinguishes between metaphor and metonymy.

Before India's independence in 1947, Hindustani, potentially appealing to Indian Muslims with its Urdu vocabulary and its broad populist energies, had long been the choice for the role of national language. However, with the likelihood of the formation of a regionally and linguistically defined Pakistan by May 1947, the question of India's prospective national language became stickier. The Constituent Assembly faced the task of not only defining the newly independent India against the shadow of the British but also against the emerging Islamic state of Pakistan. The political elite of the time took the rising groundswell of anti-Hindi appeals seriously, and recognized the flawed character of the purified Hindi as championed by the Hindi *Sahitya Sammelan*. Yet they did not abandon the idea of an official/national language and a unifying national language policy. When the idea of a Hindi purged of its Urdu vocabulary as the national language of newly independent India met with resistance in the Constituent Assembly, the Munshi-Ayyangar Formula of 1949 recruited English as an associate official language to offset the factional nature of Hindi, now the state's official language. The foreignness of English gave it an advantage over other regional Indian languages, though that had been precisely the source of discomfort for Gandhi at an earlier moment between the 1920s and the 1930s, as noted in the previous chapter. The English language had so far also been perceived as antithetical to the aspirational democratic character of the newly independent India. However, its choice as an associate official language at this point was rationalized as a way of preparing a context for Hindi. The original goal was to end the use of English fifteen years from the commencement of the constitution on January 26, 1950, but the proposal to put an end to the use of English in the early 1960s met with

violent protests from the states of Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

Intervening in these debates, in the year 1960, a man named Isaac Mathai, a publisher from what was still Bombay, collected essays and speeches on the indispensability of English in India. Entitled *India Demands English*, this anthology was meant to be submitted to Nehru as a request that English be retained as India's associate official language alongside Hindi.<sup>28</sup> In the face of an impending judgement, the titular insistence of the anthology is backed by arguments from several (dead and living) Indian political leaders, journalists, and diplomats belonging to a range of religious and ideological persuasions. Most of these writers belonged to the upper class, and several of them were Brahmins. In broad strokes, most of the arguments converge on the presumed alliance of English with science and modernity, which it had by virtue of its "western" provenance. Hindi was ideal but it was English that was abreast of the times. It was practical and useful in the daily workings of a nation in a way that Hindi could only hope to be at this point.

Jawaharlal Nehru himself was quoted on the strong relationship between English and science and technology (Nehru in Mathai, 62). In keeping with its liberal humanistic role in colonial India, English was also seen as the language that gave to man his fundamental right to be free and to grow intellectually. It was an "unchallengeable fact that you [could not] talk a man or a nation out of freedom in the English language" (Iyer

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<sup>28</sup> This anthology was to be a "forerunner of a thousand pages volume entitled Documentary evidence India demands English language," (4, sic), which never seems to have been produced. I also did not find evidence that *India Demands English* was, in fact, presented to prime minister Nehru.

in Mathai, 33), and without it, the “development of our minds [would] be impossible” (Deshmukh in Mathai, 78). If there remained any doubt, the anthology also assured that there was no shame in using English in a country that until twenty years ago had been colonized by the British. Pothan Joseph, an eminent journalist who had played an important role in establishing major Indian newspapers, argued that “an impatient champion of Hindi once described Indian lovers of English as ‘Macaulay’s bastards’ but, as Adam and Eve have not been formally wedded in church according to priestly rites, no one need feel particularly hurt at the gibe if applied to mankind” (Joseph in Mathai, 29). Lovers of English in India, in fact, found company with the first man and woman of all Abrahamic religions. Together these arguments read like the fulfilment of Anund Messeh’s meaningful response to the natives who refused the sacrament: “The time is at hand, when all countries will receive this WORD” (Bhabha, 105, sic). The guilt associated with using a colonial language in a postcolonial context is mitigated by expanding the discursive realm of the language itself. English was not only the language of the British but that of a much broader religious sphere. There was no reason to feel offended as Macaulay’s illegitimate children when the fates of nations, men, and gods were tied to the English language.

Given the motivation for the publication of *India Demands English*, many of the anthologized writers specifically compared the merits of English with those of the Sanskritized state Hindi (instead of Hindustani, Urdu, and other languages of India), concluding that India was not and could not be congruent with this purified Hindi. In these discussions, it was English, *not* Hindi, which emerged central to the sustenance of

nationalism and the functioning of the democratic nation state. This is evident in essay titles like “India Is Greater Than Hindi,” “Against Hindi as the National Language,” and “Can Hindi Replace English?” For some writers, English embodied a wholeness, a fantasy of unity, community, and equality. For instance, Mirza Ismail, a philanthropist who had been the Dewan of Hyderabad, Mysore and Bhopal in British India, was quoted posthumously as having called “the knowledge and use of English” a “*national asset*” (Ismail in Mathai, 68, my italics). Ismail’s formulation unleashes a vision of the English language as a material object equally owned by and profitable to all belonging to the nation of India.

C. Rajagopalachari, another contributor to the volume, had first opposed the legislation of English in independent India but soon became one of its biggest advocates, claiming that the role of Hindi in India’s nationalist struggle had been overemphasized. He belonged to the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu (partly the reason for his anti-Hindi position later) and had been a part of the Indian National Congress, but developed differences with Nehru towards the end of his career. He also translated a very popular version of *The Mahabharata* into English. In the essay included in *India Demands English*, Rajagopalachari conceded Nehru’s observation that English had an “overwhelming utility” for training technicians to carry out national plans. However, it was the role of the language in preserving a “uniformity of laws and administration as also for unity of thought and exchange of ideas until such time as Hindi is organically able to take its place” that he deemed “*essential*.” With this in mind, he suggested, “the sooner we give up the attitude towards English as an instrument of former *alien* rule, the

better it [would] be for our future progress. We must adopt it as a lever for our multisided *national* advancement” (Rajagopalachari in Mathai, 66-67, my italics). Even its instrumental role in making the laws and administration of India uniform could not minimize the alien-ness of English. Only a shift in attitude, or perhaps what Ernest Renan has described more accurately in “What Is a Nation?” (1882) as a *forgetting*, could do that. Kanaiyalal Maneklal Munshi, an ardent supporter of the idea of “*Akhand Hindustan*” (undivided land of the Hindus), further argued that “by an enthusiastic effort at removing English from its place, Hindi [had] not gained; it [had] lost. *Nationalism* [was] suffering an eclipse. Regional consciousness [was] growing” (Munshi in Mathai, 54, my italics). Nationalism, in Munshi’s case, was ideologically linked to Hindutva, against separatist struggles as in the case of Pakistan. The idea of undivided India, which had come into existence, in part, in response to the British practice of divide and rule, now survived by virtue of the English language. This idea risked failing with the decline in the use and acceptance of English.

In *India Demands English*, the English language emerges as necessary to the idea of the (Hindu) nation, to national advancement, to feelings of nationalism, and certainly, to the functioning of the nation state. It assumes a materiality as a tool in Rajagopalachari’s “lever” of national advancement, and as a medium in Nehru’s radio. By a collective national action of forgetting or, at the very least, of negligence—a kind of social translation—it was important that its relation to colonial history be denied. Amid a strong affirmation of the liberal democratic qualities of the English language, there was a vision of English as anti-elite, and almost, radical. English, after all, was not only the

language of aliens and god's (and Macaulay's) children. For instance, in *India Demands English*, S. N. Moos, who had already penned a separate volume titled *The Place of English in India* in 1958, made an unmistakable appeal to ordinary people in his case for English, which affirmed the potential of this foreign language to be nationally amenable. In his essay titled "The Teaching of English," Moos was specifically concerned with the then government ruling that English language and literature would only be taught in the last four years of the school system.<sup>29</sup> He argued that what was "learnt rapidly disappear[ed] rapidly" and that it was only with an early start and with progressive instruction that English could become a "permanent possession" (Moos in Mathai, 44). Already we see in Ismail and Moos's formulation the English language transmuting into an object to be possessed rather than a language to converse in. The lack of English language skills—now objectified—had long been a disadvantage for those who did not have access to it through education abroad but

the time [had] come for ordinary people to maintain their own educational institutions of their own choice without state help, as discrimination has been introduced on grounds of language. No civilized state has any authority to say, 'You shall not teach any particular language to your child.' Every father has the unalienable fundamental right to choose the language through which his child should be taught. (45)

Moos's appeal is collected in a larger appeal by Mathai to the state, and Moos relies on a discourse of a citizen's rights. Yet he ironically suggests that the popular

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<sup>29</sup> In contrast to the overwhelming characterization of English as a language to be *learnt* in India, or a language that has been forcibly *taught*, Geetanjali Shree's Hindi novel, *Mai* (1992)—discussed in Chapter 4—shows a more "natal" link to the language.

demand for English language will inaugurate a venue outside the state, without state help and without state authority. In opposition to imperial paternalism, it is the “ordinary” native who is the father, making a decision on behalf of his child. This figure of the native is “ordinary” not only in comparison to the powerful state but is “ordinary” also in his lack of a (mono)linguistic affiliation to either Hindi or English.

Still, as Rajagopalachari made it clear, English was only biding time *for* Hindi. Despite triumphant arguments about the need to stop imagining English as foreign, the enduring fact that English *was* foreign was hard to shake off. Further, English could not be maintained as the “mother tongue of any section of our people,” Munshi declared, and if it were, “a small minority in the country [would] be cut off from the main currents of *nationalism*” (Munshi in Mathai, 56, my italics). Extending a spatial metaphor, Munshi continued that “a *psychologically foreign enclave* [would] be perpetuated in an otherwise homogenous land. In the end, the minority [would] harm itself; it [would] continue to develop *foreign* attitudes on life and in days of vocal democracy like ours, its members [would] be looked upon as *aliens* or looked down upon as *denationalized*” (56, my italics). Even though English was said to be a *national* asset, those who used it as a mother tongue were imagined as an alienated minority. Munshi’s vision of India as homogenous is at odds with its multilingualism and diversity, attributes mentioned in some of the other essays in the anthology. Further, his use of the word “denationalized” and the prefix “de-” (against “anti-” and “un-”) conveys the author’s approach to “nationalization” as a *process* of inclusion, a *making*, rather than an existing state of affairs to be honored with a judicious use of English. “Nationalized” carries the



recognition of an artificial manufacturing and a careful admittance which “nationalism” tends to elide. The argument is that those using English as their mother tongue will not betray themselves as anti-national or un-national but that they will be de-nationalized, stripped of their claims to a nation, deprived of community, excluded and alienated. Even though English was central to democracy as argued by many in *India Demands English*, democracy itself will root English out if the latter overstepped its rightful place. It was a language of the ordinary people, the *sound* of “vocal democracy,” but misplaced it was also its own muzzle.

Gradually, then, the broad arguments become more differentiated, and a complicated relationship emerges between English, the India that demanded it in the title, and the Indian state from which it is demanded. The foreign-ness seems integral to its putative capacity to unite and to sustain nationalism; it is maintained by situating English *alongside* Hindi, not in opposition to Hindi. Munshi recommends a cautious distance from English, suggesting that some foreignness must be preserved. Both he and Rajagopalachari, however, also insist on the *place* of English *in* India in their comments, urging one to give up seeing it as foreign. Was the implication that the foreignness of English was already *in* India, historically and ideologically?

Was it the nation itself, the idea of India, that was foreign and alien, excessive and insufficient (though it should no longer be?) to the people, like the language that enabled it? In his essay on nation (1901) that originally appeared in the Bengali literary magazine *Bangadarsan*, Rabindranath Tagore had attributed a specifically English provenance to the idea of the nation. He did not approve of the engineered commonality of inheritance

and future that the idea of a nation required and suggested. Instead, Tagore saw the nation as a living entity. Tagore wrote that he did not “hesitate at all in using the word nation in its original form. We have received the idea from the English, we should be prepared to acknowledge our debt by retaining the language too” (Tagore quoted in Chatterjee, 2008: 95). If, as per Rajagopalachari’s suggestion, “we” did abandon the thought that English had been the instrument of foreign rule, would it still be an effective step toward India’s future progress? Perhaps not. The cautious optimism, the division of labor between a mother tongue and the language the father chose for instruction at school, and the use of the word “psychologically”—which distinguishes a mental inner life from a physical outer one—in Munshi’s appraisal of the future of English appear consonant with many readings of the attitude of the native elite to English education.

The two instances that come to mind are the encounter with the English book described by Homi Bhabha in “Signs Taken for Wonders” (1985), and the image of the nationalist Indian elite “demanding” (Viswanathan, 43) English education, as described in Viswanathan’s *Masks of Conquest*. Bhabha reads the discovery of the book as a moment that typifies the “disjunction produced within the colonial act of enunciation” (Bhabha, 107-108). According to Bhabha, the encounter of the natives with the Bible is at once a triumph of the colonial authority as also a moment of its instability. The continuous reiteration of ostensibly fixed identities reveals the tension of opposition that riddles them. He writes,

For it is in-between the edict of Englishness and the assault of the dark unruly spaces of the earth, through an act of repetition, that the colonial

text emerges uncertainly... What is 'English' in these discourses of colonial power cannot be represented as a plenitudinous presence [...] As a signifier of authority, the English book acquires its meaning after the traumatic scenario of colonial difference, cultural or racial, returns the eye of power to some prior, archaic image or identity. Paradoxically, however, such an image can neither be 'original'—by virtue of the act of repetition that constructs it—nor 'identical'—by virtue of the difference that defines it. (107)

Without resorting to the metaphor of “dark unruly spaces,” one can see that there is a similarity between the disavowal in the native’s response to the Bible and the circumvention performed by the Bengali Hindus in asking the British for English education. In Bhabha’s essay, the natives encountered by the missionary Anund Messeh appear willing to accept the word of god. However, not only do they, at first, locate the Bible in the Hindu pilgrimage site of Hurdwar, but later, at the behest of the Brahminical Hindu proscription against eating cow’s flesh, they also refuse to be baptized. In the first chapter of her book, Viswanathan writes that the founding in 1816 of Hindu College “sprang up entirely from the demands of a group of Calcutta citizens who wanted instruction not only in their own languages and sciences but also in the language and literature of England” (Viswanathan, 43). Sir Edward Hyde, chief justice of the Supreme Court, was surprised at the irony of “natives” demanding English education but he chalked up the unambiguous demand to the centrality of English in “polite education” (43) and its potential to open avenues to lucrative employment.

To all appearances, then, the “demands” made by Mathai and the other contributors to his anthology are as ironic as that of the Bengali Hindu elite in Viswanathan’s account, if not more so—an independent nation’s people asking for the colonizer’s language. While these men (there are only men in this anthology) belong to a national and political elite, they are demanding of their *own* government, and in the name of its *own* wellbeing, what they all agree is a *foreign* language. Recalling the notion of Munshi’s “psychologically foreign enclave” in his essay “Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonialized Women: The Contest in India” (1989), Partha Chatterjee provides one way to understand this demand. Since any reference to the English language in India also invokes the history of British colonialism (though perhaps, as per Rajagopalachari, it should not?), it seems logical that it is still not allowed within the “inner sanctum” where a more familiar mother tongue is or must be spoken. According to Chatterjee, in response to the imbalance of imperial power, the Bengali *bhadralok* split off the spiritual from the material, the home from the outside, based on the belief that India was spiritually superior to the west. Such an affirmation allowed a degree of engagement with the accouterments of western civilization like “science and technology, modern statecraft and rational forms of economic organization” (622) but “no encroachments by the colonizer [were] allowed in that inner sanctum. In the world, imitation of and adaptation to Western norms was a necessity; at home, they were tantamount to annihilation of one’s very identity” (Chatterjee, 624). The writers in *India Demands English* also make demands for English for its alliance with science, modern statecraft, and intellectual development, though they do not resort to a vocabulary of imitation or adaptation. They do not wish to imitate the

British or adapt the English language to India. Very much like the *Report of the Committee of the Official Language* (1958), *India Demands English* deems a Sanskritized Hindi as not ready to be the only official and/or national language. The hope is that Hindi would develop with its interaction with English. An understanding of English as a modern language, as a conduit to a democratic, secular, scientifically advanced, and “composite and conciliatory” (DasGupta, 138) nationhood, further strengthens its case.

The opposition and division imagined between Hindi and English in the essays in Mathai’s anthology *appears* similar to the one observed in Chatterjee’s readings and in Bhabha’s and Viswanathan’s examples. Yet, this “split” is not a physical or a metaphorical *separation* of the home from the outside. To be precise, it is not even a separation but a promise of a future where Hindi would be enriched and primed through its association and translational relationship with English and other languages. A nationalist “home” of the future would be “progressively” realized through a present lodged “outside.”<sup>30</sup> The “promise” also brings to mind the profound sense in which monolingualism in Jacques Derrida’s *Monolingualism of the Other; or, the Prosthesis of Origin* (1998) is not only the colonial imposition of a dominant language but also the monolingualism of the singular:

It is not possible to speak outside this promise... that gives *a* language, the uniqueness of the idiom, but only by promising to give it. There can be no question of getting out of this *uniqueness without unity*. It is not to be opposed to the other. It is the monolanguage *of* the other. The *of* signifies

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<sup>30</sup> The word “progressively” occurs in the The Official Language Act of 1963 as a way to explain the continuation of English along with Hindi and to assuage concerns of both the pro- and anti-Hindi camps.

not so much property as provenance: language is for the other, coming from the other, *the* coming of the other. (Derrida, 68)

The promise of an assuredly monolingual Hindi—unified in itself—looks forward to both the undisputed preeminence of Hindi in India and the formation of its distinctive and equipped unity. However, since this monolingualism of Hindi will be manifested through its relationship with English, and Hindi and English mutually reinforce each other, the distinctions between a native Hindi and a foreign English are rendered untenable. As such, the promised monolingualism of Hindi will, in fact, result in a singularity that is at once multiple and heterogeneous: “a uniqueness without unity.” The “promise” of monolingualism then, ironically, continuously menaces any possibility of a truly monolingual nationalism, never mind how hard one tries to “possess” English and transform Hindi in alliance with it. If anything, then, this forward glance betrays a homology with the developmentalist logic that liberal thinkers like John Stuart Mill and Thomas Babington Macaulay used to explain the unpreparedness of the colonies, especially India, for representative democracy, and for modernity in general. For instance, in his “Minute on Education” (1835), Macaulay famously said that “We have to educate a people who cannot at present be educated by means of their mother-tongue (sic). We must teach them some foreign language. The claims of our own language it is hardly necessary to recapitulate” (Macaulay in Zastoupil and Moir, 165). The incapacity of Hindi admitted in the Constitution and the reliance on English to rectify that incapacity are quite similar to Macaulay’s own plan for Indians. In *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth Century British Liberal Thought* (1999), Uday Mehta writes that “by the

nineteenth century virtually every liberal justification of the empire [was] anchored in the patience needed to serve and realize a future. And that future [was] invariably expressed through the notion of progress” (Mehta, 1999: 30). It is a temporal division, a “temporizing” to borrow Mehta’s expression from later in the same passage, though it also comes to *repudiate* precisely the temporal break imagined in the Constitution of India. It is important to retain the English language because, in time, it will release the full potential of Hindi. In fact, the strategic duplicity, duplication, and division detected between languages in Bhabha’s, Chatterjee’s, and Viswanathan’s readings have given way to an overwhelming argument in favor of a kind of parity and integrity that the English language activates. The demand in *India Demands English* is at no point for English in opposition to Hindi, but for English along with Hindi, English to buttress Hindi. Even for the most radical advocates of English in this volume, the goal is not to unseat Hindi but to supplement it. The *place* from which English had been removed, according to Munshi, and where English should always stay, according to Gandhi, was perhaps one of proximity to Hindi. If the title of the anthology left some things vague, the essay clarified them. India demands English, but not *instead* of Hindi. It demands English *along with* and *alongside* Hindi.

This conception of the Hindi language as a language in making and one that is to be made translationally is evident in Article 351 of the Indian Constitution, “Directive for Development of the Hindi language.” A Benjaminian vision of the amphora emerges in this characterization, where Hindi would develop and be transformed by its interaction

with other languages such as Sanskrit and English, which are the medium as well as the message. Article 351 reads as follows:

It shall be the duty of the Union to promote the spread of the Hindi language, to develop it so that it may serve as a medium of expression for all the elements of the composite culture of India and to secure its enrichment by assimilating without interfering with its genius, the forms, style and expressions used in Hindustani and in the other languages of India specified in the Eighth Schedule, and by drawing, wherever necessary or desirable, for its vocabulary, primarily on Sanskrit and secondarily on other languages.

While English is not explicitly listed here and only implied in the aggregate and secondary category of “other languages,” its structural role is defined and externalized later in The Official Language Act, 1963, which revises the provision, in the Munshi-Ayyangar Formula of 1949, that the use of English end fifteen years after the commencement of the Constitution.<sup>31</sup> The Act reads as follows:

Whereas under article 343 (sic) of the Constitution Hindi shall be the official language of the Union, and under article 351 (sic) thereof it is the duty of the Union to promote the spread of the Hindi language and to develop it so that it may serve as a medium of expression for all the elements of the composite culture of India. This House resolves that a more intensive and comprehensive programme shall be prepared and

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<sup>31</sup> While the The Official Language Act, 1963 was drawn up in 1963, it came into effect only fifteen years after the commencement of the Constitution, i.e., in 1965.



implemented by the Government of India for accelerating the spread and development of Hindi, and its *progressive* use for the various official purposes of the Union. (My italics)

The more “intensive and comprehensive program” mentioned above was executed as much by the enlistment of English to enhance the effectiveness of Hindi for state communication as it was by the efforts to advance Hindi through translational projects of developing dictionaries *et cetera*. As the newly reinstated “associate official language” alongside Hindi, the English language was to “continue to be used, in addition to Hindi: - (a) for all official purposes of the Union for which it was being used immediately before that day, and (b) for the transaction of business in Parliament.”<sup>32</sup> Further, in 1968, the National Policy Resolution also adopted a “Three Language Formula” which suggested that schools in Hindi-speaking states teach two languages: Hindi and English. However, schools in non-Hindi-speaking areas of India should teach three languages: Hindi, English, and one modern Indian language (presumably the one spoken in the region). Even in this attempt to ensure that the linguistic diversity of India was not extinguished by the legislation of Hindi and English, the latter two languages retained priority. English, which had been considered undemocratic during the nationalist movement and just before independence, was precisely that which, at once, secured the democratic and multilingual nature of the Indian nation state by the 1960s as the “medium of expression

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<sup>32</sup> This included correspondence “(i) between one Ministry or Department or office of the Central Government and another; (ii) between one Ministry or Department or office of the Central Government and any corporation or company owned or controlled by the Central Government or any office thereof; (iii) between any corporation or company owned or controlled by the Central Government or any office thereof and another.”

for all the elements of the composite culture of India,” and perpetuated the undemocratic hegemony of Hindi. Mandatory teaching of only Hindi in educational institutions, by itself, would be construed as a political disavowal of India’s linguistic diversity. However, teaching English was understood as a practical gesture, as a means of preparing the youth for the changing political and economic climate of the world. It was harder to dispute the hegemony of Hindi once it was accompanied by English. Likewise, it was more difficult to critique the presence of English when it was “nationalized” by its alliance with Hindi. English both buttressed and disrupted the Hindu nationalist aspirations and claims of the Hindi language.

Not simply for its necessity for advancements in the fields of technology, English itself becomes a technology *and* a medium as the associate official language. In this move, its foreign-ness is not simply its outsider-ness as the language of the colonizer, its *extrinsicality* to use Adejunmobi’s word, but settles as prosthesis in its “rightful place,” to repurpose Gandhi’s expression, *next* to an alleged “mother tongue” and the “vernacular” of Hindi. In *Monolingualism of the Other*, Derrida uses the idea of proximity as the relation of writing of the self to the “forbidden language” (Derrida, 33). As he discusses the act of remembering and writing one’s life, and the fraught nature of the “I remember” that precedes and follows from it, he writes,

But how does one orient this writing, this impossible appropriation of the forbidding-forbidden language, this inscription of self in the forbidden language—*forbidden for me, to me, but also by me* (for it can be known that I am, in my own way, a defender of the French language)? I should

rather say: How does one orient the inscription of self in *proximity* to this forbidden language, and not simply in it, in proximity to it, like a complaint lodged next to it, a grievance and, already, an appellant procedure. (33, my italics)

I find the idea of being in proximity helpful to understand the way English supplements the discourse around Hindi, deflecting meaning both toward and away from itself in a relation of translation. This position of adjacency to English is a resentment, an acknowledgement of its colonial history, yet it is also a bid to galvanize Hindi by means of the modern attributes of English. The “interdicted” remembering and forgetting of English imbues Hindi with the qualities that are desirable in English: its modernity, rationality, and even, ability to nationalize. At the same time, this relation of *proximity* and of supplementation draws the English language into the discursive terrain of the “language of the ordinary people” ideal for democracy as address, imbuing it with an enduring political legitimacy that writers in *India Demands English* build upon without acknowledging it as such. Thus, an appeal to the vernacular claims and protects not only Sanskritized Hindi (a language that was largely fictitious) but also English: a language that had, historically, been hegemonic and exclusive.

This relation of proximity in translation is further illuminated in Lydia Liu’s conception of a “hetero-linguistic catachresis” (Liu, 2004: 45) in the super-sign as described in *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making* (2004). Liu defines heterolinguisitic catachresis as “the act of (mis)translation that manipulates the meaning of a super-sign by transgressing the boundaries of languages

and camouflages the traces of that transgression at the same time” (45). The idea of the super-sign theorizes translation as not necessarily based on a reciprocity or commensurability but a motivated hetero-linguistic catachresis where “a verbal sign from one language [becomes] the destiny and destination of a verbal sign from another language” (37). The super-sign is a fantastic hybrid of translated concepts, which can, technically, be demonstrated with a series of verbal signs connected by slashes, as in Liu’s example of *yi/barbarian*. The significant feature of the super-sign is that “[it] invade[s] a language and assume[s] the look of a known word in that language, but it never fails to defer the meaning of that word elsewhere, toward some foreign language or languages” (34-35). Liu gives the example of the specific hetero-linguistic super-sign of *yi/barbarian*, which in the course of British/Chinese treaty-making in the early to mid-nineteenth century altered the signification of the Chinese word *yi* in response to its purported English translation *barbarian* that was offensive to the British. The super-sign *yi/barbarian* “[compelled] the destination of the word *yi* to be ‘barbarian’ and appointed the latter to inhabit the super-sign and become its proper signified” (38). In doing so, “it require[d] that the word ‘barbarian’ be sufficiently shielded from *yi* to enjoy a different destiny and a different mode of survival. This is how the law [inscribed] the internal differentiation within the super-sign to produce the coincidence of meaning between ‘barbarian’ and *yi* to disavow their apparent translatability at the same time” (38).

In their association as the official and the associate official languages of post-Independence India, the translation between Hindi and English that I have thus far identified is non-reciprocal and incommensurable—as all translations are. In their

relation with the other Indian languages as the independent Indian nation state's official languages, Hindi and English also function as a super-sign. Their equivalences and differences may not be rendered with a literal "slash" as in *yi/barbarian* but a figurative "slash" of colonial and nationalist injunctions and interdictions separates them. Together in this proximity in translation, Hindi and English announce a self-sufficient and a compound vernacular of languages, ostensibly understood and spoken by all Indian people, as Article 351 suggested Hindi would be. Placed along with/next to/in proximity with Hindi, the "foreignness" and the history of colonialism embedded are occluded. English and Hindi each becomes the medium through which the other is transmitted in democracy as address and assumes the role of the "medium of expression" imagined in Article 351 and by Nehru (as discussed in the previous chapter).

The occlusion envisioned in the super-sign of Hindi and English in the service of democracy is similar to the translation Rafael reads in nationalist practice. In his examination of the beginnings of Filipino nationalism in the later nineteenth century in *The Promise of the Foreign*, Rafael conceives of nationalism as a "conjuring of the nation by way of substitution and estrangement [...] a translation" (Rafael, xvii), which "revises (in the strong sense of that word) origins for the sake of projecting a new basis of filiation. At the same time, it keeps in reserve something of the alien quality of origins, investing it with a power to explain the past and underwrite the coming of a future" (xvii, parenthesis original). In this process, the language of the colonizer, Castilian, captivated the thinking of the nationalists, who saw in Castilian a force of communication with which to address those on top of the colonial hierarchy and to communicate among

themselves, thereby enabling them to go beyond their linguistic and geographical differences. Furthermore, when incorporated into vernacular literature, Castilian had a transformative effect, extending and amplifying literature's communicative capacity and arguably laying the ground for the formation of the nationalist public sphere (xvii). The English language in its proximity in translation to Hindi also constitutes what Rafael has described as a "telecommunicative medium," where the "alien" and the "alienating" capacity of English facilitates a transmission of messages across linguistic and social borders.

English, thus, functions very much like Castilian in Rafael's study. The foreignness of English enhances its reach and accords Hindi a "new immediacy in the transmission of messages that circumvents the mediation of colonial authority" (Rafael, 20). Very much as nationalists saw English in India, Filipino nationalists, according to Rafael, saw in Castilian "the promise of nationhood, but also a recurring menace to its realization" (xviii). The relationship of hetero-linguistic catachresis and translation between Hindi and English preserves the promise of the foreign. It also maintains a foreignness not intrinsic either to Hindi or to English but always exterior and proximate to both, creating the conditions necessary to name a democratic language and a language of democracy. There are two relations of translation embedded here: democracy as a translation, and the relationship of heterolingustic catachresis between Hindi and English that authorizes it. The one difference between Castilian in Filipino nationalism and English in Indian democracy is that, in the latter case, the forgetting of the foreignness is intentional but never completed. In this telecommunicative address in India, English is

vital because it is foreign. At the same time, as it participates in the super-sign and assumes the inequalities Hindi embodies and perpetuates, it also functions at what may be understood as a national level. As we see below in the case of *Raag Darbari* and the example of the two Yadav ministers in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, the global life of English, its worldliness, is continuously invoked and re-formed at such “local” levels.

In the foreignness of English in the address of democracy English does not so much represent the Indian public as, attached to Hindi, it imbues Hindi with the legitimacy to do so. Put differently, English represents not as a metaphor but through metonymy. For instance, in its legislation as the associate official language, English stands for the many other Indian linguistic and religious groups denied exceptional status in favor of Hindi. However, at the same time, it also brings these groups into association and contiguity with Hindi, conferring on it the credence with which to speak for them.

In this relation, the telecommunicative potential of English derives from its ability to make laws and administration uniform and intelligible (as was also imagined by Rajagopalachari). However, the nature of the address of democracy is perhaps better understood as what Naoki Sakai in *Translation and Subjectivity: On “Japan” and Cultural Nationalism* (1997) described as a “heterolingual address.” Sakai theorizes address as the social relation that is structured by translation, and considers it as anterior to—not the same as—communication. Address, Sakai writes, does not “guarantee the arrival of the message at the destination” (Sakai, 4) but is “a performative gesture that constitutes a ‘we’ of the community” (4). There are two kinds of addresses according to Sakai: homolingual address and heterolingual address. The “regime of homolingual

address serves to repress the awareness of this disparity between the invocation of ‘we’ and its representation and thereby reinforces the assumption of immediate and reciprocal apprehension” (5). However, in a heterolingual address the addressees respond with varying degrees of comprehension, and the “disparity between addressing and communicating is most conspicuously perceived” (5). Sakai writes,

what is addressed to the addressee is not automatically delivered precisely because of the disparity between addressing and communicating, of a disparity that also expresses the essential *distance* not only of the addressee from the addresser but also of the addressee or addresser from himself or herself. In the heterolingual address, therefore, the act of inception or reception occurs as the act of translation, and translation takes place at every listening or reading. Whereas translation is necessary only between the interior of a homogeneous medium and its outside in the case of the homolingual address, it is upheld in the heterolingual address that, in principle, translation occurs whenever the addressee accepts a delivery from the addresser. (8)

Imagined as such, the democratic address at work in Liu’s translational super-sign exposes what Sakai calls the “non-aggregate” nature of the “we,” the nation. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, unintelligibility of English—its intelligibility as the unintelligible—plays an important role in this address of democracy that never coincides with the communicative. We will come across many examples of this imparity between communication and address of English in *Raag Darbari*.



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To reinvoke the vignette with which I opened this chapter, it is perhaps the incomplete obliteration of English from memory that haunts Vaidyaji in the dream sequence in *Raag Darbari*. The telecommunicative power of English and Hindi takes center stage in Shukla's novel, and humor always ensues from the unintelligibility of the heterolingual address. *Raag Darbari* shows the way, to use Aravind Rajagopal's statement about India under Indira Gandhi, "planning and policy were conceived from the commanding heights of the state, functioning for the most part, at a remove from the ordinary language of the people" (Rajagopal, 2001: 32). *Raag Darbari* won the Sahitya Akademi award in 1969 and its writer Shrilal Shukla, a civil servant with the Uttar Pradesh government, received the Jnanpith Award in 2009.<sup>33</sup> It was adapted into a play, *Rangnath Ki Wapsi* (Rangnath's Return), and has become even more popular after its translation into English by Gillian Wright in 1991.

Set in the 1950s, *Raag Darbari* is a satire that expresses the cynicism and disillusionment resulting from the death of Jawaharlal Nehru and the imminent failure of India's welfare state policies in the 1960s. India's defeat in the India-China war of 1962, communal rioting, and corruption scandals threatened the very existence of the independent nation state in this bleak decade. Nehru's death, especially, was "the seal on the coffin of the idealism of the nationalist movement" (Anjaria, 4797). At the same, the question of India's language policy remained very much in flux. The novel has been

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<sup>33</sup> The Jnanpith Award is an Indian literary award for the "best book among the Indian languages." Conceived in the 1960s by the Bhartiya Jnanpith Trust, it has never been awarded to an author in the English language—thus clarifying the category "Indian languages."

called the most insightful account of the “rural Indians’ encounter with the state” (Gupta, 21). Unlike the rural scenes of writers such as Premchand or Phanishwarnath Renu, the fictional village of Shivpalganj in eastern Uttar Pradesh in the novel is no idyll—innocent and morally exemplary. Instead, it confronts the reader with narratives of corruption and poverty, and instances of faulty statist engineering, which only confirm the unworkability of the idea of an independent India. There have been many literary works, in both Hindi and English, which have examined the postcolonial Indian state and discussed the cultural and political life of the English language. Perhaps the most memorable in this category would be Upamanyu Chatterjee’s English novel, *English, August* (1986), where the narrator refers to district administration, the railways, and the English language as the “complex and unwieldy bequest of the Raj” (Chatterjee, 1986: 10). In contrast, Shrilal Shukla’s *Raag Darbari* is one of the earliest novels in Hindi to associate the English language with post-Independence statist aspirations towards development and political modernity. It satirizes precisely the centralizing function of English in state administration that has often been overlooked in histories of the English language in India.

In *Raag Darbari*, the English language—its misuse and its discrepancy—amplifies the heterolingual address of democracy and emerges as metonymy for the failing nation state. In apparent contradiction to its location of power, the English language also functions as a trope that complicates the notion of the “real” and the “truth,” and troubles the very logic of representation guiding both literary realism and democratic politics. Ulka Anjaria has characterized the satire in *Raag Darbari* as working

through unlikely comparisons (un/translatability?) that “[elaborate] on the real rather than [oppose] it” (Anjaria, 4799). Anjaria writes that the “language of refractions, bends, travesties and inversions” in *Raag Darbari* “captures the abject experience of the state by highlighting the process by which the one-to-one relationship between the represented and the representor, whether in political or literary domain, can lose its identity under conditions in which the very ontology of the real—defined before 1947, as inextricable from the ideal—has undergone a qualitative change” (Anjaria, 4797). I would add to Anjaria’s analysis the observation that the force of satirical-realist language, in fact, derives largely from the out-of-placeness of English in Shivpalganj, and the comic confusion and chaos result from an impossible *commensurability* between English/western cultural words and phrases, on the one hand, and indigenous rural realities, on the other—only to collapse the distinction between them.

English as a locus of power, prestige, aspiration, and privilege is constituted and contested within local regimes of social and political meaning. It is discursivized as a dubious catalyst of self-improvement, moral amelioration, and national development. In the state discourse from above, the English language is cast as liberal and democratic, as encouraging participation in global circuits of intellectual and economic exchange, and—in thus creating modern subjects—is deemed vital for the pedagogical impulse of the nation state in its creation of ideal citizen subjects. However, as the novel affirms this centrality of the English language to the modern Indian nation state, it also exposes the very multiplicity of the lived meanings of the language and its sheer futility in the management of populations.

*Raag Darbari* opens with the arrival of Rangnath, a graduate from the city with an MA in Indology. He comes to the village to recover his health. However, the political climate of the village—rife with corruption, factionalism, nepotism, and unseemly politicking—does not help Rangnath better either his physical or his moral health. Rangnath's uncle, Vaidyaji, single-handedly controls the co-operative union and the college. With such a monopoly of the village's economic and political life, he consistently abuses his power. *Raag Darbari* spans the six months that Rangnath spends in Shivpalganj. The plot converges on Vaidyaji's bid to control the Village Council as well, thus seeking absolute domination on the village. This results in a challenge to his ascendancy from a group of schoolteachers, who are backed by Ramadhin Bhikhankhervi's rival gang.

As has been established, the state machinery is defunct, and the grassroots politics of Shivpalganj follows its own logic, with little bearing on the lives of the villagers. Residents of Shivpalganj are represented as devoid of a political consciousness: they assume that the Planning Commission is an outfit that invents mysterious English names for the nation's problems (Shukla, 120), find elections irrelevant to their happiness (138), and treat votes with the attachment of ascetics. With such latitude, Vaidyaji and his clique sponge off grants and funds disbursed for the welfare of the impoverished villagers. Most often, the only thing that reaches the residents of Shivpalganj from the government in New Delhi is its bureaucratese. As if an index of its users' unpreparedness for structures of modern governance, English in the form of this special governmental language appears gloriously incorrectly on applications to the government and in rejections of those

applications. It is the language the magistrate resentfully yells in to resume order in the court, and it is the medium of choice for tokenistic speeches on modernization, secularism and unity in diversity. Besides this, English comes into view in expected places. It is a language that presages “सौत्व”<sup>34</sup> (respect and power) (60), though that sense of power is also undercut in the novel. English words and phrases also glow tackily in neon signs in the bazaars of the historically colonial part of the city, they help one identify pornography and advertising, and they characterize the elusive class-based English medium education.

The world of English, imagined as important, refined, and macrostructural, does not overlap with the world of Shivpalganj, and when it does—as it must—it leaves everyone confused. The third person narrator’s use of English words and British or American cultural references usually serves to heighten the absurdity of life in Shivpalganj and the ignorance of its residents. The narrator’s comparison of the goings-on of village life to what happens in the parliament in New Delhi or in more advanced cities in the “west,” for instance, performs two functions. These variations in scale immediately make the villagers look ignorant, laughable, and unimportant against the backdrop of the world. The presence of English words in such instances in the narrative also makes more damning the characterization of the villagers as usually scantily clad in dirty undergarments.

However, this tendency in the narration also serves to cut the pomposity of the state and the world down to size. In one such instance, the Awadhi-speaking Principal of

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<sup>34</sup> *Raub*

the local high school refers to Picasso as he criticizes the ugly reprint of Gandhi on a calendar in a *paan* (betel leaf) shop. The Principal remarks that the print befits the *paan* shop because it is not as if one would expect to see Pablo Picasso's work hanging there anyway. The Gandhi of popular calendar art looks cheaply produced. Standing there, Rangnath is more shocked to hear a reference to Picasso in Shivpalganj than he is in disagreement with the Principal's class-based critique of nationalist iconography. He bursts out laughing because Shivpalganj is so far removed from the world of fine art and culture that even a reference to literature or culture is comical here. The Principal is offended by Rangnath's disrespectful laughter and the underlying assumptions about his ignorance. He proceeds to tell Rangnath that he was also a very bright and judgmental student in his youth. Once in college, the Principal challenged the authority of a University professor on the linguistic roots of a word found on Ashoka's pillar, and lost favor with him. As a result, this University professor doctored his score on the final examinations and made it impossible for the Principal to find a job anywhere but in rural Shivpalganj.

Very quickly, then, the comedy emerging from the incongruity of Picasso in Shivpalganj transforms into a critique of the revisionist post-Independence history that systematically delegitimized lived language experience. Despite his experiential knowledge of the root of the word because of his caste affiliations, the Principal was forced to accept the definition his University professor invoked, a definition provided by English-language Indological "research" that backed up India's link with Buddhism. Hinting at the precarity of national sentiment, the Principal perceptively points out that

his encounter with the professor took place before the recent war with China. Since then, the Principal tells Rangnath, he has learnt to simply agree with those in power and to not use his education or his lived (in this case, caste-based) experience to challenge authority. English is no longer the language of culture and knowledge but a means by which structural disempowerment and an inconsistent nationalist narrative are legitimated. The developmentalist myth embodied in English language and education was always frustrating to most who placed their faith in it, with a “growing disjunction between the seemingly unlimited possibilities for self-elevation promised by literary training and the restrictive conditions of British rule under which moral and intellectual growth was actually promoted” (Viswanathan, 22). Participation in and accessibility to the idea of the modern remains contingent on the citizen subject’s class and caste position. English education reproduces the same relations of production and division of labor that it ostensibly contests in casteist Hindi. English punctures its own potential to speak for and to speak to the nation, and as a guarantor of opportunity and advancement. In the heterolingual address of democracy, English exposes as many irreconcilabilities as it aims to suppress.

Not many in Shivpalganj know or use the English language in their private lives unless it is absolutely necessary. The very few characters like Rangnath who do show a familiarity with the language are marked as outsiders or, like the Principal, have willfully decided to stop using it. Rangnath’s degree in Indology, a decidedly colonial invention, further reinforces this status. The teachers who are burdened with the task of transferring the knowledge of English to their students themselves do not fathom its logic or

motivation. They are increasingly frustrated as their lectures are met with daunting apathy. Students do not know either English or the *shuddha* Hindi, as neither of these languages has a place in their linguistic milieu. Their lack of knowledge or interest in this regard characterizes them as ignorant, uncouth, and incapable of succeeding in the world. The training of students at the high school throws light, microcosmically, on the nationwide attempts at disseminating Hindi and English that followed independence. A student promptly calls out Motiram Master for teaching the English language, not science, when he explains “अपेक्षिक घनत्व”<sup>35</sup> as “relative density” (19). The explanation of the scientific concept cannot simply be its English language equivalent when the audience does not understand English at all. Instead of clarifying the meaning the use of the English language not only reinforces the alliance between scientific knowledge and English, it also mystifies science and the particular scientific concept. This tautological explanation of a scientific concept is a comment on one of the first projects of national language policy: the fanatical invention of a technical vocabulary in Sanskritized Hindi as India sought to establish its expertise in the fields of scientific research and development. The state of Uttar Pradesh, in which fictional Shivpalganj is set, played an important role in the engineering of the Hindi language because of the “aggressive anti-Urdu attitude of the Hindi group’s leaders” (DasGupta, 141). Pro-Hindi leaders overwhelmingly dominated the government of Uttar Pradesh, who were well known for their concern for the purity of Hindi (140). Radio broadcasting, educational efforts, and teacher training were some of the important ways in which the propaganda of Hindi was disseminated.

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<sup>35</sup> *Apekshik ghanatva*



However, in both Motiram Master's classroom and in the government's translation efforts, scientific knowledge is removed from the experience and grasp of the non-English speaking Indian and established as arcane knowledge only to be unlocked by upper class and caste privileges.

On the one hand, state sponsored Hindi in *Raag Darbari* is consistently marked as ludicrous. On the other, the English language is shown to be dispositionally rootless as well, as not belonging to Shivpalganj (though in advertising and pornography it could more rightfully belong there than Hindi). In a particular episode, Rangnath is watching a group of villagers play cards under a tree, and he wonders at the terminology the players deploy. Borrowed from English, card games such as "Flash" and "Bluff" have come to produce their own vernacularized equivalents. As he attempts to make sense of "flash"/"falaas," "trail"/"tirrail," a "pair"/"jod," and "flush" /"langdi," (178) Rangnath realizes that this vernacularized English had become a language in itself. In this rough-and-ready functional vernacularization, English remains as a distorted version of its more customary pronunciations and as Hindi dialect approximations. In its organic and conversational provenance, this refashioned idiom of the villagers seemed to Rangnath to be the more appropriate solution to the obsessive engineering at the center. In an interior monologue that is characteristic of him, Rangnath reminds the reader of the vast "network of professional lexicographers and their committees, who are coining Hindi and regional equivalents for English words." This work, he muses,

[i]s quite interesting because, on the one hand, a new language is being generated inside a room, and on the other hand, it is taking long enough

that the creators are able to clock in enough work hours to earn a life-long pension. This process is interesting also because, manufactured in this way, the language is devoid of meaning. It only has a symbolic meaning that conveys: here, the awe-inspiring quality that was in English is now also in your language. Whether the other person cares for it or not is no one's concern. (178)

(देश के पेशेवर कोशकारों और उनकी समितियों का जाल बिछा है जो अँग्रेजी शब्दों के लिए हिन्दी और दूसरी क्षेत्रीय भाषाओं में शब्द रच रहे हैं। यह काम काफ़ी दिलचस्प है क्योंकि एक ओर कमरे के भीतर एक नयी भाषा का निर्माण हो रहा है, दूसरी ओर इतना वक़्त भी लग रहा है कि निर्माण करता पेन्शन पाने भर की नौकरी भी पूरी कर लें। यह इसलिए भी दिलचस्प है कि इस तरह बनायी गयी भाषा का कोई अर्थ नहीं है, सिवाय इसके कि यह कहा जा सकता है कि लो भाई, जो शै हमारी अँग्रेजी में थी, वा तुम्हारी भाषा में आ गयी है।)

Indeed, Sanskritized Hindi equivalents of English words, rather than accented pronunciations, were developed by the Indian state to create a Sanskritized Hindi vocabulary after independence. Rangnath's thoughts here underline the two crucial reasons for the adoption of English as an associate official language in post-Independence India. First was the hope that the assumed worldliness of English would act as the wellspring from which other Indian languages would draw qualities of dynamism and modernity. Second was the assumption that the colonial aura of English as the language of the ruler would also make Hindi a technology of governmentality, able to effect change and catalyze social transformation. Significantly, Rangnath characterizes this association of Hindi with English as largely metonymic and symbolic.

This telecommunicative power of English extended not only to the human members of the nation, but also to the animal. As Shukla writes, “it was [the above] line of argument that necessitated that all appeals to exterminate mosquitoes and eradicate malaria were written in English” (260). Of course, the villagers, the bodies that contracted malaria, do not follow the language of these posters; rather they see malaria as the result of the darkness of “कल युग”<sup>36</sup> (Black Age) that permits a native man to contract a “foreign” disease. The “foreignness” of the disease is surmised purely from its foreign-sounding name, and the propaganda to eradicate malaria is understood in curiously feudal terms. Apparently, “two men went to every single house and wrote on the front of each, in ochre paint, prayers to the Goddess Malaria in English letters. It was because of the majesty of those English letters that all mosquitoes disappeared” (दो आदमी बराबर हर घर के आगे जा-जाकर गेरू से मलेरिया महारानी की इस्तुति अँग्रेजी में लिख गये। उन अक्षरों का प्रताप, बाबू, कि सारे मच्छर भाग गये।) (260). It was because of its stateliness and masterliness that the English language is invoked to exhort the villagers to be healthy and hygienic. As a language of both governance and self-governance, English also encourages the now-healthy villagers to be more productive farmers and to contribute to the growth of the nation. English, along with Hindi, becomes the language of address as the state exhorts the villagers to be free of diseases and to grow more grains. However, the responsibility for this productive and healthy life lies with the villagers as they are interpellated by the languages and exhorted to internalize the transformative logic associated with Hindi and English.

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<sup>36</sup> *Kal Yug*

The poster urging the readers to “grow more grain” (60) in English showed a healthy farmer, well dressed and laughing, cutting a tall crop of wheat. The narrator rationalizes the linguistic logic of the poster as follows:

It was assumed that the farmers (clad in a quilted jacket and earrings) who were also scholars of English, would be convinced by the English slogans, and those who were scholars of Hindi, would be won over by the Hindi version. And, those who didn't know how to read either language would at least recognize the figures of the man and the laughing woman. The government hoped that as soon as they saw the man and the laughing woman, farmers would turn away from the poster and start growing more grain like a people possessed. (60)

The use of the word “scholars” to describe someone who is literate enough to read the words of an informational poster draws attention to the enormity of the effort required by the farmers to comprehend the government's address to them. The farmers are alienated not only by the two languages that they cannot read but also by their representation as rich and well-dressed figures. As the narrator later goes on to say, the laughter of the farmers in the posters appeared more like the laughter of the officers at the agriculture department. This misplaced reflection of the laughter of the officers from the agricultural department implies that the farmers' characterization on the posters was factually incorrect.

Perhaps the combined energy of Hindi and English, it was hoped, would also galvanize farmers and replace their life of hard physical labor with a comfortable one

befitting officers. The focus on the laughing woman suggests that the poster interpellates the gaze of a male farmer and associates eros with the act of growing more grain, which is contingent on the farmer reading Hindi and/or English.<sup>37</sup> As the efficiency of English and Hindi mutually reinforce each other, both English and Hindi emerge as the loci of desire. In fact, the well-dressed and happy farmers—without a care in the world—make the poster seem more like an advertisement for the combined efficiency of English and Hindi. The assumption that the farmers’ only logical response would be to grow grain “like a man possessed” characterizes them as primitive and not prone to a rational response. The power of English, along with Hindi, manifests in its ability to dispel native inertia and superstitions as in its use against malaria.

The double-edged satire of the novel lampoons the political liberalism inherent in an advocacy and exploitation of the English language. In its dissemination to farmers and villagers, and in bureaucratise, English embodies the logic of reform, progress and discipline that was an important aspect of British imperialism, and remains attractive in the ideology of modern nation formation. At the same time, in its unarguable illegibility to the farmers, the foreignness of English is not a productive force. The poster fails to be intelligible to its intended audience and thus to effect the change that it sought to. The joke is on the government for its ill-thought-out publicity strategies. The address of English to Indian publics here both capitulates to and exceeds the dynamics of Althusserian interpellation as the poster is unintelligible to the intended audience. The nature of translation structuring this address is that of heterolingual catachresis of the super-sign which also makes it possible to reject, to question, and to not even register the

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<sup>37</sup> I am grateful to Shaden Tageldin for this reading.

interpellative force of the state. The authority of English, and of Hindi as it draws power from English, diffuses its democratic impulses. Further, as an address that remains unintelligible, the poster makes evident the incapability of both Hindi and English. Instead of acknowledging and responding to ideologies, thereby recognizing themselves as subjects, the farmers are only left confused.

Still, even as the super-sign of English and Hindi fails to “communicate,” it establishes the pre-eminence of English in its address. In *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (1996), C. A. Bayly writes about the preference of Hindustani (referring then to Urdu) over Persian in the British Empire in India. Persian, he argues, was the language of the Indian political community and ecumene. However, Hindustani/Urdu was a “less learned” form of Persian and in a way both an elite as well as a popular language. In this form, unlike Persian, Urdu was easier to learn and it was a language in which to command the “lowly servant and the sepoy”: When “a poor native hear[d] himself addressed in it *by a European* he [knew] he [was] to keep his distance” (Bayly, 286, my italics). I find this idea of keeping distance when commanded in an elite but popular language by a dominating force useful to understand the function of English in governmental address in Shivpalganj. In the case of malaria eradication, the villagers were right in detecting the therapeutic scope of the English language. The English alphabet the government workers inscribe on the village walls may fail to inform the villagers what they ought to do to avoid malaria. However, the use of the English alphabet conveys and simultaneously enhances the effectiveness and authority of the governmental address. Likewise, the

poster urging the farmers to grow more grains performs its job of conveying a governmental injunction. The poster—even if the farmers were able to read—says nothing about how or why to do it, so it is not as if the farmers missed that information.

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In my discussion of the postcolonial relationship between Hindi and English thus far, Urdu has been conspicuous by its absence, a sign perhaps of the systematic means by which it was ousted by the Indian state after independence. The new state Hindi was created precisely by purging it of all Perso-Arabic influences and of Urdu words. Urdu was still one of the fourteen national languages of India until the category of national languages itself was retired in 1950. It was considered a minority language in India, though the Constitution laid down that the *Rashtra Bhasha* (the State Language, i.e. Hindi) would draw its strengths from all fourteen officially recognized languages, including Urdu. As of today, Urdu is one of the officially recognized languages of India as well as a minority language.

In the many discussions of Indian Muslims and the Urdu language (relegated now to a religious constituency), it becomes clear that Muslimness had been understood as the antithesis of forwardly progressing modernity embodied by English. The demand for a separate state of Pakistan raised questions about a “Muslim identity,” as distinct from an *Indian* one. In *A Discovery of India* (1946), Jawaharlal Nehru locates Indian Muslims in the past, as those who are always harking back to an earlier time for their identity.

But what is this ‘Muslim culture’? Is it a kind of racial memory of the great deeds of the Arabs, Persians, Turks, etc? (sic) Or language? Or art

and music? Or customs? I do not remember any one referring to present-day Muslim art or Muslim music. (Nehru in Padamsee, 28)

As Alex Padamsee in “Postnational Aesthetics and the Work of Mourning in Ahmed Ali’s *Twilight in Delhi*” (2011) explains, “Time, [Nehru] seems to suggest, is what separates a certain prominent strand of the Muslim intelligentsia from the contemporary landscape of colonial India; their conception of ‘Muslim culture,’ like their idea of the ‘Muslim nation,’ exists only in the distant past, and only in another landscape” (Padamsee, 28). This “teleology of extinction” is a significant aspect of the Indian discourse around Muslims and modernity, and responses to the call for a separate Muslim state. Indian National Congress President Abdul Kalam Azad, in a speech at the Delhi Jama Masjid in 1947, said that Indian Muslims needed to “rouse their torpid sense of historical time” (Azad in Padamsee, 28) because,

If you falter and fall behind the march of time, if you remain inert and lethargic, the future historian will record that your flock [...] adopted an attitude towards freedom which was characteristic of a community heading towards extinction. (Azad in Padamsee, 28)

Urdu does not come up often in *India Demands English* except in cursory references to languages that are not fit to be the “national” language of India, or languages that were also “foreign” to India like English. In *Raag Darbari*, two characters use Urdu: Ramadhin Bhikhamkhervi and Khanna Master, who are the rivals of the village don and feudal lord, Vaidyaji. In a gesture that counters the idea of Urdu as premodern, Ramadhin uses an Urdu couplet as an epigraph to an official application for the creation



of the position of vice-principal at the local high school. This gesture brings to mind Mathai's "application"—his petition in defense of English as the language of India's state administration—and the larger mobilization around English as a necessary associate official language of India. Ramadhin's application is as much an application on behalf of Khanna Master (who he hopes will be the likely beneficiary of the position) as it is a defense of the Urdu language by showcasing its suitability for the administration of the modern state.<sup>38</sup>

Khanna Master's appointment would give Ramadhin an opportunity to challenge the clout of the principal, who is Vaidyaji's lackey. His application is supposed to be discussed at the next board meeting but as it turns out, the school board has historically never met in the la la land of Shivpalganj. Ramadhin's request has been in vain, a comment on the unsuitability of Urdu and his own misunderstanding of how the state works. However, word gets out that Ramadhin and Khanna are challenging the authority of the principal and Vaidyaji, and soon after the letter of application is "submitted" to the authorities (that is, just pocketed by Vaidyaji), Principal and Khanna Master get into an argument about the proposed position. None of the eavesdroppers catch much of the conversation but Khanna is heard shouting "humanity" in Urdu, the word "इंसानियत."<sup>39</sup> It is suspected that the Principal must have verbally abused Khanna in response to which he likely appealed for a more considerate treatment in the name of humanity.

When he hears about it, Rangnath calls Khanna's response foolish. In a conversation with the village wrestler, Badri, Rangnath says that the appropriate response

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<sup>38</sup> I am grateful to Shaden Tageldin for this reading.

<sup>39</sup> *Insaniyat*.

to verbal abuse is not an appeal in the name of humanity but, in fact, simply hitting the person with a shoe. Urdu is associated with sophistication and the literary, which are valued neither in Shivpalganj nor in the political times of the sixties in India. Violence, in fact, is the answer. Badri agrees with Rangnath: “That’s right. But here, anyone who knows his ABC begins to spout long Urdu words. They go ‘humanity, humanity,’ at the drop of a hat. When a man does not have sufficient strength in his muscles, he pines for humanity” (Shukla, 80). Urdu is associated with excessive and unnecessary refinement that neither understands the protocol of government correspondence nor has the physical strength to survive the toughness of politics. In fact, the narrator tells the reader that Urdu poetry was Ramadhin Bhikhamkhervi’s “fancy,” just as it is Indians’ “fancy” to run the “western-born democracy” on traditional methods of factionalism (80). Urdu constitutes an inappropriate address because in the most generous reading, it is weak (unlike the androgynous Hindi, discussed in Chapter 3), and at its worst, it is simply a sly artifice to evade the low-down and dirty aspects of modern politics. As the narrator further elaborates, “[i]n Shivpalganj humanity was believed to be a feature of ingenuity and shrewdness in the same way that leadership was a feature of politics” (81). Yet the facile opposition of Hindi to Urdu proves misleading. In the Hindi original, Badri says that anyone who knows the first three letters of the Hindi alphabet (क, ख, ग) starts spouting long Urdu words. It is ironical that in critiquing the use of Urdu in a document that should ideally have been written in Hindi or English, Badri (Shukla?) in fact attests to the philological history of Hindustani, Hindi, and Urdu.

In *One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India* (1994), Christopher King traces the processes by which Hindi became Hindu. He highlights the crucial role of the College of Fort William in the early nineteenth century to differentiate one language, Hindustani, into the two categories of Urdu and Hindi on the basis of script and vocabulary. The College was established to provide instruction in Indian affairs to British civil servants in both “classical” and “vernacular” languages. Since vernacular languages such as Hindustani did not have suitable textual materials, the College developed its own textbooks so that the candidates could be tested during the Civil Services exams. For Hindustani, two different scripts—Perso-Arabic and Nagari—were used. Nagari was considered easier to learn and more communicational than Perso-Arabic words. The assumption was that good governance must be conducted in a language that was read and understood by the people rather than just by the elite and erudite. Gradually then, a vernacular Hindi (Hindustani written in Nagari) began to replace Urdu (Hindustani written in Persian script). The texts compiled at Fort William College replaced more formal Perso-Arabic words with either Sanskrit synonyms, or Sanskrit-based local, less formal words and phrases, and called the language Hindi. As it developed, Hindi was literally a language that no one spoke (King, 72). It was taught at the College, although Urdu (and later, English) was preferred for administrative work. Ironically, even though after independence, Urdu loses favor as the language of the state, Hindi still does not fill that role, and English is recruited.

In this episode in the novel, the word “इंसानियत” (humanity) is attributed to Ramadhin’s interest in Urdu poetry, and so, it is associated with the Urdu language.

However, while not Sanskrit, “इंसानियत” is also a Hindi word. In mocking its use by Ramadhin, Badri, Rangnath and the narrator uphold the modern materialist dimension of worldliness in opposition to a possible humanist one. Moreover, their erroneous attribution of “इंसानियत” to Urdu ignores the fact that the Hindi and the Urdu meanings of the term—as also the materialist and humanist dimensions of worldliness—are, in fact, tied. The horror of Vaidyaji’s dream, then, results as much from the absence of the democratic super-sign—consisting of English and *shuddha* Hindi—as it does from the uncanny sounds of the Hindustani and Urdu words, “*huzoor*” and “*sarkar*.”

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As explained in the previous chapter, by the 1990s, despite regular resistance, English had made unprecedented inroads into the public and private life of the nation primarily through its presence in technologies of communication. Hindi and English remained preferable to Urdu, and together constituted both the “vernacular” and the official language of an independent nation. However, post-Mandal especially, English was increasingly claimed by marginalized members of the society. To cite one example, in 1993, Bihar chief minister Lalu Prasad Yadav, a politician with as many jokes about his inability to speak correctly in English as he has public scams to his name, adopted an unexpected pro-English policy in his state. He pushed for English as a mandatory subject in the state school curriculum. This decision was especially controversial in the wake of a “Banish English” campaign by another minister of the Yadav caste. In 1989, in an anti-elite gesture, Mulayam Singh Yadav, the then chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, had revived the *Angrezi Hatao* (Banish English) campaign as led by Ram Manohar Lohia in

the 1950s and mid-1960s.<sup>40</sup> Both these ministers, at the time, were allied to the same coalition government at the center, belonged to the same cow-herding low caste, and espoused similar socialist politics.

Despite their absolutely contradictory approaches, both Lalu Prasad Yadav and Mulayam Singh Yadav were guided by the same rationale of anti-elitism and of validating a common speech. In different ways, it is this desire for a common speech that also motivates Mathai and the other contributors in *India Demands English*, and it is the absence of this common speech which is the source of confusion in Shivpalganj. In a quest for this commonness, Lalu Prasad Yadav and Mulayam Singh Yadav both responded to English as a language of an elite class-based minority. Mulayam Singh Yadav sought to replace English with Hindi (but not Urdu, a proposition that in fact led to communal riots in the region). Lalu Prasad Yadav wanted to appropriate the language of dominant discourses as belonging to the masses. Lalu's policy was scrapped (he had also lost political favor for other reasons) and Mulayam Singh's received encouragement from the government at the center. This was not the first time that the English language had become a schizophrenic locus of subaltern politics. The specific stances of these politicians shift too often to be taken seriously, but in this moment, as interesting perhaps as the push for the English language was the skeptical reception of Lalu Prasad Yadav's

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<sup>40</sup> Ram Manohar Lohia was an anti-Congress socialist who launched an "*Angrezi Hatao Andolan*" (Banish English Movement) in the 1950s. He was more interested in banishing English than in reinstating Hindi. However, this guiding motivation changed as he, eventually, merged interests with the more Hindu fundamentalist party, Jana Sangh (the political party that later evolved into the BJP). In the face of constant opposition to English from Hindu nationalist forces like the BJP, Rajiv Gandhi's tenure from 1984-1989 strengthened it as a public language in India. The rise of Hindutva in the early 1990s, again, placed Hindi right at the center of the national imaginary. The BJP government, as mentioned in Chapter 1, actively supported the Hindi language. Atal Bihari Vajapayee, India's prime minister from 1998-2004 under the BJP government, has been one of the most vocal advocates of Hindi and is also a poet in Hindi.

suggestion. Selma Sonntag in her essay “Ideology and Policy in the Politics of the English Language in North India” (2000) is confused by Lalu’s “embrace” (68) of the English language. She turns to a newspaper article published at the time which assuages her suspicions with the explanation that Lalu was not embracing the English language as much as he was, in fact, *hijacking* it. “Like gunboat diplomacy, in the hands of a few, English helps maintain a kind of balance that will be destroyed if the instrument passes to those who have been kept beyond its reach so far. By wanting to hand over the instrument to the backward castes or the local people, Lalu Prasad Yadav has in fact committed piracy” (Agrawal in Sonntag, 68).

The paradoxical politics of the Yadavs is provocative for many reasons. Most importantly, it dramatically “de-colonizes” English, in that the elite minority English is supposed to belong to is not that of the British but that of upper castes and classes in India. Further, it confirms that the question at the heart of democratic practice in India is not only whether the Indian nation is represented better by English or by a less Sanskritized Hindi but also what is the common democratic language of the people. Democracy is not simply a representative democracy, a speaking for, but also an address, a speaking and a speaking to.

In a striking shift from the liberal to the neoliberal arrangement, the writer of the article to which Sonntag refers sees Lalu Prasad Yadav as hijacking and not embracing the English language. Yadav’s desire to make English language education available to the lower caste people is criminalized as an act of piracy—straddling meanings of both (rightful and glorious) robbery as also of illegal reproduction. As an act of translation, it

is read as only a combative disavowal of a dubious original. In contrast, Mulayam Singh Yadav's call to "Banish English" was more understandable because it set up a familiar enemy in the excolonizer (now occupied by the upper classes and castes), while not questioning the hegemony of Hindi.

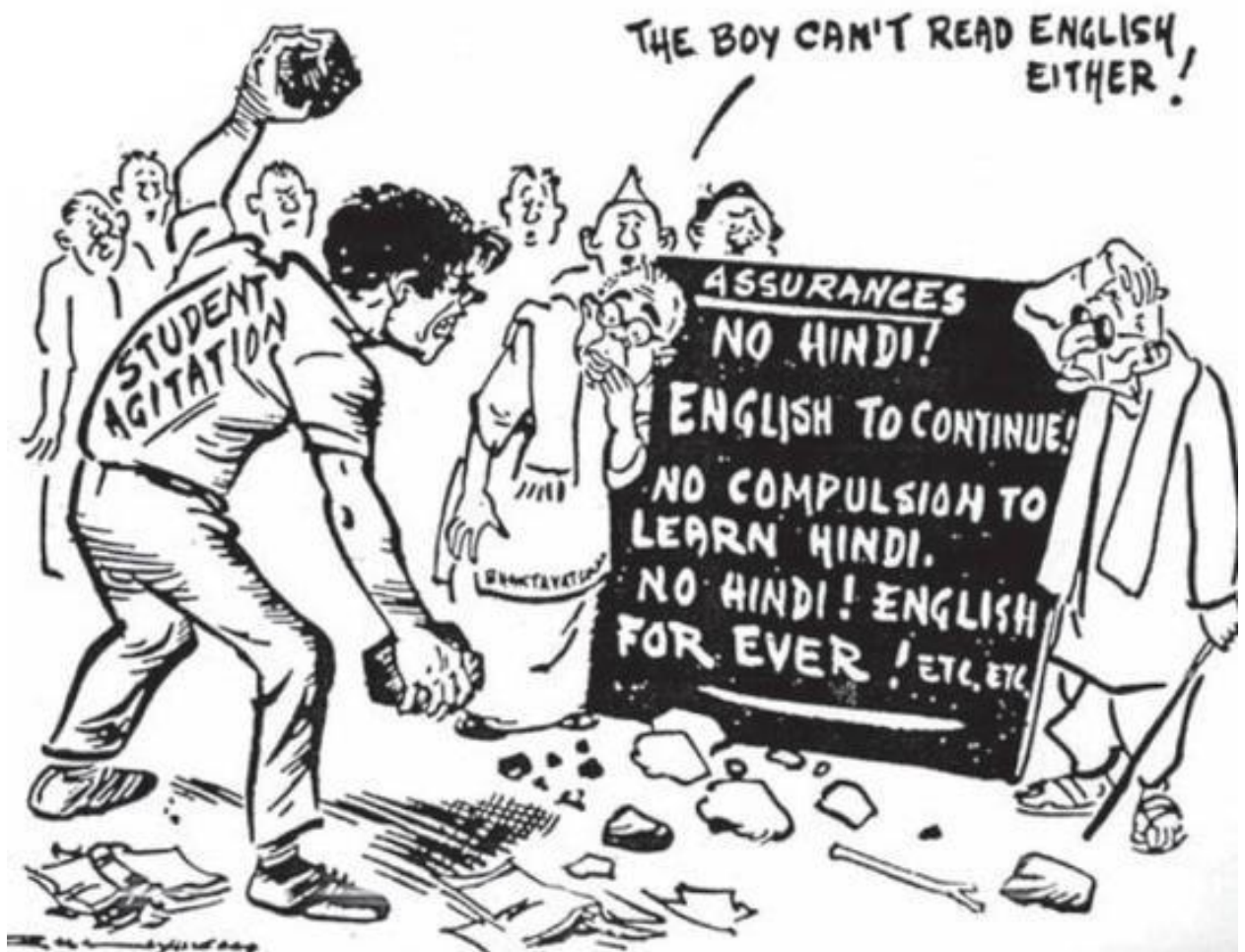
Language is a key site of postcolonial discourse as colonialism itself begins in language, but why must the response to English in India always constitute or be read as rejection or subversion of the foreign *colonizer's* language? Acting creatively and also attentively on Rajagopalachari's entreaty, can we regard English in India as not just foreign but also native? Or, more provocatively, reworking a question from Lydia Liu, can we recapture and reinterpret the *foreignness* of that which has donned an all too familiar mask of the foreign?



**Figure 2.1.** December 14, 1958, *The Times of India*.

This cartoon appeared at the height of the anti-Hindi agitation in the South of India, and shows Hindi as a young boy (with the implication that it is still immature and unprepared) who is incapable of shouldering the task of a newly independent modern state.





**Figure 2.2.** January 26, 1965, *The Times of India*.

This cartoon depicts the anti-Hindi riots in Tamil Nadu in 1965 in anticipation of the switch to Hindi as the only official language of India on January 26, 1965. It shows a blackboard on which the Congress Party leader, C. Rajagopalachari, has written assurances that Hindi would no longer be the mandatory linguistic medium in the state. This should be welcome news for the natives of the state but a young man continues to stone the board, as another party member comments that the youth cannot read English either. In 2012, this cartoon came under attack when it was included in a political science textbook of a standardized curriculum in India. It was seen an insulting to the legacy of the student agitators as well as humiliating to students today with the insinuation that they knew neither Hindi nor English.

### Chapter 3: Illegitimate Speakers

*“Can we recapture the foreignness of that which has penetrated the opacity of the indigenous?”—Lydia Liu, *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making*.*

Much ink has been spilled on the insufficient ways in which the English language reckons with subalternity.<sup>41</sup> In part, this results from what Vikram Chandra (2003) has begrudgingly identified as the “cult of authenticity,” where “to write about India in English is at best a brave failure, and at worst a betrayal of Indian ‘realities’ (Chandra, 2003: 1). Beyond the questionable demands of authenticity, however, there has existed a deeper crisis of representation emerging from the wholesale designation of English as always a foreign (colonial or global) language steeped in a history of violence towards all Indians. In the introductory chapter, we saw this in Sunder Rajan’s statement that the meaning of English in India is fixed as foreign. Many Indian writers working in the English language have also struggled with a “foreign” language to express “Indian” stories and sensibilities. One of the earlier expressions of this dilemma was Raja Rao’s “Author’s Foreword” to his novel, *Kanthapura* (1963), where he reflects on his task of telling in English a story a village grandmother would tell. He explains that villages are always rich in legendary (Hindu mythological) history and grandmothers’ stories are never linear. The reference to a village and a grandmother already sets up a dichotomy between a subject matter that is antiquated, natural, original, and nearly transcendental, and a language that is transplanted, worldly, and modern. Rao writes,

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<sup>41</sup> Parts of this chapter appeared in *South Asian Review*, vol. 35, no. 3, 149-165.

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 was before—but not of our emotional makeup. 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 a part of us. Our method of expression 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. (Rao, 1963: vii)

For Rao, writing in English is an act of translation which retrospectively distinguishes the translatable and the untranslatable. Little wonder then that Chandra found it to be so doomed. However, Rao's conception of the translation necessitated by writing in English resonates with Rebecca Walkowitz's theorization of Anglophone novels as born as and from translations, *born translated*, "pretending to take place in a language other than the one in which they have" (Walkowitz, 4). These translations are challenging, Rao reminds us, because English is a language that is intellectually familiar and a part of our repertoire as citizens of the world. It is not a part of our emotional and spiritual makeup, and it is not the language of the village grandmother. Still, there is no fatality in his view as he hopes that with time it can be made into a more amenable dialect; an experience that will not only transform the language as we know it, but will

also transform us. In an important counterargument to Emily Apter and David Damrosch, English is not maltreated, refracted, and warped in a global context, but English maltreats the thought that Rao wishes to express. Rao's comparison of this new English with Irish and American "dialects" betrays the desire to have, I imagine, an "Indian" English, which nominally at least will validate itself by subsuming the linguistic differences of India.<sup>42</sup> The position Rao espouses here is similar to Chinua Achebe's argument in the essay, "English and the African Writer" (1975). Unlike Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1981) who holds that even subversive use of English widens its dominance, Achebe "intends to use [English]" (Achebe, 62) but only to create a new English that will be able to carry the weight of his African experience.

The discrepancy that Rao, Achebe, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o identify, and which only Rao and Achebe wish to subvert, is cast in spatial terms by the Kannada writer U. R. Ananthamurthy. In an essay titled "Towards the Concept of a New Nationhood: Languages and Literatures in India" (2008), Ananthamurthy explains that his writing in

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<sup>42</sup> The subsumption of India's linguistic and literary diversity in favor of English and in English through translation is a long-standing and thorny issue in postcolonial English literary studies. In *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing: 1947-1997* (1997), Salman Rushdie wrote that "the prose writing—both fiction and non-fiction—created [after independence] by Indian writers working in English, is proving to be a stronger and more important body of work than most of what is being produced in the 16 'official languages' of India, the so-called 'vernacular' languages, during the same time: and indeed, this new, and still burgeoning, 'Indo-Anglian' literature represents the most valuable contribution India has yet made to the world of books" (Rushdie, 1997: viii). This statement raised a storm in the field of Indian literature, and has contributed to debates around the validity and use of English in its disciplinary definition and study. For instance, Amit Chaudhuri in his "Introduction" to *The Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature* (2001) rhetorically asks, in rebuttal to Rushdie, "Can it be true that Indian writing, that endlessly rich, complex and problematic entity, is to be represented by a handful writers who write in English?" (Chaudhuri, xvii). In his anthology, Chaudhuri is careful to emphasize that his sympathies lie with the "vernacular" literatures and that his anthology is only an attempt to bring those riches to the attention of the English-reading world. As if responding to Rao, Chaudhuri goes on to claim, "English is not an Indian language in the way it is an American language; nor is it an Indian language in the way that Bengali or Urdu, for instance, is one" (xxii).

English draws on vernacular energies for its vitality, as all Indian writing should. He maps language onto the “front yard” and “backyard” of his childhood home in the village. The backyard refers to life in Kannada, the world of the folk, the oral, the rural, the women, and the mingling of all castes. The front yard, by contrast, is a space of men who read and converse in Sanskrit and English. In this architectural analogy to the local and global dimensions of the world, both the front and the back yard should open the house onto the “world” outside. However, in studies of literary globalization, the backyard—as a metaphor for the local—is rarely acknowledged as performing that function. Ananthamurthy writes,

Every language has a front yard and a backyard. I take my own home in my village. A large house. We had a *chawri*, a front yard. We had an inner house, and we had a backyard, where there was a well. And in the front yard my father’s friends would come. He used to get the paper *Harijan*, and translate it to them, talk about the freedom struggle and things like that, and also *Ramayana*. But when he went to the backyard, all women, from all castes would come and my mother would talk to them on all matters. And, as a child, I listened to all this. That is why I became a writer. If I had been only in the front yard, perhaps I would have been a politician. Almost all Indian languages have a backyard. And also *ati-Shudra*, who now have become literate and they bring their rich experiences. We have much more spoken literature, oral literature, than written literature. And, this is in the backyard. (1)

The front yard, the space of English and Sanskrit, of the *Ramayana* and the nationalist freedom struggle, is the space of translation. The backyard—standing for orature—is instrumentalized as the lifeblood of literature. Even in this day when the “*ati-Shudra*” (Dalit) is literate, the division is laid in concrete and has the permanence of childhood homes. Kannada is separate from the world of Sanskrit and English, the *ati-Shudra*—*never mind how literate*—is separated from the front yard of English, belonging to the backyard of the oral and folk. English has to be surgically infused with a vernacular vitality; it cannot itself be vital in a postcolonial context. Ananthamurthy’s division of worlds and languages places English on the outside, with no means of apprehending it as an “Indian” or a postcolonial language. Rao and Achebe come close but only by marking and subverting the difference that they see as inherent in English.

This tendency to theorize English as not local to postcolonial scenes can be found in Aijaz Ahmad’s very influential essay, “Indian Literature: Notes towards the Definition of a Category” (1992). Ahmad urges scholars to keep in mind the entangled pre-colonial and postcolonial histories of the different language cultures in India, as we conceive of a category called “Indian literature.” His argument is profound as it cautions against imagining languages as discrete in themselves, and therefore also against defining Indian literature as the sum of its separate linguistic and literary parts. Ahmad stresses that Indian languages are not like European languages:

Like most analogies this one has its uses, but one of the distortions which result from confusing an analogy with a *model* is that the modern languages of India are then seen as discrete and markedly differentiated

entities, as if the relationship between, say, Hindi and Urdu, or between modern Hindi and the half a dozen languages which have historically composed it and continue to have extremely diverse relations with Hindi itself, as well as with each other, were of the same order as, say, that between English and French, or Italian and Spanish. (Ahmad, 246)

Ahmad's comparative vision across time and language cultures is inspiring, especially in its attention to the multilingual formation of Hindi, though I am not certain if even European languages can be read as discrete and markedly differentiated. However, what is more glaring at this point is that this comparative approach to the study of Indian languages has never been extended to the study of English in India, a language that has now been a part of postcolonial India's linguistic culture for at least two hundred years. This omission is starker in recent work in the field of postcolonial literary studies, where the idea of English remains woefully monolithic.

As a challenge to the dominance of what Fredric Jameson saw as inevitable national allegories in third world literature (1986), and to counter the focus on the transnational and the hybrid, recent work in postcolonial literary studies has adopted a comparative approach. In this move, the "vernacular" has assumed a pride of place. For instance, as I have discussed earlier, Subramanian Shankar uses the idea of the vernacular to salvage the "commonly disregarded sensibilities, practices, and modes of being" (Shankar, 24) in discussions of postcolonial societies, and to rehabilitate the local in opposition to the global and the national. He works within the matrix of three variously hegemonic languages in India—English, Tamil, and Hindi—and proceeds on the

assumption that the vernacular is always a position of disadvantage, that Hindi and/or Tamil always occupy the place of the vernacular in relation to English. While he discusses Tamil subnationalism, he does not discuss the ways in which Tamil itself fueled continuing imperialisms during the Dravidian Anti-Hindi Movement.<sup>43</sup> Further, Shankar also does not examine the different political registers on which Hindi and English operate in postcolonial India as I have described in the last two chapters, and as Ahmad suggests in the case of Hindi.

Likewise, in *Untouchable Fictions: Literary Realism and the Crisis of Caste* (2013), Toral Gajjarawala reads Dalit literature in Hindi along with Anglophone novels to recover vernacular histories that contest, among other things, the centrality of the Partition in South Asian scholarship. Gajjarawala reads comparatively both Hindi and English literary texts; she highlights the subordination of the caste question to imperatives of the nation in Indian Anglophone fiction and in postcolonial scholarship. While her work rightfully destabilizes some of the dominant paradigms of reading postcolonial South Asian literature by demonstrating their marginality to Dalit narratives, it upholds the notion that the English language is itself a proxy for modernity and upper caste hegemony, failing to question Dalit negotiations of both resonances of English.

In a slightly different vein, Susan Koshy, in her essay “Minority Cosmopolitanism” (2011), argues that diasporic texts like Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Interpreter of*

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<sup>43</sup> The Dravidian Anti-Hindi Movement started in the 1930s and grew into a broader (now, global) separatist movement demanding “Dravida Nadu,” a separate land for the Tamil. Dravidian nationalism, influenced by studies of Tamil literature and linguistics, imagined Tamilians as a separate ethnic and linguistic nation, which was being subjugated by the Sanskrit-speaking Aryans of north India. Thus, beginning in the 1930s, Dravidian nationalism questioned the logic of the emerging Indian state. One of the original leaders of the movement, Periyar E. V. Ramasamy, rejected the caste-based Hindu social order as an Aryan import, and critiqued the postcolonial state as neo-brahminical.



*Maladies* (1999) be read as world literature, where diasporic citizens function as vehicles for “minority cosmopolitanism.” Koshy shows that these narratives about “minority” figures present cosmopolitanisms that diverge from and contest dominant perspectives. As they offer non-Eurocentric accounts of globality, they must be recognized as such. I appreciate Koshy’s theoretical motivation here and agree with her eloquent articulation that “an unexamined logic of small and large governs our use of the terms minority and cosmopolitan” (Koshy, 592). Koshy further writes that the frequent “conflation of the minority with the subnational and the cosmopolitan with the global misconceives the complexity of both” as “it denies worldliness to the former and particularity to the latter” (592). Articulated as such, I agree with Koshy’s motivation in the essay. However, the oxymoronic analytic of “minority cosmopolitanism” preserves the binarism of minority and cosmopolitanism—in opposing them as epithets—and seems to rehearse precisely the logic she wishes to challenge. In different ways, none of these writers takes a differentiated view of what they see as the cosmopolitan or the modern; instead, they adhere to a binary of vernacular and cosmopolitan.

The challenge, then, is to reconsider our approach to English, as a language and as what it stands for, in postcolonial literary studies. At first sight, the category of the world Anglophone threatens to subsume the heterogeneity of postcolonial linguistic cultures, but in its suggestion of *world* Anglophony, it also presents an opportunity to rethink how we understand the worldly scope of English. I appreciate very much Walkowitz’s comments in this regard in *Born Translated*. Quoting Pascale Casanova, Walkowitz writes,

But the English language is dispersed like no other: it is a first, second, or third language used in the largest number of countries. As Pascale Casanova has persuasively argued, this is what it means to be the world's dominant language. It is not a matter of counting first-language or "native speakers." Rather, it is a matter of counting both first language speakers and all the plurilingual speakers who 'choose' it. [...] This diversity creates an enormous range of English language geographies, writers and audiences. It also means that readers of English-language texts are likely to have very different experiences: the work will be foreign, strange, or difficult to some; it will be familiar to others. (Walkowitz, 20-21)

Walkowitz's statement applies not only to the hegemonic presence of (American?) English in the world today but to its historical dominance as the language of the British Empire as well. I would imagine that speakers of all languages include those who are native speakers of the language and those who "choose it" or, as I show in this work, those who are pressured to speak it as part of a multilingual repertoire. The multiple language geographies and historical conditions under which language choices are made are what postcolonial literary studies must attend to. Surely, not all speakers of English and other globally dominant languages are able to insert themselves into dominant discourses of power and not everyone who speaks a vernacular is subaltern? The challenge, as the epigraph to this chapter states it, is to recapture the un/translatable foreignness of English beyond the familiar mask of the foreign it has come to don. In

order to arrive at this point, we must also recognize the foreignness and hegemony of linguistic and literary cultures that are read as the native and the familiar.

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To this end, this chapter examines the relationship of the English language to experiences of caste and class marginality. I will read two Hindi short stories, Ajay Navaria's "Cheers" (2012) and "Yes, Sir" (2012), that deal with Dalit experiences, and three Indian English novels that have lower class and lower caste protagonists: Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935), Vikas Swarup's *Q&A* (2006) and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008). I suggest that we take seriously when English is spoken, falteringly, imperfectly, and even deceitfully, by those who have historically been denied access to it. While the English language continues to participate in discourses of power that favor the traditionally elite, English in India is not always the sole prerogative of the elite and those formally educated in English. Instead of reading the use of English within overdetermined narratives of critique or of capitulation to the colonial, caste and class hierarchies (which they are), I wish to highlight moments of strategic capitulation and the desire for inclusion in the mainstream, in the absence of the privilege to critique. While recognizing the deeply unequal process of neoliberalism, I want to draw attention to the ways in which the consequent proliferation of English language—its informal availability—loosens the injunctions against a language of power. For the lower caste and class characters discussed below, the English language provides a strategic, even precarious, space from which to launch a critique of the secular and universalist foundations of the postcolonial state. A comparative study of vernacular and English

language texts, Shankar argued, can address the absence of caste in a postcolonial theory crippled by its Anglophone and transnational bias. I show that it is not only possible, but necessary, to recover the “caste question” through the English language as well.

The title of this chapter derives from Betty Joseph’s essay “Neoliberalism and Allegory” (2012), where she refers to Balram Halwai, the low caste and low class protagonist of *The White Tiger*, as an “illegitimate spokesman” for neoliberalism, and argues that the critique of neoliberalism in the novel derives not from its depiction of rural life but rather from the fact that Balram, who espouses the virtues of neoliberalism, belongs to a section of the society that is most disadvantaged by it. I agree with Joseph that the novel enacts a critique of neoliberalism but I do not agree with the characterization of Balram Halwai as a dummy through which the critique of neoliberalism is ventriloquized. This line of argument is politically dangerous because it delegitimizes the “voice” of the lower caste and lower class hero on two levels, in the narrative and in the reading. Other critics have found different ways of critiquing or making peace with the disquieting figure of Balram. In almost all such readings, assumptions about his access to English culminate in insinuations about the extent of his knowledge, which further inform arguments about his (absent) political consciousness. For these critics, the crisis of representation emerges from the low caste and low class protagonist’s access to English, a marker of “class, urbanism, and education” (Anwer 304). Balram Halwai, as we will see below, is certainly not an “angry young man” or a “man of the people,” but a conniving opportunist who murders his employer and drives away in his car. In what seems to be an unmistakable vindication of neoliberal

exceptionalism, Balram even dissociates himself from “parliamentarians and politicians” (295) and from the Naxalites, only to fight structural oppression with disarming entrepreneurship.<sup>44</sup> While noting the inadequacy of his “politics,” critics have expressed dissatisfaction with the “falsity” (Subrahmanyam, 2008: 42) that riddles Balram’s characterization. For the better or the worse, the enduring awareness that English is not a language that is Balram’s own weakens his narrative in the novel and strengthens the critique of neoliberalism.

How do we understand the *illegality*, this crime, of Balram Halwai and of others like him? In *Monolingualism of the Other*, Derrida writes that, “when access to a language is forbidden, nothing—no gesture, no act—is forbidden. One forbids access to speech, that is all, a certain kind of speech. But that is the fundamental interdiction, the absolute interdiction of diction and speech.” He uses the word “interdiction” for this inability to access language, but wonders if the word “interdiction” is “too risky [...] it was not illegal or a crime” (Derrida, 32). In the case of these characters, by contrast, the access to the English language *is* a crime and is shown to be illegal. B. R. Ambedkar, the father of the Dalit Buddhist movement and the primary architect of India’s Constitution, had also written that “it is an offence for a member of the untouchable community to speak a cultured language” (Ambedkar quoted in Chandra, 2012: 22). Then, what do we make of Balram’s dubious claims to legitimacy and legibility as he, unattached to the “politicians and the parliamentarians,” speaks up and to the world in the English language? How does one draw a line through the crisis of political representation to that

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<sup>44</sup> Naxalism refers to the rebellion against the marginalization of poor forest dwellers in rural parts of eastern India. It began as an armed peasant uprising in the Naxalbari village in the state of West Bengal in 1967. It led to the formation of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist).

of Balram's literary representation in the novel? These are some of the questions that guide my readings in this chapter.

In thinking about the relationship of caste and class minorities to the English language, I find Rey Chow's theorization of the experience of languaging in postcolonial society helpful. In her most recent book, *Not Like a Native Speaker* (2014), Chow writes that the encounter of the colonized with the colonizer's language has typically been characterized in negative terms, as "the severance of an original connection (the mother tongue) and as the deprivation of linguistic autonomy, spontaneity, and integrity" (Chow, 14). She follows this statement with a "counter proposal" which is key in rethinking the place of English as a colonial language in postcolonial literary studies. She writes,

From the experience of language as a foreign object with which the colonized must wrestle in order to survive, the colonized is arguably more closely in touch with the reality of languaging as a type of prostheticization whereupon even what feels like an inalienable interiority, such as the way one speaks, is—dare I say it?—impermanent, detachable, and (ex)changeable. In this extreme conceptual shift lies a chance of overturning the burden of negativity that tends to attach itself tenaciously to languaging as a postcolonial experience. (Chow, 14-15)

Chow's suggestion that we apprehend languaging as a type of prostheticization resonates with the imaginings of English as a technology that we saw in the previous chapter. At the same time, the prosthetic and un/translatable foreign presence of English, in contrast to the colonial and neoimperial foreign presence, provides a theoretical space

in which to engage with the English language when used by non-elite and marginal figures. Indeed, as Anand reminds us in his article “Sanskrit, English, and the Dalits” (1999), the Constitution that Prasad’s Dalit Goddess (up)holds was written in English and “authored” by a Dalit, Ambedkar. As such, it “opens a range of possibilities hitherto unknown in Indian society. If we were to employ a motif from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, the dalit-Caliban (sic) never got to learn Sanskrit to answer back his Prospero. In fact, the brahman-Prospero (sic) never allowed the dalit-Caliban near his language (Sanskrit). Today’s dalitbahujan (sic), of course, does not find himself in such an unnegotiable position vis-à-vis English” (Anand, 2054). Language as prosthesis opens up a position of negotiation where the English language, for instance, is not necessarily and eternally determined by disadvantage but can be spoken, word by word. It makes it possible to approach the language of the excolonizer as a mode, not as a “destiny/destination,” to use Liu’s expression from her description of the work of the super-sign. In doing so, we inevitably arrive at a point that English, as a global and a colonial language, is not simply that. In attaching and reattaching to oneself, in being spoken strategically and as part of a multilingual context, via a series of translations if you may, English becomes widely *translatable*, which is how English also *becomes* global. This globalism of English is both challenged and accomplished through its local iterations and uses. Indeed, this relation of translatability and untranslatability reveals a fetishistic meaning that attaches to English in its global circulation, where meaning is not simply the literal meaning of the word but what it comes to symbolize, the objects on which it is found, the objects it describes. As Rangnath had inferred via the game of cards

in *Raag Darbari*, it is this symbolic value of English, not its literal meaning, that is needed to disturb caste hegemony and for social mobility.

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“If your child learns English it is as if he or she has inherited a hundred acres of land” (Prasad, 2000: 1). Guided by this faith in the English language, in 2010, Dalit writer-activist Chandrabhan Prasad built a temple for it (figures 3.1 and 3.2). He called the language a Dalit Goddess. The idol of this deity, which stands in the Lakhimpur-Kheri village of the Hindi-speaking state of Uttar Pradesh, is modeled after a *sola topee* wearing Statue of Liberty.<sup>45</sup> Mounted on a computer-shaped pedestal, the idol holds the Indian constitution in one hand and a pen in the other. Its iconography aligns the English language with a promise of literacy and technology, and it symbolizes freedom and democratic inclusion in much the way as the Statue of Liberty is supposed to. Prasad’s temple challenges the *savarna* (caste) Hindu nationalist bias of “Sanskritized” Hindi with the Goddess English, and celebrates English as a language that will free Dalits from years of oppression. The *sola topee* invokes the British colonizer, and the Statue of Liberty, among other references, summons the global power of the United States.<sup>46</sup> In the concept image created by Shanti Swarup Baudh in concert with Prasad, which was the basis for the statue (figure 3.3), the Dalit Goddess stands against a map of India which opens onto the world at large without clear borders. This openness further clarifies an attempt to

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<sup>45</sup> *Sola topee* refers to a pith helmet, which was usually worn by the British in India as protection from sun. It was also a marker of the difference between the colonizer and the colonized.

<sup>46</sup> In her essay “The Work of Goddesses in the Age of Mass Reproduction” (2011), Sumathi Ramaswamy identifies several “tropical entanglements” (Ramaswamy, 2011: 195) of the Dalit Goddess English. She reads in the figure of the deity not only a reference to Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi’s sculpture “Liberty Enlightening the World,” but also references to the female peasant woman Bartholdi likely witnessed in Egypt, and its appearance in Cuba, Vietnam, and China.



create a new community and new allies in the aspirational encounter of Dalits with forces of global capital, or what Prasad has called “Dalit capitalism.” In an article titled “The Impure Milk of Lord Macaulay” (2000) that provides more information on Prasad’s vision for and of English, he re-reads Macaulay’s “Minute on Education” (1835) and the Orientalist and Anglicist debate on education. He suggests that Macaulay’s goal was not to enslave Indians with English education but to create a system by which the English-educated Indians could further educate those below them.<sup>47</sup> Prasad argues that Macaulay exposed the backwardness of indigenous knowledge systems, for which the upper caste intellectuals disavowed their responsibility. According to Prasad, an attitude of scientific rationality that results from English education makes it impossible to discriminate on the basis of caste. English education is the only means to right the wrongs of *varna* (upper caste) history and to enter the exalted space of western modernity. In what Gopal Guru has noted is the distinctly anti-nostalgic stance in Dalit politics (Anand, 2056), the Goddess English points Dalits in India onwards and outwards.

While Prasad’s gesture is perhaps the most dramatic and the most recent, his is not the only one. In contrast to the upper class and mostly Brahmin writers of *India Demands English* working within the frame of a modern nation, there have been many before Prasad who have preferred the English of colonial history and wished to wrest it from Brahminical monopoly. Most famous in this category is Ambedkar who produced

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<sup>47</sup> The full quotation that Prasad refers to from Macaulay’s “Minute on Education” is as follows: “*I feel with [Orientalists] that it is impossible for us, with our limited means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern,—a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population*” (Macaulay in Zastoupil and Moir, 171, my italics).

all his writings—including his autobiographical piece “On the Way to Goregaon”—in the English language.<sup>48</sup> Of course, like Sanskrit and other Sanskritized languages, the English language is also dominated by upper castes and is equally exclusive. However, in an important contrast, English is not as severely policed with ritualistic injunctions against speaking and learning. S. Anand argues that unlike Gandhi, who enjoyed a communicative privilege because of his class and caste position and did not have to struggle to be heard, Ambedkar made a conscious decision to write in English (Anand, 2056). Similarly, Kancha Ilaiah, an academic and a Dalit-Bahujan activist, wrote in *Why I Am Not a Hindu: A Sudra Critique of Hindutva* (1996) that growing up he found that his alienation from Telugu textbooks “was more or less the same as it was from the English textbook in terms of language and content” (Ilaiah, 13). As a result, he felt he had been sitting in “hostile anglicized and brahminical (sic) classrooms that had been built only by extracting the surplus generated by our own parents” (Ilaiah, 56). Nonetheless, between Telugu and English, he chose to write in English.

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<sup>48</sup> Narendra Jadhav’s *Outcaste: A Memoir* (2003) is a recent addition to the growing body of autobiographical writing by Dalits in the English language. Meena Kandasamy, an English language poet, has also written autobiographical poetry on her experiences as a Dalit woman in modern India. She has called English a “borrowed language” that has “taken her voice to a larger level and helped in her search for solidarity” (Kandasamy in Singh, 1). Many of her poems engage with the promise of the English language to “accept [her]... to appreciate [her] sensibilities, admire [her] culture and, above all, be accommodating” (1). In her poem “Mulligatawny Dreams” collected in the anthology *Touch* (2006), Kandasamy petitions—recalling Mathai’s gesture—for her own English: “I dream of an English/ full of the words of my language/ an English in small letters/ an English that shall tire a white man’s tongue/ an English where small children practice with smooth round/ pebbles in their mouth to spell the right *zha*” (Kandasamy, 21). Significantly, she wishes that this English would achieve parity with her caste-inflected and vernacular (not classical) Tamil. Historically, there have been more biographies of Dalits, rather than autobiographies, in the English language. An example of a Dalit biography in the English language would be *Viramma: Life of an Untouchable* (1998) which was “told to” ethnographers Josiane Racine and Jean-Luc Racine. The biography was later translated into English by Will Hobson.

In Dalit politics and literature, very often, the English language forms the site on which the refusal of and the reach for the mainstream is enacted. As Shefali Chandra writes, English has always “operated in different registers for an array of constituencies; it could be a means of securing employment, a vehicle for Christianity, a route to humanist equivalence with European power, or *a break with upper caste hegemony*” (Chandra, 2012: 7, my italics). In her study of contemporary Hindi Dalit literature, *Writing Resistance: The Rhetorical Imagination of Hindi Dalit Literature* (2014), Laura Brueck also corroborates this view. She shows that while modern standard Hindi acts as the most important marker of modernity in India in comparison to other Hindi dialect forms, the use of English in Hindi Dalit narratives indicates *both* a heightened political consciousness, Dalit *chetna*, and a deeper alienation from and frustration with a modernity that is marked by native caste politics.

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The broad corpus of the work of Ajay Navaria, a Hindi Dalit writer, illustrates the double role of English in its promise to bridge the representational gap for Dalits in everyday lived experience, as well as in its failure to do so. Navaria’s short stories, very often, focus on the urban middle class Dalit male who is educated and politicized, comfortable speaking in English, and enjoys a certain mobility to institutions of capitalist modernization, such as fast food restaurants like McDonalds. His move to the city makes it possible to take advantage of employment and promises anonymity. Transgression is an important trope in Dalit narratives, and the unrestricted mobility of Navaria’s characters

exemplifies a degree of freedom from, and thus an opportunity to transgress, caste-based limitations.

Many of Navaria's stories, including "Yes, Sir" and "Cheers," make references to the report of the Mandal Commission, which recommended twenty seven percent reservation for "Other Backward Castes" (OBCs) in state administration and in all Public Sector Undertakings. The category of the OBCs includes a variety of socially backward groups that may not necessarily belong to the lowest caste, formerly untouchable, of the Dalits. Though it had been submitted to the then Indian prime minister in 1980, the report was accepted only in August 1990. The Mandal Commission Report was not only protested by upper caste members of the society but also by some Dalits. In fact, Chandrabhan Prasad, who believed that the Dalits had been more oppressed than the OBCs, argued that reserving employment for the OBCs was not only misdirected, it would also further disadvantage the Dalits by directing attention to a relatively upper caste. Christophe Jaffrelot writes that while initially the Mandal Commission Report brought the various lower castes together in solidarity against the upper castes, "by the turn of the 1990s, OBCs tended to vote together and for their own people, leading to a plebianization of politics that led to the rise to power of Mulayam Singh Yadav in Uttar Pradesh, and Laloo Prasad Yadav (sic) in Bihar" (Jaffrelot, xvi). Once mainstream parties like the Congress started to endorse the lower caste agenda and lines of alliance between a variety of *jatis* were put under pressure, the solidarity of the OBCs began to decline.

In the short story "Yes, Sir," English is the vernacular of choice of the character Narottam, who prefers it over the caste-based Hindi. The story is narrated from the

perspective of Tiwari, a Brahmin peon in an Indian government office who is deeply resentful that he has to work for Narottam, the Dalit officer. He is very bitter at the new order ushered in by reservation, where he has to wait on a generation of uplifted Dalits who would probably be, to use his expression, “pushing a broom somewhere, if it weren’t for the **quota**” (कोटा नहीं होता तो कहीं झाड़ू लगा रहा होता) (Navaria, 181, my emphasis). The word “quota” appears in Devanagari script in the text of the story, and is a colloquial term for reservation of employment opportunities for socially and educationally “backward” members of the society. Tiwari’s use of the English word draws attention to its intrusive quality—as a foreign language—that has upset a traditional order that worked to his advantage. Indeed, the English word “quota” has become an easy criticism in popular discourse that delegitimizes a lower caste candidate with the insinuation that s/he succeeded only because of the unfair “advantage” of the quota. This is despite the fact that there are new reports every day which show that positions reserved for Other Backward Classes, Scheduled Castes, and Scheduled Tribes are rarely filled, and that many qualified members of the OBC, SC, and ST categories still find themselves unemployed due to prejudice. However, at the same time, by virtue of precisely its foreign quality, the word also stands for a modicum of legal enfranchisement and promise of social mobility. As such, it confirms the symbolic power of English in its promise of breaking with years of upper caste hegemony.

The narrative of “Yes, Sir” deploys a variety of registers of standardized and dialect Hindi, of full English sentences and phrases in an otherwise Hindi sentence to indicate different levels of education and urbanism. Most of the English words and

phrases are either bureaucratic or brand names. The most important phrase in the category of “bureaucratic words” is the title itself, “Yes, Sir,” which indicates an attitude of serving and assisting—sincere, submissive, formal and bureaucratic, all at once. We are told that Tiwari’s tongue *chafes* each time he has to say “Yes, Sir” to Narottam: “Tiwari did end up saying **yes, sir** but it is as if his tongue chafed as he did so” (“यस सर कह तो गया तिवारी, पर कहते हुए उसकी जैसे जीभ छिल गयी”) (182, my emphasis). The two words, “yes” and “sir,” are easily translatable into Hindi but they are not translated into Hindi in the text. In the kind of caste-neutral relationship they posit between a Dalit and a Brahmin, they remain untranslatable. The English language, in its bureaucratic use, allows a role reversal which would be impossible in Hindi outside this work arrangement.

As brand names, in turn, English words and phrases used by different characters announce increased participation in global modernity for the Dalits. One conversation between Tiwari and Narottam dramatizes very clearly the reversal in roles brought about by the government’s reservation of employment opportunities for lower castes and access to the English language. Narottam is very proud of his accomplishments and remains unfazed by the gossip that he rose in ranks only because of employment reservation. He is also slightly patronizing—especially in an instance where he is discussing hygiene and water purification with Tiwari. As Tiwari is pouring Narottam water from the latter’s water bottle, Narottam tells Tiwari that he has owned an R. O. System at his house for a long time. He then asks Tiwari if he even knows what an R. O. system is. R. O. System here refers not only to the reverse osmosis system of purifying water but also to a brand of water filters in India, which advertises it as its patented technology. Tiwari feels

humiliated at Narottam's tone and snaps back with the word, "Aquaguard." This is a brand name for another kind of water purifier in India. Narottam is exasperated with Tiwari's ignorance and responds with a lesson in language, science, and consumerism.

This is the one problem with you folk, you don't know the difference between horses and donkeys. If you go to buy **toothpaste**, you will just ask for "**Colgate**" and if you are buying **detergent**, you will say you are buying "**Surf**." Idiot! **Aquaguard** is the name of the **company**. It is called a **water purifier**. A **machine** that filters water and an **R.O. System** are two different things. (182, my emphasis)

बस तुम लोगों में यही कमी है, गधे घोड़े सब बराबर। **टूथपेस्ट** खरीदने जाओगे तो कहोगे **कोल्गेट** खरीदने जा रहा हूँ और **डिटरजेंट** खरीदो तो कहोगे सर्फ खरीद रहा हूँ अरे बेवकूफ़ **एकवगार्ड** तो कंपनी का नाम है. इसे **वॉटर प्युरिफाइयर** कहते हैं, पानी साफ़ करने वाली **मशीन** और **र.ओ. सिस्टम** दो अलग चीज़ें हैं।

This liberal impulse of Narottam's response shows the reversal of social and political roles between the Brahmin and the Dalit. These altered roles are further secured by the neoliberal vocabulary of an informed consumer that overhauls a sense of what counts as knowledge. After all, the knowledge of brand names in English and consumer goods is very different from the literary and religious knowledge that the Brahmins have monopoly over. Historically, Brahmins are the most knowledgeable about scriptures in the caste system and the lower castes are prohibited from entering the temple or reading the Hindu scriptures. Recall that in Ananthamurthy's linguistic architecture, the *Ramayana* is discussed in the front yard and the *ati-Shudra* tells stories in the *backyard*. In fact, the topic of water purity features in many Dalit narratives as the site of caste

violence. Considered “impure,” Dalits continue to be prohibited from communal and high caste sources of water and have to rely on the mercy of higher caste members for this basic right. Approached in the neoliberal vocabulary of a rightfully appointed government officer, in “Yes, Sir,” the subject of water purity does not stigmatize the Dalit but offers an opportunity to confirm his state-bestowed elevated office.

The technology of the English word comes to stand for the capacity of English language regimes—as in the new “quota” order at the government office—to upend caste hierarchy. The association of English with science and technology has long been the source of its fascination and its validation—from Macaulay to Nehru to Chandrabhan Prasad. The significance of the technology of a water purifier in “Yes, Sir” is thrown further into relief by a comparison with Anand’s *Untouchable*, which I will examine in detail later in this chapter. In *Untouchable*, it is the modern technology of the toilet flush that the young Dalit protagonist finds most alluring as it renders his caste-based profession of manual scavenging obsolete. In both texts, the association of English with technology, the sociotechnical effects of the English word itself, holds the power to address and redress caste-based violence.

Further, the scene at the office where Narottam explains the R. O. System to Tiwari, and the story at large, also throws light on the government office as a space where the subordinate-who-is-now-the-officer consolidates the hegemony of the English language. This resonates with the *Dainik Jagran* editorial discussed in Chapter 1. The difference is that now the erstwhile subordinate figure is himself speaking in English, and another Hindi speaking individual, because of his ignorance of English, is stationed as the



subordinate “errand boy.” While the editorial was correct in identifying a bias against speakers of Hindi, it also was correct in underscoring a relationship of supplementation *between* the two languages. In this specific instance, the knowledge that Narottam displays is specifically a knowledge of English, science, and of consumerism. The fact that Tiwari even stands there and listens to Narottam is because of the latter’s higher status in the office, which has been possible because of the government’s liberal efforts to reserve a certain percentage of employment opportunities for lower castes.

But even when not spoken by educated and well-placed Dalit characters like Narottam, English words in the story add emphasis to statements (as in Tiwari’s about quota earlier). For instance, one of the lower caste characters who is also a peon in the office says the following, “Brahmins have a **disease** that makes them want to **show** their **caste**” (“बामनों को कास्ट शो करने का डिसीज़ होता है”) (52, my emphasis). This is a reference to the fact that many members of lower castes choose not to use their family name as it reveals their specific occupation and caste in the society, whereas members of the upper caste usually do use their family name as it makes them readily legible within a social hierarchy. In this short story, in fact, “Tiwari” is a family name and Narottam is a first name. The sentence is in dialect Hindi since the word used for Brahmins is Baaman, and it contains three English words transliterated into Devanagari: *caste*, *show*, and *disease*. All these words have equivalents in Hindi, with the exception, arguably, of the word “caste” itself. The fact that the English word “caste” is not quite translatable into Hindi marks it as an alien category and thus disenfranchises the concept. In *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (2001), Nicholas Dirks has shown that the

caste system was, to a large extent, shaped by British colonial practices. It was the Portuguese who first suggested caste identities. The British expanded on that idea to promote order in Indian society, and the discipline required for census surveys helped establish a clear hierarchy of caste categories. Shankar in *Flesh and Fish Blood* also uses the phrase “*varna-jati*” complex instead of the word “caste” to denote social and occupational stratifications in India as he finds “caste” to be an inaccurate and imperfect translation. Thus, the foreignness of English that attaches to “caste” discredits—as a relic of the colonial order—the very system that subordinates Dalits. “Show” and “disease,” however, evoke the “objective” and “scientific” valences of English, respectively. These words variously summon the foreignness of English to highlight the inadequacy of the language to native categories and its prestige value to bolster the speaker’s empirical critique of caste. The use of these words in an otherwise dialect Hindi marshals the “foreign” language within a familiar idiom to critique Brahmin supremacy. The simultaneous untranslatability and translatability of English, its foreignness and objectivity, further buttress this critique. If English were to be entirely absorbed into Hindi by a complete translation, if it were rendered *translatable*, it would lose its power to validate, modernize, and democratize: power on which not only this speaker relies, but also the Indian state at large. Given the “foreign” provenance of the idea of caste, Shankar is right in noting that a less Anglocentric approach is required to recover “vernacular” experiences. At the same time, it is the selective use of English in such experiences which reveals a new relationship with the question of caste, one in which English makes possible a willful elision and anonymity.

The story “Cheers” also uses English words as bureaucratise and advertising and presents English as a language of change, a language with which to emphatically critique caste. In fact, in this case, the English language word and colonial relic of “scheduled caste” makes it possible for the young narrator of the story to not reveal his specific caste to his co-workers who also belong to low castes. He only identifies as the governmental label of Scheduled Caste. Having found a temporary refuge in the English language, the narrator wonders if the Hindi language was so humiliating because it was intimate, “Was this language so humiliating because it was familiar?” (क्या यह भाषा अपनेपन के कारण इतनी अपमानजनक है?) (52).

“Cheers” is set on the last day of the school year when the teaching staff in a government school have to elect their representative. The story makes explicit references to the report of the Mandal Commission and follows the subsequent rise and fall of solidarity among lower castes. The teachers recognize that the composition of the faculty body has changed immensely since more lower caste employees have been admitted, and they need “one of them” to be their representative. However, they are uncertain as to who that person should be, and the story quickly unravels with political differences and hierarchy between the Dalits and the Bahujans (OBCs). As in the previous story, the reservation of employment is closely tied to access to the English language in “Cheers” as well.

Not all of the story’s characters can speak in English fluently. In fact only one of them can, a low caste man named C. Lal, who has shortened his name from “Chunni Lal” to “C. Lal” because the former iteration undermined his “dignity” with its informality.

The English word “dignity” appears in Devanagari script in the story and reveals how foreign the idea of dignity is for lower castes in modern Hindi—so foreign that it has to be found and rendered in English. C. Lal’s grasp of structural racism and his knowledge of English and of Black Literature make him a force to reckon with at the school.<sup>49</sup> Even though the school principal is high caste and of a higher official rank, he does not know the English language and literature as well as Lal, and is shown to be nervous around him.

In a key scene in the story, someone graffitiies the principal’s name plate, which is supposed to read, in the Roman script, “Chandgi Sharma.” However, as someone draws a line on the letter “C,” it now reads as Ghandgi, a Hindi word which means “dirt.”

In blue letters on a white washed wall, it read “Ghandgi Sharma” [...] someone had drawn a line across the ‘C’ and had turned it into a ‘G.’ Just like the tiny adjustment of the reservation, thanks to this little line, Principal Chandgi Sharma turned into a heap of Ghandgi Sharma. (53)

(वहाँ सामने दीवार पर, सफेद पेंट से पुती, लकड़ी की प्लेट पर, अँग्रेजी में, नीले अक्षरों में ‘गंदगी शर्मा’ लिखा था [...] किसी ने ‘सी’ के नीचे डंडा खींचकर उसे ‘जी’ में बदल दिया था। आरक्षण की छोटी-सी व्यवस्था की तरह, इस छोटे से डंडे की कृपा से, प्रिन्सिपल चंदगीराम शर्मा, गंदगीराम शर्मा के ढेर में बदल गये।)

C. Lal teases the principal by saying that had he stuck to Devanagari script for his name plate, this would have never happened.

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<sup>49</sup> “Dalit Panthers” was a revolutionary anti-caste organization that was inspired by and modeled after the Black Panthers. It was founded by the poets Namdeo Dhasal, Arun Kamble, and Raja Dhale in April 1972. The characterization of C. Lal in “Cheers” suggests his affiliation with the radical philosophy of the Dalit Panthers that advocated direct militant action and sought to wage an organized struggle against the *varna* system.

I had told you that you should have your name plate made in Devanagari, not English. That would have saved you your reputation, met the government's stipulation, and preserved old memories as well. C. Lal purposefully emphasized Devanagari and old memories. (53)

(मैं तो आपसे पहले ही कहता था कि अँग्रेजी की बजाय नॅप्लेट 'देवनागरी' में बनवाई जाए, इससे इज़्जत भी बचती, सरकारी नियम भी पूरा होता और 'पुरानी याद' भी बनी रहती। सी. लाल ने जान-बूझकर देवनागरी और पुरानी याद पर ज़्यादा ज़ोर दिया।)

The phrase "old memories" refers to an unchallenged upper caste exclusivity in government jobs (and all arenas of social and political existence, by extension) before the induction of lower castes into the government. "Government's stipulation" is a reference to the government's encouragement to use Hindi in Devanagari script for state administrative tasks in The Official Language Act, 1963. The Act also concedes the use of English in the official work of the government. It is this use of English that C. Lal seems to have satirically warned the Principal against. By writing his name in the English language, the Principal perhaps hoped to associate himself with a language of power that he, as the narrator tells us, does not speak very well. The Principal's act mobilizes English symbolically, as a "brand" one buys, to enhance his status and prestige at the school. Ironically, the same language provides the stage to humiliate him. Thus, the relationship between English and caste marginality, as it emerges in this scene, is not simply one of exclusion. English makes it possible to critique Brahmin supremacy in the high school, which had not been possible in the regime of the Devanagari script. At one level, the Principal's new name, "dirt," captures the long-enduring belief that even the

shadow—to say nothing of the touch—of an untouchable person can pollute the upper caste man.<sup>50</sup> Presuming that it was a (lower caste) student who tampered with the name plate, it is not a surprise that Chandgi Sharma collapsed into a heap of dirt.<sup>51</sup> However, as the graphic inscription defiles it also defies the caste-based hierarchy that is reproduced at the government school. This incident draws our attention to the symbolic value of English not only in the word “quota” but also in the legislation of English as India’s associate official language which further motorizes its vernacular force. English plays an important role in this surreptitious coup that parallels the imagined progressive energy of reservation of employment opportunities after the Mandal Commission. The vernacular and symbolic force of English, however, is allegedly, guided and goaded by its global force. The Principal suspects—though he would never dare to say as much—that C. Lal incited one of the students to tamper with the name plate. As far as C. Lal is concerned, the English language allows him to access a global lexicon of political radicalism from English and Black literature.

Nevertheless, the promise of English is limited, and by the end of the story, we see its complicity and complexities in lower caste oppression. The story does reference the fact that access to English is not simple and while C. Lal as an autodidact is able to speak the language and familiarize himself with radical literature available in English, many of his own students are not. As it catalyzes a transitional narrative into global

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<sup>50</sup> There is a scene in Anand’s *Untouchable* where the “untouchable” protagonist, Bakha, forgets to announce his caste while walking on the road as he is tired and distracted. As a result, he accidentally crosses paths with a caste Hindu, who beats him up and hurls at him a volley of abuses.

<sup>51</sup> As he considers the defacement of the name plate, the Principal remarks on the changing composition of the student body as well, looking back nostalgically at a time when all students were from “respectable” upper caste families.

modernity, English also signals an alienation from the specificity of the caste experience and a critique of an abstracted modernity. The story makes it clear through two English phrases that appear in Devanagari, “Cheers for our victory” and “Cheers,” that respectively open and close narrative in two scenes where the teachers are celebrating the election results with a drink. The opening “cheers” is celebratory, it announces the arrival of a new order where the various lower caste teachers will finally have their own representative. The process of deciding who their candidate will be reveals more differences than similarities among the gamut of lower castes present in the school. It is in this process that the narrator is asked what his precise caste affiliation is. While it begins ambivalently, the elections make clear the internal differences and hierarchies between the various low castes. As they are clinking their glasses at the end, C. Lal says that with these elections, the position of the secretary at least slipped down a little. It is Rampal—belonging to the pastoral community of the Gurjars classified as one of the OBCs—who wins the election.<sup>52</sup> C. Lal’s statement acknowledgement and affirmation of a hierarchy in the phrase “at least slipped down a little” reveals that even the English language cannot obliterate caste hierarchies.

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“Yes, Sir” and “Cheers” present a complex relationship between the English language and experiences of caste marginality, where English is not always the site of cleavage but a space from which Brahminical supremacy can be critiqued. With this in mind, I will now move to the three Anglophone novels. Of these, *The White Tiger*

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<sup>52</sup> Like the Jats mentioned in footnote 12 on page 18, Gurjars also enjoy an elite status in some states of India, and are classified as OBC in certain others.

engages with categories of both caste and class, *Q&A* betrays a more direct preoccupation with class, and *Untouchable* focuses solely on the category of caste. I acknowledge these differences between the three novels because the genre of the Anglophone novel has traditionally been read as “modern,” “non-local,” and dismissive of the caste question. Gajarawala in *Untouchable Fictions* and Tabish Khair in *Babu Fictions: Alienation in Contemporary Indian English Novels* (2001) both point out that the Indian English novel and its readings have tended to subsume the category of caste within the category of class. In reading these Anglophone novels along with two of Navaria’s short stories, my objective is to redirect attention to the ways in which the English language *is* attuned to the “local” experiences of both caste and class.

There are two levels on which the English language operates in these novels. First, as the “medium,” the language in which these Anglophone novels as translations appear. There is also a second level of the narrative and dialogue where *English appears as English*. It is this level that I wish to draw attention to. My sense is that if we can legitimize the experiences of the protagonists of these novels through a more nuanced understanding of the discourse of English, we can also approach the process of translation less incredulously. To my knowledge, the genre of the Indian Anglophone novel has not seen any first person narratives by lower caste or lower class protagonists. This includes Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable* which is narrated by a third-person omniscient narrator. In this context, we must take seriously when Balram Halwai and Ram Mohammad Thomas, the protagonists of *The White Tiger* and *Q&A* respectively, *speak* in the novels.



This critical gesture becomes even more urgent when, as I will show, the narrative logic itself is predicated on these characters' illiteracy.

Bakha, Balram, and Ram are three servants and three unlikely speakers of English, not only in the world of Anglophone literature but also in the society they belong to. They are unlikely speakers because their class and caste position precludes them from English education. Lower caste and lower class heroes in Indian English writing have been marked as different precisely because of their exclusion from the “modern” world of the English language. Bakha, for instance, had always wanted to learn and speak the English language but does not succeed in doing so. Tabish Khair writes that, historically, heroes like Bakha have always been presented as distinctive in either their beauty or wisdom or exceptional virtue. They stand out of (and apart from) their class and caste milieu to appear worthy of liberal sympathy, and of social and political restitution. Indeed, Bakha is described as looking “intelligent, even sensitive, with a sort of dignity that does not belong to the ordinary scavenger, who is as a rule uncouth and unclean. It was perhaps his absorption in his task that gave him the look of distinction, or his exotic dress however loose and ill-fitting” (Anand, 1935: 8). Despite only humiliation at work, Bakha never shirked a day's duty either, “for, although he did not know it, to him work was a sort of intoxication, which gave him a glowing health and plenty of easy sleep” (10). Bakha's unfortunate occupation—where he literally handles other people's garbage and excrement—is supposed to give him a healthy glow!

*Untouchable* is a twenty-four-hour, story-in-a-day, modernist novel that focuses on Bakha and his family. All members of the family, including Bakha, belong to the

untouchable caste, and work as manual scavengers. They depend on the generosity of the Brahmins and other upper caste members of the society for food. Bakha's distinctiveness shows in his desire to be like the English man, while others in his family are hesitant to imagine a different lot. Over the course of the day, we are privy to the big and small ways in which dependency on upper caste mercy is continuously demeaning for Bakha and his family. Bakha feels truly crushed by the end of the day, and just when he is beginning to give in, he is confronted (and comforted) by three different alternatives that promise to rescue him from his fate. The first of these alternatives is the Christian missionary, Colonel Hutchinson, and the second is Gandhi. Bakha finds both of these options unappealing and is confused by their duplicity and hypocrisy. In a triumph of technology over politics, the only sustainable and exciting option is that of the modern flush system, which promises deliverance from his opprobrious caste-based occupation. Bakha's faith in technology seems to be manifested and justified, about seventy years later, when Narottam sitting before Tiwari takes pride in his R. O. System water purifier.

Bakha's desire to learn the English language casts it as a means to exit the caste system and to enter the unmarked group of the English(-speaking) people in India. English, as it is imagined by Bakha, incarnates the prosthetic promise that Chow underscores in *Not Like a Native Speaker*. However, Bakha never actually learns the language. We never know if the *babu's* son teaches Bakha how to speak in English. The only way in which this untouchable is able to experience, however briefly, how it feels to not be marked by his caste is when he is wearing the discarded clothes of the English man. These are the clothes that, the narrator notes, provide him with a quiet dignity. The

re-wearable and removable quality of the clothing items mimics the learnable and strategic quality of the English language. After all, Bakha rejects Colonel Hutchinson's overtures because he only wants the clothes and to be like the white man, and does not actually desire to follow his religion. The "English" clothes desired and worn by Bakha are also reminiscent of the "English" three-piece suit worn by Ambedkar.<sup>53</sup>

Bakha never speaks in English, except perhaps through Mulk Raj Anand, but his desire to do so makes him an important archetype in the genre of Indian Anglophone novels. *The White Tiger* and *Q&A* share many themes and disappointments of Anand's novel, *Untouchable*. Most importantly, the protagonists share the desire to know what it feels to not be marked by class and caste marginality. However, instead of awaiting a promise forever in abeyance which is mediated by the *babu*'s son and the benevolence of Charat Singh, Ram and Balram are able to informally assimilate enough knowledge of the English language to escape their lives of social, political and economic marginality. However, in each case, the characters' access to, and use of, the English language is questionable. In fact, it is their transgressive access to English that is cast as a moral and an ethical problem, one that threatens to delegitimize their textual and political existence. This is the shift from "liberal" to "neoliberal" English that we now turn to.

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*The White Tiger* follows Balram Halwai's rise from the acute poverty of rural Bihar (Darkness) to entrepreneurial success as a cab service owner in Bangalore (the Light). Balram accomplishes this by recklessly lying about almost everything: his name,

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<sup>53</sup> The revolutionary nature of Ambedkar's sartorial choices provides an important counterpoint to Gandhi's decision to ascetically shed his clothes and to adopt "*khadi*" (handspun and handwoven cloth) as part of the Swadesh movement.

caste, age, level of education, religious beliefs, his work experience, and sexual experience. He lies not only to other characters in the text but also to the reader. What is worse is that he murders his employer, Ashok Sharma, and steals his money, which serves as “seed money” for his start-up, White Tiger Drivers. By the end of the novel, he is a smalltime gangster, in cahoots with the Bangalore Police, flouting the law, and harboring visions of starting a school for children. The novel itself is framed as an epistolary narrative where Balram is dictating a letter to the Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao, who is slated to visit India soon. Balram’s rags-to-riches story would have been a middle class fantasy, as Swarup’s *Q&A* is, had it been made possible by difficult yet rightful access to education. In that difference alone, Ram Mohammad Thomas of *Q&A* is a fascinating counterpoint to Balram. Ram is a waiter from the slums of Dharavi in Mumbai. He enters a popular quiz show, *Who Will Win a Billion?*, to seek revenge on the host. He ends up winning the prize money, after which he is sent to jail on accusations of cheating, since as a person without formal education, he is not expected to know the answers. The chapters in *Q&A* are organized around the questions Ram was asked in the quiz show. Each chapter states the “prize money” he was playing for and reveals the fortuitous coincidences that led to Ram’s knowledge of the answers. The difficulty of each question is matched only by the hardships endured by Ram during that episode in his life. While Ram’s ability to answer in the quiz show seems serendipitous, his ability to overcome the corresponding dire situation in real life requires a demonstration of “unique generosity, creativity and wit” (Shingavi, 93). The unfairness of Ram’s life, thus, is compensated by the purported fairness of the quiz show. Ram is not an ambitious

person but harbors only “small manageable dreams” (Swarup, 278), and *Q&A* is a novel of hope about an exceptional slum dweller. Balram, on the other hand, is “no normal human being, but a freak, a pervert of nature” (Adiga, 150). *The White Tiger* is a cautionary tale for the Indian middle class about how not to treat their servants lest they murder you. Balram’s narrative disrupts the myth of India Shining that I mentioned in Chapter 1; Ram’s embalms it for longer by romanticizing the acute class disparity that accompanies it. Yet both Ram and Balram speak in English—despite ignorance, and out of necessity.

In *The White Tiger*, English appears as a language that is mired in lies and falsehood, as Balram uses it to fake his identity and commit homicide. The imperative and the impossibility of English figures very early in the novel when Balram opens his letter to the Chinese Premier with the irony of Jawaharlal Nehru’s first address to independent India in English. He writes, “Neither you nor I speak English, but there are some things that can be said only in English” (Adiga, 3). The “thing” that immediately follows this statement and can presumably only be said in English is “what a fucking joke!”(3), an exclamation which Balram heard his employer Ashok Sharma’s wife use. That Balram singles out “What a fucking joke!” as a statement to be articulated in English immediately draws attention to the use of English in the novel. Arguably, the “thing” that can only be said in English also refers to the entirety of the letter that forms the novel. In this book-length letter to the Chinese Premier, Balram uses the above-mentioned exclamation, at different points, to mock the democratic process in India, to

show the dark underside of recent entrepreneurial successes in the country, and to draw attention to his own wrongful framing as a murderer by his employers.<sup>54</sup>

Almost all aspects of Balram's person were invented by the state. He was given the name Balram because his schoolteacher was dissatisfied with his generic name, "Munna" (literal meaning, "boy"). Since none of his family members remembered his birth date, that was also invented for him by the schoolteacher. Whatever we know of Balram's height and weight, even the details of the crime, are from a "Wanted" poster issued by the police in his name.<sup>55</sup> Yet, by the end of the novel, Balram skillfully manipulates his lack of social coordinates and his ignorance through his knowledge of the English language. *The White Tiger* thus vividly dramatizes the ways in which not knowing the English language, or not revealing how much he knows of it, allows Balram to make a political gesture by signing as his master, Ashok Sharma, in the final instance.

Ashok and his wife make fun of Balram's pronunciation of English words, and Ashok and his brothers scold Balram expressly in "chaste Hindi" (241). He learns how to pronounce the word "pizza" in the "right way" by repeating under his breath as he hears Ashok correct his wife. A self-confessed "original listener, not original thinker" (247), Balram memorizes the names of expensive whiskey, picks up stray words like "pri-va-see" (176), "income tax" (47), and buys an American porn magazine. He knows that it is rich teenagers who buy American porn magazines and that purchase makes him share

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<sup>54</sup> This refers to the time when Pinky Madam, drunkenly, runs over a pedestrian on the roads of Gurgaon. Ashok's elder brother and father force Balram to take the blame for the hit-and-run and threaten to hurt his family if he does not cooperate. In contrast to Ashok's family's insensitivity and hypocrisy, when one of Balram's drivers runs over a person in Bangalore, Balram not only protects his drivers but also compensates the family of the deceased.

<sup>55</sup> This poster, like the posters found in Shivpalganj, is not only meaningless but also erroneous in its information about Balram, as we learn in the novel.

that classed experience. He learns to identify the compact discs of Sting, Enya and Eminem from their covers, and he knows that Ashok likes to listen to Sting when stuck in a traffic jam.

It is this random but not irrelevant knowledge of English words and sounds that also equips Balram to craft his letter to the Chinese Premier. Balram's larger objective in writing to Jiabao is to expose the dysfunctionality of the Indian state and the acute class disparity plaguing neoliberal India. Equally importantly, Balram wishes to present Jiabao with secrets of India's entrepreneurial success and inform the latter of "the real truth" about it before Indian state officials give him their misleading version. He tells us that while he was happy to know that the Premier was visiting to "learn how to make a few Chinese entrepreneurs" (4-5), he was also filled with an "*anxiety*. It hit me that in keeping with international protocol, the prime minister and foreign minister of my country will meet you at the airport with garlands, small take-home sandalwood statues of Gandhi, and a booklet full of information about India's past, present, and future" (5, my italics). That is when Balram decided to write his narrative to counter the prime minister's. While Balram does not pursue a collective politics in his life, and many critics see that as the novel's most damning flaw, his "What a fucking joke!" immediately offers a critique of the state narratives as found in police actions, among the parliamentarians, and in the "welcome." In this, I argue, Balram's approach is already politicized. Balram never voted in elections because rich landlords routinely bought off his votes, nor did he find himself represented by "politicians and parliamentarians" (295) who only exploit the rural poor. Balram's manipulation of the English language as a means to controvert the statist

ideology and achieve global affiliation, and his assimilation of the language as a catalyst of upward social mobility, associates him with the neoliberal ideology of the entrepreneur. The use of an expletive learnt from the master places him in the tradition of a Caliban as described by S. Anand. Balram had encountered an injunction against English during his childhood in the form of his low caste and class position, which prevented him from completing his education. As an adult, Balram seizes on every opportunity to learn the language and to capitalize on his knowledge of it—thus, making good use of his talent as an “original listener.” Significantly, Ashok does not force Balram to speak in English and prefers him just barely lettered. In fact, Ashok and his wife find Balram’s incorrect English pronunciations amusing. However, Balram picks up English words by listening to Ashok from the driver’s seat and from the ubiquitous presence of the language in the media and consumer sphere of Delhi and Gurgaon. What he learns is also not a formal knowledge of the English language but more the symbolic associations of the language.

The process of learning to speak English by surreptitiously overhearing his employers underscores Balram’s transgressive desires to move across classes. It also brings him so dangerously close to Ashok that he loses sight of the class differences between them. Balram imagines that he can instinctively understand his employer, that just the lilt of his voice can convey his needs clearly to Balram. As they travel through New Delhi and Gurgaon, and spend more and more time in car together, Balram and Ashok curiously meld into one person. Balram often catches his glance in the rearview mirror. He copies the cultivated mannerisms and tastes of his employer. He begins to see



the world through Ashok's eyes, react to it in a way that Ashok would. If Ashok seeks a Caucasian sex worker who oddly looks like Kim Basinger, then Balram also dredges up the last of his savings to sleep with a golden-haired girl. If his employer sits with a woman in the car, then it is Balram who gets aroused. Balram explains this closeness with the man he murders by saying that one tends to feel surprisingly attached to the person one kills. Balram describes this imitation of Ashok as his "first taste of a fugitive's life" (152), which conveys a sense of the illicit as he overhears snatches of English phrases and as he mouths them later. This idea of the fugitive implicitly criminalizes Balram for overhearing and learning English—the master's language he is not supposed to access, learn, and know—even before he is criminalized as Ashok's murderer. Ashok and his family conduct their unscrupulous business in the car with unabashed candor because they do not think that Balram can understand them. The value and success of Balram as a servant and as a driver depend on his illiteracy. Thus, the fact that he learns the English language in secret signifies that he has outgrown his submissive role as the employee. Further, Balram's knowledge of English is, in fact, a step towards his crime of literally unseating the master and occupying his position.

Despite the centrality of English as arguably the *only* linguistic medium that affords a critique of the state, the indeterminacy of how much Balram understands when he repeats and uses English words stages a struggle over representation and claims to a language. While Balram Halwai does not rise against the injustices of the rich in an identifiably glorious gesture like that of an overthrow or an uprising, what he does far exceeds either of these. He falters in his self-appointed position as a guide to Wen Jiabao

through the lies and truths about India. However, this is not because he is not a “proper guide” as some critics have claimed but because Balram shows that this process of guiding itself is murky. Through his self-conscious tropes of narration and blatant lies, Balram magnifies and parodies the representational process of democratic politics itself. Thus, the unreliability of Balram as a narrator does not so much weaken his critique as it strengthens it.

Joseph argues that almost all of Balram’s neoliberal rhetoric can be traced back to Ashok. So the views he expresses are not his own, or not only his own or of his class. Invoking Terry Eagleton, Joseph writes that it is precisely the “neurotic symptomatology” (80) of neoliberalism that a poor low-caste driver unquestioningly internalizes its ideology. This reading does not account for the ambiguity with which Balram receives that neoliberal rhetoric, and the powerful double-edged-ness with which he deploys it. Balram constantly appropriates ideas and words, and the neoliberal language he picks up from his driver’s seat. One of the most compelling images in this respect is that of the Johnnie Walker Black whiskey bottle. Balram knows from other drivers and from his own experience that English liquor is more expensive than country-made liquor. He also knows that an *empty* Johnnie Walker bottle, carelessly left behind by the employer in the car, is just as expensive because of its resale value. It can be refilled with cheap liquor and sold at a profitable price. However, what he *actually* does with the empty bottle of Johnnie Walker to extract its value far exceeds this petty bootlegging. He smashes Ashok’s skull with it. “I rammed the bottle down. The glass ate his bone. I rammed it three times into the crown of his skull, smashing through his brains.” He concludes

unsentimentally, “It’s a good, strong bottle, Johnnie Walker Black—well worth its resale value” (285). After murdering Ashok, Balram not only absconds with his money but also takes on his former employer’s name. In the ultimate act of political reinvention, he signs his letter to Wen Jiabao as “Ashok Sharma.”

The usefulness of the empty bottle of Johnny Walker Black usually lies in the possibility of refilling it and selling it on the black market. In the way the other drivers use such a bottle, its use value is in fact coupled to its exchange value by virtue of the English brand names. By killing his master with that bottle, Balram uses it to exchange his person, name, and financial means with those of Ashok Sharma. Further deepening the exchange values of such a bottle, Balram uses it to establish an equivalence between himself and his master. As he transitions from a marginalized citizen to a citizen as a consumer, the knowledge of the English language helps Balram to claim a new political space and identity for himself. English is not simply the literal language of English but encompasses its materiality and its visual life. Balram splits English along its symbolic and literal meanings, transforming it into an object and a commodity that he can wield. In this political economy of the sign, form takes priority over content; the English language literally functions like a currency and as an object of use—a murder weapon—as in the example above.

Related to this tendency, one of the ways in which Balram emulates Ashok while the latter was alive is by paying attention to his choices as a consumer. Blending the sartorial, the visual and the linguistic register into a single semiotic register, Balram describes Ashok’s attire thus: “[I]t was like no T-shirt I would ever choose to buy at a

store. The larger part of it was empty and white and there was a small design in the centre. I would have bought something very colorful, with lots of words and designs on it. Better *value* for the money” (150, my italics). Balram decides to buy a similar shirt the next time he goes shopping for clothes, and picks up a pair of black shoes and toothpaste as well. Hygiene, another presumed marker of class and caste difference, is also something Balram learns from Ashok. The value of the T-shirt, in this case, is not simply as a piece of clothing to cover a naked human body but is indistinguishable from its exchange value as a shirt of a specific English brand that is also worn by Ashok. In this association with the T-shirt, the English language is really the commodity that Balram wishes to purchase. As he tells us in the novel, Balram rejects many T-shirts before he chooses this one with the one English word.

Balram wears this outfit on two occasions, though he always keeps it in the car with him. The first time he wears it is when he wants to enter the mall to experience the world his employers inhabited. He is afraid, however, that the security guard at the entrance would identify him as a “paid driver” and humiliate him. “I was sure the guard in front of the door would challenge me and say, ‘No, you’re not allowed in,’ even with a pair of black shoes and a T-shirt that is mostly white with just one English word on it” (152). Nevertheless, despite all his fears and anxiety, no one recognizes Balram or stops him from entering the privatized public space of neoliberal economy. Balram is able to live the fugitive(’s) life. Significantly, the second time Balram wears this outfit is right after murdering Ashok. He changes into this T-shirt and these shoes before he drives away in the car. The T-shirt and that one English word furnish him with a new “fugitive”

identity, and one transgression, *crime* as the narrative would have the reader believe, leads to another. That plain white T-shirt with only one English word on it is like an empty canvas, which Balram fashions to his own freedom from the colors and multitude of narratives of his servant's attire. With this tastefully selected attire, Balram is no longer dressed like a servant but as an English-speaking master who belongs in a Honda City car. The clothes and the one English word equip Balram with the anonymity from class and caste branding that Bakha and the Dalit characters of Navaria's stories cherish. The *value* of Balram's shirt, then, is not simply its use value but also its exchange value—almost in excess of what can be captured by the brand name—that literally opens the doors that had historically been closed for Balram and his ilk.<sup>56</sup> Clad in it, Balram enters the mall. However, more than that, this shirt allows Balram to be *read* as an upper class figure and facilitates his admission into that class.

Just before he actually murders Ashok, Balram again displays an uncanny comprehension of the “value” of the English language. His plan had been to take Ashok to a deserted road at night, make him step out of the car on the pretext of a problem with the tire, and kill him when he is bent over examining the problem. But as it turns out, Ashok seems reluctant to step out and wants to telephone for help. This leaves Balram with no other option but to blackmail Ashok with the knowledge of his previous sexual liaisons. Referring to the car, he says, “It's been giving me problems ever since that night we went to the hotel [...] The one with the big T sign on it. You remember it, don't you, sir?” (283). Balram's use of his knowledge of the ‘T’ sign, one Ashok did not even

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<sup>56</sup> According to Shaden Tageldin, this talismanic quality of the single English word also recalls the fetishistic quality of the commodity.

presume he could read, is important as it neither attests to his English literacy nor makes him a more reliable narrator. Instead, it transforms the terms of his everyday experience because of its symbolic meaning. After he hints to his knowledge here, Ashok is more willing to listen to him. This tendency to claim signifiers culminates in him taking on Ashok's name after murdering him.

It is also in the English language that Balram constructs a textual genealogy for himself that, eventually, severs him from a modern lineage of English. Balram often mentions that he finds literature comforting and inspiring and quotes Urdu poetry to prove his point—Iqbal, Rumi, Mirza Ghalib. There is “a fourth fellow, also a Muslim, whose name I've forgotten—has written a poem where he says this about slaves: ‘They remain slaves because they can't see what is beautiful in this world’” (40). Together, these lines become formative in strengthening Balram's resolve to murder Ashok. Balram's inability to remember the name of the fourth poet is intriguing. In quoting these lines without credit, a plagiarism akin to his other practices in the novel, Balram establishes something akin to a *silsilah* of poets. The word “*silsilah*” literally means a chain of succession, or transmission, usually established by quotation and invocation between an *ustad* (master-poet) and a *shagird* (student/apprentice). Balram Halwai can be read as participating in a *silsilah* when he quotes Rumi, Ghalib and Iqbal, indicating that *that* is the tradition he wants to place himself in. His love for Urdu poetry, and not an English novel, is a disavowal of the distinctly modern ideology of the postcolonial Anglophone novel and the English language. Balram inserts himself in the *silsilah* of

Urdu poets by reciting lines that invite one to escape slavery by noticing the beautiful in the world.

This act of insertion, on the part of Balram, also realizes his desire to break out of the rooster coop that maintains the master and slave dialectic.<sup>57</sup> As he offers his analysis of inequality and injustice in India, in his letter to Jiabao, Balram declares that it is the servant himself who is responsible for his own suffering. It is the mentality of the servant class to surrender to “perpetual servitude.” This ideology of the “rooster coop” is so strong that “you can put the key of his emancipation in a man’s hands and he will throw it back at you with a curse” (147). The way to break out of it, arguably, is to recognize the servile mentality. Later when Ashok is despondent after his wife has left him, Balram again invokes the metaphor of the rooster coop. As he wipes Ashok’s vomit and takes care of him, Balram wonders where his genuine concern for his master ended and where his self-interest began: “Do we loathe our masters behind a facade of love—or do we love them behind a facade of loathing? ‘We are made mysteries to ourselves by the Rooster Coop (sic) we are locked in’” (160). The lines from Urdu poetry, exhorting the slaves to look for beauty in the world, demystify the rooster coop. The alliance with the poets separates Balram from the social tussle that English and Hindi languages represent. Instead, it places him in the space of Urdu literary tradition, which at once presents a theoretical space to upend the Hindi-English social and literary hegemony, as well as the

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<sup>57</sup> Balram uses the “rooster coop” as a metaphor for the lives of the poor in India: “Go to Old Delhi, and look at the way they keep chickens there in the market. Hundreds of pale hens and brightly colored roosters, stuffed tightly into wire-mesh cages. They see the organs of their brothers lying around them. They know they are next, yet they cannot rebel. They do not try to get out of the coop. The very same thing is done with humans in this country” (147).

historical space to complicate their binaristic dynamics. Balram, ironically, rises to the middle class—no longer remains a slave—by rejecting the Hindu majority culture and the forward moving conception of modernity in favor of the minority Muslim culture in India.

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In contrast to the Urdu literary tradition that Balram wishes to place himself in, Ram Mohammad Thomas in *Q&A* finds his deliverance by comparing himself to Raju Guide from R.K. Narayan's *The Guide* (1958). In his description of his stint as a tour guide to the Taj Mahal, Ram says, "The fact that I spoke fluent English immediately gave me a head start. Foreign tourists flocked to me, and pretty soon the fame of Raju Guide had spread far and wide" (Swarup, 253). However, when we first meet him, Ram is being beaten in jail for having cheated on the popular quiz show, *Who Will Win a Billion?* One of the first statements made about Ram is, "How can you expect him to speak in English? He is just a dumb waiter in some godforsaken restaurant?" (5). But Ram *does* speak English in the novel, and based on what he says, he is also acquitted of the wrongful crime of cheating on the game show.

In fact, each time Ram speaks in English, he is telling a deeper truth about himself, and restating the claim of the supposedly "illegitimate speaker" to English. This is integral to the plot of the novel because Ram is narrating to an audience (besides the reader) who will decide whether he really cheated in the quiz show or not. This person is a lawyer who decides to bail him out and to take up his case. She not only tests Ram's narrative for plausibility but also matches it against her life in an ultimate test of his



honesty. As we later discover, the lawyer was also his neighbor at an earlier point in life, and when Ram recounts experiences from that period, his “memories,” she can match them as facts against her own.

Not only is *Q&A*, like *The White Tiger*, a first person narrative, it is a narrative that is deeply preoccupied with facts and with telling the truth. All the questions that Ram is asked on show require the knowledge of English language and the dominant Anglophone culture (British, American, and Australian). As I mentioned earlier, each chapter describes the difficulties that Ram had to endure to “experience” the answers. The reader is, thus, comforted by the fact that while Ram did not work hard and compete in the hamster cage of higher education, his knowledge of the answers (and the prize money they win) is, indeed, well-earned and well-deserved. *Q&A* represents the convergence of neoliberal fantasies and liberal structures of meritocracy, insofar as it not only vindicates but also valorizes Ram’s self-taught English (neoliberal fantasy) within the framework of an exam-like quiz show (liberal structure).

In a scene that illuminates the power of global English to reward Ram and recalls both Bakha’s and Balram’s (and Ambedkar’s) interest in putting on English clothes, he is traveling on a train for the first time with a ticket he has bought from working at the Australian Embassy. He writes, “Today I am a bona fide passenger, traveling to Mumbai, in the sleeper class no less, and with a proper reservation. I am wearing a starched white bush shirt made of 100% cotton and Levi’s jeans, yes Levi’s, bought from the Tibetan market” (150). Ram is a bona fide passenger even though his American-English brand of

clothes may be counterfeit.<sup>58</sup> His pride in a proper reservation (and no awareness that his prized clothing items may be fake) is revelatory of the ideological impulse of the novel, which consistently affirms the state. In a crucial contrast to *The White Tiger*, where Balram steals his newly acquired wealth from his employer, Ram has earned the money honestly.

As he finally finds his seat in the train and observes the other passengers, Ram thinks to himself, “Looking at a typical middle-class family scene in front of me, I don’t feel like an interloper anymore. I am no longer an outsider peeping into their exotic world but an insider who can relate to them as equal, talk to them in their own language. Like them, I can now watch middle class soaps, play Nintendo, and visit Kids Mart on weekends” (153). Ram wishes to speak the language of the middle class—names of popular TV shows, games, and shopping centers—so that he can be a part of the middle class. In the phrase “in their own language,” English is no longer the language of the colonizer but that of the Indian middle class. Ram’s induction into this class is possible because he has “small manageable desires,” that do not include chasing money or displacing the middle class.<sup>59</sup> As the plot unfolds, we discover that Ram did not come on the game show for money or fame but to take revenge. The quiz show host, a famous

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<sup>58</sup> There are a number of “Tibetan markets” in different parts of India. These are found in areas where Tibetan refugees were located by the Indian government. Such markets are mostly famous for selling fake designer clothes and accessories along with authentic Tibetan clothing and jewelry, among other items.

<sup>59</sup> While the phrase “small, manageable desires,” ostensibly, casts Ram as a possible foil to Balram, the unmistakable neoliberal vocabulary of “management” belies that distinction. In another reading, the only difference between Ram and Balram is that Ram knows when to stop. While it is Balram who wrote his life-story as a how-to book of entrepreneurship and management, it is Ram who executes that wisdom judiciously.

Indian film star, had abused two women in Ram's life, a former employer and his ladylove, and he wants to avenge their ill-treatment.

Deservedly so, then, English literature proves to be the final vindication of Ram's merit. As the quiz show organizers realize that Ram will soon be able to win the game and that they will have to shell out the money before they had planned to, they throw harder questions at Ram. These are the kinds of questions one would not expect a waiter to answer, as they presumably lie well beyond a waiter's realm of everyday experience. The twelfth question, thus, is on English Literature, on Shakespeare to be precise. It is about which play features "Costard," the fool who misuses English words. The answer is *Love's Labour's Lost* but Ram does not know it. He calls an English teacher in small town India whom he had once helped and who owes him a favor. In an unmistakable nod to the nature of English literary studies in small Indian towns, the teacher is also not certain of the answer. Yet in perhaps the ultimate embodiment of the "accidental English" that Ram's knowledge and use of the language represent, the English teacher's guess turns out to be correct, and Ram goes on to win the prize money.

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The rhetoric of neoliberalism in *The White Tiger* has been critiqued in popular and academic criticism, where many have read the novel as valorizing exigencies of the market. Balram's self-enterprising and self-managing individuality, his eponymous exceptionalism (he is the "white tiger" after all), does not respond adequately to the structural problem he wishes to tackle and extinguishes his political existence. At best, Balram is a dummy for market rationalities. However, the textual politics of *The White*

*Tiger*, in fact, do not champion the logic of the market. Balram utilizes his “half-baked” (Adiga, 7) knowledge of English for economic gains but the novel consistently enacts a moral critique of Balram’s rise. This is best thrown into relief by my comparison of *The White Tiger* with the narrative and fate of Ram Mohammad Thomas in *Q&A*. The format of the quiz show in the latter is reminiscent of the English-language civil service examinations that bureaucrats like Narottam in Navaria’s “Yes, Sir,” had to take to accede to middle-class status. By contrast, Balram’s entrepreneurial success is a result of deceit and crime; it is gained by him pretending to be what he is not and cannot be verified. Unlike *Q&A*, *The White Tiger* is not a story of assiduous hard work. Balram’s approach to language, like his approach to his work, is fraudulent and, arguably, even unlawful. Balram’s “fugitive” manipulation of the language does not show the success of neoliberal competition. In fact, in its comparison with *Q&A*, it exposes the complicity of liberal and neoliberal tendencies, which do not challenge the authority of the state but affirm it and carefully hem in the “individual” as entrepreneurial.

The five texts discussed above show English in the hands (and mouths) of the “masses” and “the common people” in whose name the language occupies its state-sponsored centralizing function. These narratives draw attention to the fact that English activates anonymity and mobility that are desirable to those in positions of marginality. This access to anonymity and mobility may not be easily available to all who learn the language—formally or informally. Nonetheless, and more importantly, the prospect of such success illuminates the *desire* for English and the *strategic use* of English that must be acknowledged. The vernacular of global englishes, as it figures in the texts, is no

longer relegated to expensively gained formal education of a few but circulates, tantalizingly, within the everyday experiences of Ram, Balram, and Narottam, in a way that was not possible for Bakha. Within a globalizing neoliberal economy, the English language is available to these variously non-elite characters as a graspable catalyst of social mobility and individual advancement. In each case, however, the neoliberal promise of English is also tied to its liberal dispensation in reservation of employment opportunities and in validation by exams. In order to undo this link between liberalism and neoliberalism, it is important that, as readers, we acknowledge informal brushes with and experiences of the English language by non-elite characters. Dismissing these experiences as “unrealistic” or improperly political not only delegitimizes the (arguable) neoliberal promise of English, it also delegitimizes the complex negotiation of a language of power from positions of marginality. The desired representative capacity of the English language *in* India mirrors the way in which English literature *from* India often becomes a technology of managing linguistic diversity. In the translational process of writing that Rao identified and that we witness in three Indian English novels, English language in Indian Anglophone literature gains representative validity and claims the vernacular by absorbing a linguistic diversity within its repertoire, enfolding those who don’t speak English but must speak English. The prosthetic nature of language, its divisibility into exchange and use value as if it were a commodity and an object, offers a transformative perspective on the meanings of English. These novels, read along with Hindi Dalit literature, reveal new relations of power and intersubjectivity that the field of

postcolonial literary studies as well as the growing field of world literature must attend to.

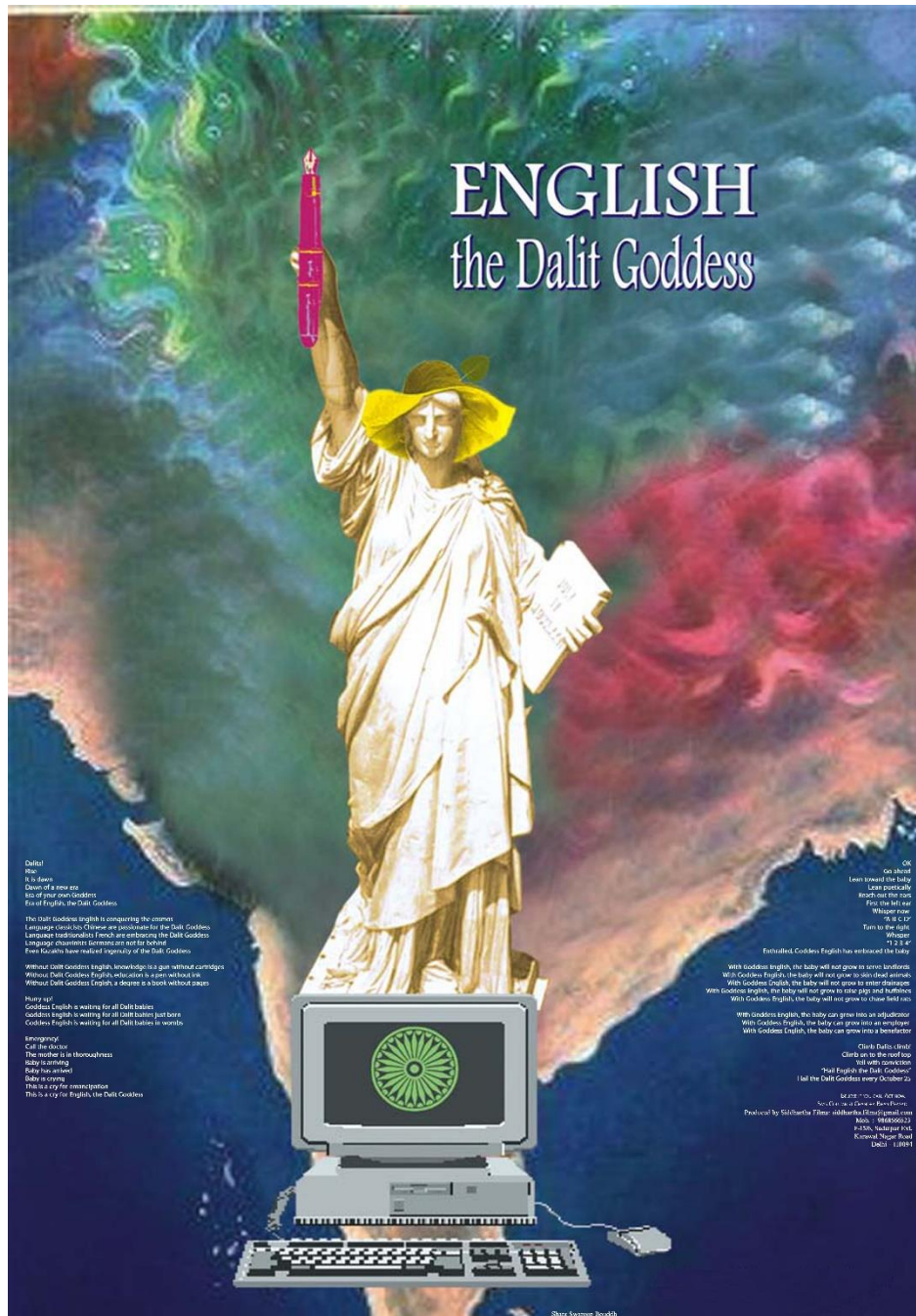


**Figure 3.1.** [www.chandrabhanprasad.com](http://www.chandrabhanprasad.com).  
A woman praying to the statue of the Dalit Goddess English in Lakhimpur-Kheri Village,  
Uttar Pradesh.



**Figure 3.2.** [www.chandrabhanprasad.com](http://www.chandrabhanprasad.com).  
The statue of the Dalit Goddess English.





**Figure 3.3.** www.chandrabhanprasad.com

The concept image for the Dalit Goddess English which Prasad created along with the sculptor, Shanti Swarup Baudh.

## Chapter 4: Between the Home and the World

The narrator of Geetanjali Shree's 1992 Hindi novel *Mai*, Sunaina, is tormented by her bilingualism.<sup>60</sup> The Hindi she speaks at home reminds her of her mother's silence. The English she reads in secret, and speaks in public, promises worlds of freedom, opportunity, and self-realization. She finds herself unable to "speak a sentence without jumbling up English and Hindi. A whole sentence could be in English but at least one word would have been in Hindi—I was saying *ki/ कि* (that)..." Sunaina recounts, "There was a remarkable phase when, whether I could speak Hindi or not, he [the brother] wanted me to speak English. The world has moved ahead rapidly outside this house, he told me. Move with it. Master it" (Shree, 93). In an English language sentence (transliterated into Devanagari in the novel), Sunaina slips into Hindi at the crucial moment of "that" as conjunction, of the grammatical transition from one part of her sentence to the next, as well as of her personal locational transition from the house to the world outside. The yoking of mobility with mastery of the language in her brother's argument is a key feature of Enlightenment modernity as it played out in colonial discourse, and one of the promises of English. Her inability to ever only speak in English, and thus to move with and master the world as her brother exhorted her to, is indexed in her struggle to leave her family home. In the face of the irreconcilability of what Hindi and English have come to stand for between the home and the world, Sunaina's linguistic hybridity is her lapse and her resistance.

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<sup>60</sup> All translations from the original Hindi of *Mai* are my own.

The association of Hindi with the mother and the home seems predictable in the novel, but Shree imagines the relation between these three coordinates slightly differently than one would expect. In *English Heart, Hindi Heartland* (2012), Rashmi Sadana quotes from her interview with Shree. Here Shree calls the Hindi she uses an idiomatic Hindi, which includes dialects and English, as opposed to the Sanskritized Hindi. We learn that her use of an idiomatic Hindi is related to her own bilingualism. Lacking formal training in Hindi, Shree writes in the language she grew up speaking at home. Thus defined, the quotidian spoken-ness and breadth of (a) mother(’s) tongue are as important as its givenness or precedence over other language relationships. Shree does not contest the notion of a mother tongue, nor does she see it as an artificial construct. In fact, she demystifies it by attributing its vitality to its spoken-ness and not to its purity. Though more intimate, “natural,” and “biological,” the mother tongue then appears very much like the vernacular and secures an affiliation with a people and a place that has been attributed to it. In *Mai*, it is expansive enough to accommodate the dialect Hindi of the grandmother, the English of her education and her brother, and the silence of her mother. Of course, a mother tongue still naturalizes a sentiment of belonging. However, what is more important, as Jing Tsu reminds us in her discussion of the figure of the native speaker in *Sound and Script in Chinese Diaspora* (2010), is the question of what is at stake in defining that sentiment and acting as if it is indeed natural (Tsu, 9).

This chapter examines vernacular englishes through the gendered imaginings of the English language. I place the inward-dwelling, hybrid, and idiomatic Hindi-English spoken by Sunaina in Shree’s *Mai* alongside the outward-looking, hybrid Hindi-English

of Hindi newspapers after the vernacular press revolution. Bilingualism and linguistic hybridity literally instantiate the (ap)proximate relationship of the super-sign between Hindi and English languages. Like *Raag Darbari*, *Mai* and *Dainik Jagran* offer us another glimpse into the global life of English as it is imagined in Hindi literary texts to show that global englishes are, indeed, better grasped as vernacular englishes. The newspaper, especially, also constitutes a specific site in which we might examine the phenomenon of social translation that Shankar theorizes and differentiates Apter's translation zone.

In each case, language-in-translation is approached intimately through the female figure, the mother in *Mai* and the woman reader in the Hindi newspapers. In *Mai*, the Hindi-English hybridity of Sunaina's narrative results from a modernist preoccupation with representation; in the Hindi newspapers it packages a commercial and aspirational image of what it means for women to be modern. Both cases are quite different from the figures we encountered in the previous chapters. Unlike the men who aspire towards a "linearity" (Sadana, 121) and a forwardly social mobility in language, what happens when women speak in English? What kind of a relationship emerges between the home and the world through this figure of the woman who speaks the translational vernacular of global englishes instead of a chaste mother tongue?

To answer these questions, I will begin with a discussion of the different ways in which the metaphor of mother tongue and feminization has been utilized for Hindi and English languages. I will then turn to the bilingualism and the linguistic hybridities in *Mai* and in the Hindi newspaper, *Dainik Jagran*, to argue that contrary to the vision of the

vernacular as locational specificity for Pollock, these texts present an expansive and a mobile vernacular. This vernacular further illuminates a worldliness which does not necessarily take us outward but towards a renewed vision of the “local” and of “home.” *Mai* and *Dainik Jagran* reveal the world as not outside the home, the nationalist space of the woman according to Partha Chatterjee. Contrary also to cosmopolitan imaginings of the world as the home, the “home” itself appears worldly, *as* the world, and English is central to the notion of this worldly home.

In her article “The Scale of World Literature” (2011), Nirvana Tanoukhi draws on Neil Smith’s theorization of scale to interrogate “the cartographic commitment” (Tanoukhi, 78) of the discipline of comparative literature even as the discipline aims to dislocate geographical divisions. Instead of taking geographical categories and the metaphor of mapping literally (as if they refer to “real” empirical divisions out in the world), Tanoukhi brings Smith into the current conversation on world literature: “The making of place implies the production of scale in so far as places are *made* different from each other; scale is the criterion of difference not between places so much as between different kinds of places” (Smith in Tanoukhi, 83, my italics). Through the metric of English-Hindi hybridity, this chapter presents the crystallization of distance between the local and the global, as we move from the liberal to the neoliberal figuration of English in post-Independence India. Contrary to the arguments that transpose the imagined purity of woman onto an equally pure notion of mother tongue, I will show that an intentionally hybrid, “contaminated,” vernacular language *also* polices gender

identities.<sup>61</sup> In the examples below, as well, the malleable “foreignness” of English, an interplay of untranslatability and translatability, assumes a central role in this process. As a result, the world of English that emerges is distinctly shaped within the home of Hindi.

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The biological metaphor of “mother” is a legacy of colonial philology and establishes a sense of intimacy and originality. As the claimant to a most intimate idiom, a primary and naturalized language, the idea of the mother tongue was crucial to instill seemingly organic feelings of nationalism as well as to strategically position Hindi as the proper language of the emerging nation. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Hindi lobbyists often cast the language as a female figure, though over time, it also came to enjoy a remarkable androgyny. In her essay “The Mortality of Hindustani” (2012), Pritipuspa Mishra writes that Hindi was often “posed as the mother of Hindi speakers as well as of all Indians” (Mishra, 77). Imagined as a chaste Hindu woman, she was unlike the promiscuous, upper class, and female Urdu. However, this idea of Hindi as a woman was not sufficient to shoulder the masculinist task of building and steering a nation, and the excessive femininity of the dialect of Brajbhasha was not fit for a “robust political movement” (77). As India became independent in 1947, the dialect of Khariboli was identified and privileged as masculine speak.<sup>62</sup> As a result, the Hindi movement was able

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<sup>61</sup> Shaden Tageldin also pointed out that the negotiation of English-Hindi hybridity also opens up to *include* Chatterjee’s “fragments” (Chatterjee 1993)—women and lower caste men—once at loggerheads with the mainstream elite male nation.

<sup>62</sup> In contrast to the eastern dialect of Awadhi used by the Principal in *Raag Darbari*, both Brajbhasha and Khariboli are dialects of Hindi spoken predominantly in western Uttar Pradesh and some areas surrounding Delhi. Much of Hindi poetry and Hindustani classical music compositions, especially ‘Bhakti’ poetry, are written in Brajbhasha. In contrast to the poetic and musical Brajbhasha, Khariboli is more prosaic and comes closest to the modern standard Hindi.

to pose Hindi as “both a feminine mother and a robust, masculine tongue that could serve the Indian nation” (77). Mishra argues that Gandhi himself utilized the idea of a mother tongue to encourage Indians to learn the languages they were regionally exposed to. The maternal energies and sentiments now attached to the “regional language” were supposed to further fortify and inspire people, like a mother would, to learn the more “pan-Indian” language, Hindustani. Over time, many other languages have similarly been mobilized as female, especially as mother figures. For instance, Tamil was imagined as *Tamiltay*, or “Mother Tamil,” and Oriya as “Utkal Janani” (Mother Utkal). In *Passions of the Tongue: Language Devotion in Tamil India, 1891-1970* (1997), Sumathi Ramaswamy discusses the strong love people felt for *Tamiltay*: a love so strong that they were willing to immolate themselves for it (her?). Slogans like “body to earth, life to Tamil” (Ramaswamy, 1) became a rousing cry in opposition to the hegemonic presence and promotion of Hindi.

The “mother” in each of these cases is rooted in a region, associated with home—an original, identity-forming connection—which makes it possible to mobilize “her” as a political symbol. The metaphor of the mother not only naturalizes the relation of the speaker to the language, but of the language to a geographic place, which may cement a nationalist or a counter-nationalist ideology. Further, the figuration of a language as a mother establishes its organic and preeminent claim on the people, and vice versa, also imbues the language as mother with formidable spiritual and maternal power. It is this reasoning that was at work in the use of *shuddha* and heavily Sanskritized vocabulary

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In fact, the word “*kharī*” in Hindi means upright and stiff. Advocates of Khariboli pejoratively refer to Brajbhasha as “*parī boli*,” where the word “*parī*” in Hindi evokes a sense of fallen and supine.

along with images of virtuous wives and daughters to cultivate strong Hindutva ideology in the 1990s. In *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation* (1992), Tanika Sarkar discusses the example of Sadhvi Rithambhara, a young Hindu ascetic and preacher, who used a Sanskritized Hindi vocabulary to propagate fundamentalist Hindu ideas. Sadhvi Rithambhara played a crucial role in the movement leading up to the demolition of the Babri Mosque on December 6, 1992. In the chapter titled “Aspects of Contemporary Hindutva Theology,” Sarkar examines Rithambhara’s exhortations to kill all Muslims, which were taped and circulated among middle and lower classes, and in fact, led to enormous communal violence. The persuasive “purity” of Sadhvi Rithambhara’s language excluded not only any Urdu, English, or dialect Hindi words but physical gestures and expressions as well. She made use of the song found in Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay’s *Anandamath* (1882), “*Vande Mataram*,” which evokes the country as the motherland. Its entreaty to slay demons was first mobilized during the nationalist movement against the British, and later in the Hindutva movement against Muslims in India in the 1990s. Rithambhara decried emasculation and eunuchs, and relied on images of combative masculinity to encourage her Hindu “brothers.” Women were usually invoked either in stories of domesticity or in heroic images that conjured up visions of *matrishakti* (maternal strength) where they were referred to simply as wombs. The geographical specificity of the male god-centered Hindutva movement was centralized in the anatomy of the women, where the Sanskritized Hindi language was the vernacular.

The role of female inspiration in the Hindutva movement of late twentieth to twenty-first centuries is similar to the manipulation of the material and spiritual binary



that Chatterjee identifies in the response of the Bengali *bhadralok* to British colonialism in the nineteenth century, which was also tied to an understanding of the space of the woman. The woman of the Bengali Hindu *bhadralok* was imagined as the last bastion of sovereignty for the Hindu nation, whose spirituality was said to be superior to western materialism. It was the figure of the woman—the inhabitant of the *ghar*, the home, and the inner spiritual sanctum—who became the site of reification of a hegemonic national identity. An idea of purity was attributed to and expected of women while men could participate in diverse “western” and “native” discourses. This process of division has resulted in what Huma Ahmed-Ghosh calls a “gendering of the nation” (Ahmed-Ghosh, 206). The woman comes to stand for the “home,” for the sacred turf that energized the nationalist movement and cannot be defiled. This reasoning relegates cultural hybridity to the man as he “reconciles heterogeneous elements that make up India’s [...] identity as a nation” (Cullity and Younger, 106). Hybridity, linguistic or otherwise, in a woman figure (especially in its “western” provenance) threatens national integrity as she can only be strait-jacketed into categories of either the good or the bad.

Among many others (Chakravarti 1998, Naregal 2002, Anagol 2005), Shefali Chandra offers a strong critique of Chatterjee’s reading from the perspective of caste, arguing that “English was not the adversary of any spiritual, feminine essence” (Chandra, 2012: 27). In *The Sexual Life of English* (2012), Chandra writes that Chatterjee is so eager to identify Hindu nationalist patriarchy as anti-colonial that he portrays female subjects as “entirely derived from male desires” (25), simply reflecting male ambivalence over colonialism’s modernity. Chandra suggests that Chatterjee does not ask the key

question of *why* upper caste men felt empowered to speak in the name of the Indian nation (25, my italics), and why they felt justified in repressing the woman question. She argues that Chatterjee overlooks the exigencies of caste and the role of the normative woman in sanctioning the exclusivity of upper-caste power.

Chandra shows that the first generation of English-educated upper caste men “tightly engineered” (19) the link between English and the normative woman. They taught the English language to *their* women to consolidate standards of caste and sexuality. Upper caste men “[seized] upon the pedagogic inclination of the civilizing mission. But in doing so, they performed a specific twist. They turned the demands of the social contract of the colonial powers towards the management of sexual difference, responding to allegations that they were inherently different from the west by citing woman as the next constituency in need of cultural pedagogy and then using their acquisition of English to manage new internal hierarchies” (10). Chandra further shows that those of the Brahmin caste actively restricted non-Brahmins from learning, but they did so by “conceding” English knowledge to another subordinate category, their womenfolk, who then, literally, reproduced the upper-caste culture. The ideals of Brahmin womanhood, “chastity, virtue, and marital devotion, redirected the charismatic power of English” (22). Restricted to the upper caste women, English acquired their norms and standards and is “reproduced” in their exclusivity. The role of the woman in *domesticating* and shaping the social capital of English knowledge as well as in multiplying it on the terms of the caste/class/nationalist group is what makes her an

attractive figure in conceptualizing a foreign language that is double-edged like English. The figure of the mother/woman solders a natal connection where one does not exist.

In fact, the figure of the woman remains important also in lower caste, especially Dalit, critiques of Hindi and in the embrace of the English language. Combining its ability to nourish and to inspire ferocity, Ambedkar himself is supposed to have referred to English in feminized and maternal terms as the “milk of lionesses, and only those who drink it will roar” (Ambedkar quoted in Doniger, 2014: 564). Savitribai Phule (1831-97), a social reformer who worked on caste and untouchability issues, also referred to English as a mother figure in her poems. Among her many Marathi language poems that praise the virtues of the English language is one titled “Mother English” (1854). Here Phule imagines that the caste system is destroyed by the English language. Knowledge, which is parsed as knowledge of English, is the only asylum for the poor (Dalits) as English protects like a mother.

Rule of Peshwa is gone

Mother English has come.

In such a dismal time of ours

Come Mother English, this is your hour.

It is all for the good of the poor

Manu’s dead at English Mother’s door.

Knowledge is poor man’s refuge and shade

It’s akin to comfort mother-made. (Phule in Anand, 2010: 1)

The line “Manu’s dead at English Mother’s door” refers to *Manusmriti* (*The Remembered Laws of Manu*), a text that is the most authoritative for Hindu code and provides justification of the caste system. The knowledge of English, Phule imagines, ends the strong influence of Manu. Phule believed that “*shudras* and *ati-shudras* [Dalits]... have the right to education and through English, casteism can be destroyed and Brahminical teaching can be hurled away” (Phule quoted in Chandra, 2010: 21). The allure of (English) education in its capacity to crush caste hierarchy endures to date.

Most recently, perhaps, we have Chandrabhan Prasad’s conception of an ironically iconoclastic and hybrid Goddess English, which we encountered in the previous chapter. Sumathi Ramaswamy in her essay, “The Work of Goddesses in the Age of Mass Reproduction” (2011), reads the Dalit Goddess as a “pastiche figure” (Ramaswamy, 2011:201) which evokes the Statue of Liberty in New York as well as the cartographed Bharat Mata or Mother India. Ramaswamy theorizes the presence of the map of India (as Bharat Mata or Mother India) with its “critical borders undone” (204) as a subversive gesture and argues that Prasad’s deity consciously invokes neither a Hindu goddess nor a mother figure, as for instance has often been done in the case of other Indian languages mentioned above. She contends that Prasad’s and Shanti Swarup Baudh’s “mimetic capture of a female figure” (213)

[...] for all appearances looks ‘Western’ (and cannot be mistaken for an Indian), and, is emphatically not a mother and cannot be readily confused with one (unlike the other goddesses of India). Indeed, in the many statements that Prasad has made on English, including ones conferring the

status of ‘goddess’ on it, he does not extend to it the *affect-inflected* category of ‘mother tongue’ by which the spoken languages of India have been referred since the later nineteenth century. So, English is to be embraced by Dalits as their new (and only) language, but not named as their mother tongue. (213, my italics)

While the English Goddess as imagined by Prasad and Baudh may not be a mother tongue, it is nonetheless an “affect-inflected” goddess figure very much like a Hindu goddess, wherein lies its subversive force. In an interview that Ramaswamy quotes in the same essay, Prasad refers to Macaulay’s birth anniversary as the day the Goddess English is to be unveiled, which he also celebrates as “English day.” This day, he exclaims, will provide Dalits with their own Dalit *Bhagvati Jagran*. *Bhagvati Jagran* refers to the congregational devotional Hindu practice of staying up all night to sing prayers to a goddess. In his article “*Jai Angrezi Devi Maiyya Ki*” (“Praise Be to Mother English”) (2010), S. Anand reports his experience of the ceremony when the idol of Prasad’s Dalit Goddess English was unveiled. He writes that after a few introductory speeches—in Hindi—emphasizing the need for English among Dalits, a song was sung for the Goddess English. This song mimics the convention of popular Hindu devotional songs and, according to Anand, consisted of the following lyrics: “London *se chal kar aayi, yeh Angrezi Devi Maiyya/ Computer-wali Maiyya, hai Angrezi Devi Maiyya/ Hum sabki devi maiyya, jan-jan ki Devi Maiyya*” (Anand, 2010: 1). In English translation this would be: “She hails from London, this Mother English/ She reigns over computers, she’s everybody’s mother” (1). The song and the introductory speeches complicate the

figuration of the Dalit Goddess English. Clearly, the Hindi of speeches and popular Hindu devotional songs is necessary to translate and to anchor the power of English. The Statue of Liberty, which invokes the United States as an attractive ally in Dalit capitalist endeavors, is also located in London and the British colonial legacy that topos invokes! But most importantly in this context is the use of the word “*maiyya*” for the Goddess English—which is, in fact, a Hindi word for mother and regularly used for goddesses as mothers of worshippers! English, then, is not only similar to a Hindu goddess in this vision, it is also, arguably, understood as a mother.

As is evident in the recomposition of popular Hindu devotional songs in praise of Hindu goddesses as praising the virtues of the Dalit Goddess English, Prasad aims to provide an alternative to the Hindu pantheon of gods and goddesses. In her essay, Ramaswamy further writes that in his critique of the ritualistic power of Sanskritized Hindi,

[Prasad] singles out ‘the powerful Saraswati-Lakshmi-Durga triumvirate,’ as he names it, as the chief weapon in the arsenal of the Hindu caste hierarchy. This in itself is a surprising claim, given that feminist scholars would point to the ‘taming’ of the goddess over the long haul of patriarchal Hinduism when male deities have ultimately triumphed, reducing the autonomous and powerful multi-armed and multiply-armed Sakti to a demure consort-figure. Nevertheless, Prasad is essentially right in maintaining the focus on the female divinity figure, given that Dalits and other oppressed beings in the Hindu-Indic world repeatedly turn to the

goddess to help them out in times of distress and trouble. And importantly, the terrain of India—which Prasad does not want to relinquish as he charts out his agenda for Dalit capitalism—has become through nationalist symbolic activities (secular as well as Hindu) the realm of the goddess Mother India from whom essentially the Dalit project has to wean away its constituents. The struggle for power takes place on an essentially feminized terrain around contending female bodies. (206)

Then, Prasad’s Goddess English is as much a *rival* as it is an *alternative* to the feminine triumvirate of the Hindu goddesses of learning, prosperity, and strength, and to the feminized figure of India as the motherland. Interestingly, Rajagopalachari had also conceived of English as the gift of goddess Saraswati, who is considered the goddess of learning in the Hindu pantheon. In fashioning her so, Prasad continues the caste-based struggle, as identified by Chandra, on “an *essentially* feminized terrain around contending female bodies” (my italics) and *contributes* to the “taming” of the goddess. Shivam Vij in his article on Prasad’s English Goddess remains skeptical, arguing that just as praying to Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, does not bring one wealth, praying to Goddess English will not bring the knowledge of English. In his conversation with Vij, Prasad clarifies the intended effect of the figure of the Goddess English, which is not that the idol will magically bestow the knowledge of English on its worshippers. Instead, the effectiveness of the Goddess English lies in its affective resonances and the fact that the religious practices of Dalits overlap a lot with popular Hinduism. “Even where Dalits converted to Buddhism, it’s mostly the men who visit the Buddha Vihara and contemplate an abstract

religion devoid of ritual. The womenfolk easily seek comfort in popular goddesses. They need birth or marriage rituals. Besides, in a family, it is important to convince the mother of the empowerment that English will ensure her children. This is best conveyed once English becomes a Dalit goddess” (Prasad in Vij, 1). Prasad’s Goddess English, a feminized figure, is expressly an “affect-inflected” appeal to the Dalit women as mothers to teach their children the English language. The goddess as “*maiyya*” will “animate” and “inspire” (Prasad in Vij, 1) Dalits to learn English. Indeed, in his columns for the English newspaper, *Pioneer*, Prasad has urged Dalit mothers to make sure that the first sounds a Dalit baby hears are those of the English alphabet.

Despite Ramaswamy’s claims to the contrary, it would be reasonable to suggest that the Dalit Goddess English is, after all, not only a goddess but also a mother. English is perhaps not the mother tongue, but it is very much a mothered tongue. It very much functions, protects, and nourishes like a mother even if it does not ostensibly activate the “naturalness” of a maternal relationship. The figuration of English as a mother authorizes and legitimizes the claim of the Dalit to the English language. The “essentially” of Ramaswamy’s analysis is too loose of a descriptor because, as she herself has noticed, the figure of the Goddess is a “western” woman. She is not an Indian woman like Mother India, nor is the Goddess making a claim to indigeneity like the Hindi lobbyists who present Hindi itself as a mother of Hindustani. The Goddess, unfortunately, is also not fashioned in the image of the Dalit women who must worship her and who transmit the knowledge of English without ever really realizing its potential in their own lives.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> According to Shaden Tageldin, in the form of the statue, the Dalit Goddess looks far less stately—plebeian—than in its rendition in the concept-image. Perhaps the transformation



In his subversive gesture that opens the critical borders of the nation state outwards, Prasad still imagines the English language as a western woman dressed not only in robes but also the colonial headgear of *sola topee*. Goddess English can be imagined in and prayed to within popular Hindu practices, but it cannot be garbed in Indian clothes. In her analysis, Ramaswamy “tropicalizes” the figure, tracing it back to Egypt and China but finds it overwhelmingly, for all appearances, “western.” The iconicity of English as it emerges in the Dalit Goddess English is not only strategically hybrid, it also draws its effect from the very un/translatability of English. The hybridity of Prasad’s goddess stands in a contrast and a challenge to Sadhvi Rithambhara’s performative monolingualism, as does its confusing Anglo-American western-ness. The Goddess has aspects of both of the Statue of Liberty as well as of popular Hinduism. Its benediction is English but it must be welcomed in Hindi. The promise and power of English, for an advocate like Prasad, stems precisely from the fact that it belongs outside *savarna* politics. It belongs in a world that is free of caste-based asymmetries or, at least, one where those asymmetries are minimized. Ironically, that utopian world, in the context of the Dalit Goddess English, is secured not only through the “affect-inflected” relationship to Hindi language and Hindu religion but also on the “essentially feminized terrain”—the essentially maternal terrain—of a proverbial home whose doors are also open to the world. This critical move parallels the maneuvers of the English-knowing Brahmins and the Bengali *bhadralok* identified by Shefali Chandra: instead of banishing the woman from the expanding scope of English, it places the figure of the woman right

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parallels the distinctly populist means, detailed above, by which the idea of the Dalit Goddess in the English language has to be made understandable to the Dalit community.

at the center of it. Instead of simply opening up the nation to the world beyond, the step forward and outward must be traced by receding inwards first.

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As if in response to the impulse in both Prasad and Sadhvi Rithambhara, Geetanjali Shree's choice of an idiomatic Hindi instead of an ideological Hindi is as much a step to distance herself from the Hindutva rhetoric as it is to remove herself from the language that appears inordinately controlled by men. This dual disavowal is made possible by a natural-ness with which the mother and the mother tongue, Hindi, impinge on Sunaina's consciousness (Sadana, 121). Mai, the mother, is the central figure in the novel and is presented through the eyes of her children, Sunaina and her brother, Subodh. They see her as someone who is trapped at home in "*purdah*" (a veil, both literal and metaphorical), always bent over the kitchen fire, in service of the family's whims and fancy, with no freedom and no desires of her own. In the beginning, Sunaina fears that she will meet the same fate as her mother and tries to rebel and escape in a number of ways. Sunaina fights Mai and the weakness she seems to embody with the English language but both return to her, *in* her own mannerisms, in ways she does not expect and understand. Sunaina's and Subodh's access to English education and literature emboldens their critique of their mother, and literally supplies its vocabulary as Subodh refers to their mother as "spineless" (Shree, 11) and "illiterate" (93).

But the brother-sister duo develops dissimilar relationships with English. Sunaina is always encouraged to *learn* English by the male members of the household but she is never really encouraged to *speak* in it on her own terms. Her knowledge of English is

only an attractive asset on the marriage market, and when not literally directed by a male figure, it is puppeteered by the expectations of a patriarchal society. Sunaina must not be too shy to speak in English for, as her grandmother reminds her, “in today’s times no one will marry [her]” (34). On the other hand, all members of the family fawn over how Subodh talks just like an Englishman. Referring to her grandfather, Sunaina writes, “Dada wanted that I should learn English. But not speak it. Or Hindi either. That is, not speak at all” (30). Subodh is sent to a boarding school run by the “English” (possibly, Anglo-Indians) whereas Sunaina goes to what is likely a locally-run missionary school, “Sunny Side Convent.” Subodh introduces Sunaina to political theory and Victorian literature but the library at Sunny Side Convent only stocks what young women presumably prefer, the novels of Barbara Cartland. When Sunaina borrows the unavailable literature from her male friends, she is frowned upon for unnecessarily mingling with men. Sunaina struggles to get permission to study visual art outside their town, whereas Subodh’s higher studies in London are a source of family pride. Sunaina’s access to English is already contaminated and mediated whereas Subodh establishes his authority by directly studying under the English and then traveling to London. It is almost as if the strength of the English that reaches Sunaina is diluted in comparison to the direct access that Subodh enjoys. The novel creates a hierarchy of access where what reaches Sunaina is already compromised, the hybridity of English and Hindi not as effective as the knowledge of English gained by studying under the English or used in London.

Subodh seeks to rescue both Sunaina and their mother to London. He lures Sunaina with visions of unparalleled creative freedom, everyday independence, and *real*

appreciation for her artwork. In preparation for this glorious life, Subodh says that he “will teach her good English, make sure she has a great accent, get her out of here...” (36). Sunaina never masters the world or the word. She finds herself increasingly drawn to her mother’s past, unable to critique her actions. Consumed with guilt and anguish about her inability to understand the mother, to support and save her (if saving were indeed needed), Sunaina never leaves the house. Unknowingly, she replicates her mother’s life and her mother’s bent spineless figure as she becomes increasingly like one of those “girls educated in English medium schools who, as they grow up, cover their knees carefully with their frocks, join their legs, straighten their backs, make their hankies into balls in their hands on their laps, and at everything move slightly and say, ‘Sorry’, ‘thank you’, ‘Pardon’, ‘excuse me’” (134). In this encounter with the mother tongue Hindi as the mother’s tongue, what do we make of this tormented bilingualism of Sunaina’s speech, the unobtrusive politeness of her English, and the near natal silence of her Hindi? Is the slippage into Hindi in an otherwise English sentence simply a failure of translation and transition from the home to the world?

The lack of mastery of English is not so much a matter of not knowing the English language but of not finding it commensurate to one’s life experiences, and so in not using it. It is not that Sunaina does not know the English language, but that she has not mastered it to the point of monolingualism. More accurately, she has not allowed herself to be mastered by the English language and what it stands for—patronizing patriarchal control. Sunaina’s relationship to English is similar to Derrida’s relationship to French in *Monolingualism of the Other*, where he writes, “When I said that the only

language I speak is not mine, I did not say it was foreign to me” (Derrida, 5). In fact, Derrida also deconstructs the notion of mastery over a language when he declares that the master himself is never completely the master: “Contrary to what one is often most tempted to believe, the master is nothing. And he does not have exclusive possession of anything”—including “his language,” which “does not possess exclusively, and naturally” (23). Subodh’s encouragement that Sunaina *master* English to move with the world is critiqued in Sunaina’s bilingualism and hybridity, which further casts doubts on Subodh’s “mastery” of the language and the world.

The bilingual and hybrid world is one that defies mastery in and over oneself. Sunaina’s original relationship with her mother tongue (as a language but also a way of being) does not embolden her in identifiable ways: she loses her fiery personality, and becomes more subdued physically and in her speech. However, as she grows closer to her mother/tongue, she notices the gendered biases of her brother’s politics and the condescension in his approach towards her. A more complicated picture of Mai emerges in Sunaina’s eyes. She remembers her mother in moments of strength and recalls what she *had* said as opposed to the times she had not spoken. She remembers the one time her mother had stood up to her grandfather, and the many times she would dress up and go to the local service club. The mother tongue is not as woefully monolingual and quiet as it had appeared to Sunaina in her childhood. It is not as stringently stripped but accommodates, even requires and motivates, heterogeneous linguistic practices, wherein lies its most enabling vitality.

The mother tongue is untranslatable and ridden with debt and guilt, Gayatri Spivak suggests in “Translation and Culture” (2000), but what we see increasingly emerge in Shree’s text is both a translatability and an untranslatability. The writing of the novel is itself an exercise towards working out this contradiction. Invoking a spatial metaphor, Sunaina opens the novel with, “I cannot do anything else until I narrate *mai*. I want to narrate ‘*mai*’ but the distance between ‘*mai*’ (sic) and the ‘narration’ is so troubled, so full of opposition, that one doesn’t know how to...” (Shree, 122). Mai cannot be narrated, and yet Sunaina not only narrates Mai, she assumes Mai as well. The two senses of *represent* come together by the end of the novel. Sunaina is more and more convinced that her exercise to write about Mai is as futile as attempts to speak up for her mother in her childhood. As metonymy, Mai is also related to the mother tongue, and whether Sunaina realizes this or not, her torment about her mother’s so-called “liberation” manifests in her speech, in its un/translatability. Spivak writes that “translation” is at best a catachrestic term but even so, “being human is predicated on the task of translation” (Spivak, 21). Translation implies a responsibility both in and to the two languages involved. This relationship with the other is based on a suspension in the text of the other, and Spivak compares it to a debt, a “*matririn*” (the mother debt). Her understanding of translation has a distinct evocation of “reparation,” as she herself suggests: “I grasp my responsibility to take from my mother-tongue (sic) and give to the ‘target’-language through the ethical concept metaphor of *matririn* (mother-debt)—a debt to the mother as well as a debt (that) the (place of the) mother is” (15). The un/translatability of Mai as manifested in Sunaina’s tormented bilingualism becomes the

only ethical way in which she can “save” her mother and challenge the liberalism of patriarchal distinctions between the home and the world, and the imperative to cross them. The feminization of the bilingual language—shy, hesitant, and rebellious—presents a more ethical “recuperation” of Mai. It critiques the imperialistic vision of Subodh’s world through a more nuanced understanding of home and who resides there.

One of the ways in which the enduring foreignness and authority of English is registered in the postcolonial context is that the English language is always a language that must be learnt or taught. English played an important role in colonial education and continues to do so in postcolonial India. In *Mai*, Sunaina rejects this didactic stance of the language, and seizes it as part of a more deep and defiant vocabulary. In “In Praise of Creoleness” (1990), Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant write that for a

Creole poet or novelist, writing in an idolized French or Creole is like remaining motionless in a place of action, not taking a decision in a field of possibilities, being pointless in a place of potentialities, voiceless in the midst of the echoes of a mountain. Having no language within the language, therefore having no identity. This in the field of writing, is being unable to achieve writing. Aesthetically, it is dying. (Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant, 901)

Sunaina risks similar immobilization in the English language where Subodh’s interdiction delegitimizes her experiences and voice. However, she does not, in fact, become immobilized but fumbles for words in Hindi and in English. The English

language, spoken on Sunaina's own terms, is central to recapitulating a home and to feeling at home. English is not the distance between the home and the world as it was for Bimala in Rabindranath Tagore's *The Home and the World* (1916).<sup>64</sup> As a corollary, the home and the world are also not two geographical locations separated in the way Subodh imagined them, which can be bridged by speaking English correctly in the right accent. In the failure of the patriarchal interpellative force of English, the vernacular of English stays at home and challenges the conceptual and material inevitability of the world.

From the bilingual and hybrid "mother tongue" of English-Hindi, we now turn to another scene of intimacy cast on the figure of the woman in the English language: the hybrid language of Hindi newspapers in the decade of the 1990s. In a sense, the turn to *Dainik Jagran* from *Mai* provides an opportunity to read Apter's CNN Creole in light of the affective, sweeping, and inclusive creole vision instantiated in *Mai*. In *The Translation Zone*, Apter writes that "[t]hrough they occupy opposite sides of the political spectrum, the one postcolonial, the other corporate, Creole idioms and trademark nominatives share the fact that they are 'foreign' phonemes that have forced their way into the host language, interrupting the course of its lexical flow" (Apter, 2006: 175). If we take a simplistic perspective—viewing English as foreign and Hindi as native—then the foreign visitor and/or guest "interrupts" the host language in *Mai* and *Dainik Jagran*

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<sup>64</sup> In the allegorical novel *The Home and the World*, Bimala stands for the nation. She is forcibly educated by her liberal humanist husband, Nikhil. He wants Bimala to enter the modern world by learning the English language and English manners and engages an English governess, Miss Gilby, to instruct her. Gradually Bimala gains acquaintance with the outer world through Miss Gilby who virtually becomes a member of the household. Nikhil also clothes Bimala in western clothes, opens his library for her consumption, and compels her to meet his revolutionary friend, Sandip. As the novel progresses, Bimala—encouraged by Nikhil and flattered by the attention Sandip showers on her—becomes deeply enamored with Sandip and his revolutionary jingoistic ideas about the nation. As the novel stages a debate over the conception of a nation, the English language and English knowledge play an important role in defining the nation and the world.



as the order to learn English always stems from patriarchal manipulations of the woman function. However, as we already know, Sunaina draws on a hybrid and bilingual narrative precisely to reject Subodh's patriarchal and monolingual imposition. In *Dainik Jagran*, as well, the foreignness of English does not necessarily interrupt the territorial nativity of the host language (and discourse) but, in fact, strengthens and cements it further.

As I mentioned earlier in Chapter 1, Apter defines CNN Creole as the “*lingua franca* of global capital” (Apter, 2006: 168) as it results from the intersection of brand names with “languages of reception.” *Dainik Jagran* does not feature any brand names (except in advertisements) as common and nonce words. Instead, the English language—selectively appropriated through strategic un/translatibility—is itself instrumentalized like a brand. The figure of the woman further magnifies the mystique that facilitates the continuity and mobility embodied in brand. Instead of a simplified interruption of the “local” host language by a “roving” foreign language, we see that their interaction replots the limits of the local and the global, which preserves traditional gender boundaries. If Sadhvi Rithambhara was one face of the Hindutva movement in the late-twentieth century, these newspapers comprise the other face as they strengthen the connection between a patriarchal religious orthodoxy and a neoliberal orthodoxy.

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“विज्ञापन में दिखाई जाने वाली खूबसूरत ज़िंदगी आपकी भी हो सकती है, बशर्ते आप इसे जीने का सलीका सीख लें!” (The beautiful life shown in advertisements can be yours too, provided you learn how to live it properly) (1). This sentence appears at the end of an article titled “खूबसूरत बनायें ज़िंदगी को”

(Make Your Life Beautiful) in *Sangini*, the women's magazine supplement of the Hindi daily, *Dainik Jagran*. Immediately, the article announces the space of the newspaper as advertorial and instructional. Just as this article promises to educate its female reader into an apposite code of conduct were she desirous of "the good life" of advertisements, so also *Sangini* functions as a conduit through which a fitting degree of hybridization is negotiated for the modern woman reader of the newspaper. *Sangini* is a four-page color supplement targeted at women readers of *Dainik Jagran* that appears every Saturday with all its editions. The masthead of the newspaper reads in Devanagari script "संगिनी—ज़िंदगी के हर पहलू की" (Partner—of each aspect of life) and claims for itself a status of a partner for its reader, in each aspect of life.<sup>65</sup> In addition, it functions towards interpellating its readers as *sangini* (a mate) for their respective husbands, and fixes women, not as women, but as wives. *Sangini* also seems to assume an exclusive readership of married (not upper) middle class women.<sup>66</sup> The many references to men, their presence in the images and in the bylines of some articles, however, belie the nature of the supplement as a conversation between women as each other's partners.

With a number of advertisements and feature stories, *Sangini* contains the most English words in Roman script and in Devanagari transliteration of any other section of the newspaper. *Sangini* has a specific format with different content every week, which

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<sup>65</sup> *Sangini—Zindagi Ke Har Pehloo Ki*

<sup>66</sup> The "Offer Prospectus" pegs the *Dainik Jagran* footprint at a population of 500 million and a base of 95 million households. Of these, 34.2 million own a television set, 11.4 million own refrigerators, 11 million own 2-wheelers and 1.6 million own cars. The footprint accounts for 48 per cent of India's SEC A households and 52 per cent of India's entire Rs. 15,000+ income group. *Dainik Jagran* offers the largest reach amongst newspapers within the highest urban and rural socio-economic categories (SEC AB and C) most coveted by advertisers. (Prospectus, 28).

usually includes a double column interview with a non-Bollywood celebrity. One such interview with the English-language U.S. diasporic Indian writer, Jhumpa Lahiri, primarily focused on her “वैवाहिक जीवन” (married life). Even though Lahiri was introduced as a professionally successful woman and the interview appeared after the release of *The Unaccustomed Earth* (2008), there was no mention of her literary success and the conversation focused only on Lahiri’s life with her husband.

The middle pages of *Sangini* have an assortment of advice and tutorial boxes that cover topics of make-up, skincare, housekeeping, cooking, parenting, religion (always Hinduism) and health. Women readers are given easy “hacks” to fake a look they, presumably, cannot afford. For instance, in the October 18, 2008, article “*Baniye Smart Homemaker*” (Become a Smart Homemaker), the writer advises readers to use beads and sequins on fabric torn from an old *sari* to give their cushion cover a “rich look” (Bali, 3). The last page features a detailed interview with a female celebrity from Hollywood or from the Hindi film industry, such as Charlize Theron, Milla Jovovich, and Madhuri Dixit. In my research on the 1990s and early 2000s issues of *Sangini*, I discovered that these interviews are most likely a part of syndicated content and not, in fact, conducted by *Jagran Sangini*’s own staff. There were no quotation marks to distinguish the interviewee from the interviewer and the writer, and chunks of textual matter reappeared in different interviews. The topics of these interviews remained the same. The actresses were always asked about their food preferences, views on marriage, favorite pastimes and religious beliefs. Their answers (whether it was Milla or Madhuri) remained exactly the same. They liked homemade food, enjoyed cooking and would marry someone they were

emotionally compatible with. “Like all,” these actresses too relished dressing up, spent their free time shopping or going out with friends and were all religious. The interviews then are an instructive example of how the newspaper deploys a number of foreign figures/ideas and words only to bolster traditional patriarchal gender ideologies. Here this exercise leads to the creation of Indianized Hollywood actresses and fairly “westernized” Indian actresses. The phrase “like all,” always deployed, underscores the translatability of ideas across the vernacular and the global, and the forgery and plagiarism in translation literally erase the differences between them.

Besides the interview, *Sangini* always carries a lead story, the themes of which can be classified into two categories: marital/sexual/interpersonal and personal development/self-improvement. Each of the articles in the first category unfailingly stresses the importance and sanctity of a heterosexual marriage and the need to protect it in the face of an attack from “पश्चिमी सभ्यता” (western civilization). Here discussions are usually conducted in standard Hindi without any English words as if the non-admission of English words itself thwarts the imagined onslaught of the western civilization. English words, when used, are primarily indicative of concepts that are deemed untranslatable, unacceptable, and foreign to the context. The attitude of writers to ideas/words like “relationship,” “partner,” and “live-in” (cohabitation) remains ambiguous at best. A “relationship” is parsed as what one would have with a person who is not your husband; it is always extramarital and problematic, and cohabitation is glossed as a practice that is detrimental to the institution of marriage. The unacceptability of these ideas is manifested in the literal refusal to translate them. The argument seems to be that

these words would be unintelligible in Hindi translations because the concepts they signify are so unintelligible in “Indian” culture. Yet because these words and ideas are, indeed, discussed in these articles they do enter the vocabulary and the world of the readers.

The other category of articles on personal development and self-improvement emphasizes the need for the woman readers to be “optimistic, smart and confident” and is chock-full of words like “self-confidence” and “independence.” But these English words, which have Hindi equivalents, are not translated, and are resignified in their untranslatability. To give some examples, “independence” is found in an attitude that does not expect the husband or any other member of the family to contribute to housework, and self-confidence in not letting the lack of support get in the way of a successful performance of duties. Readers are advised to wear that which is “fashionable, tight-fitting, popular” and “a craze,” to throw on “funky light jewelry” to cheer up after a heart-break, to become a “smart homemaker,” to stop children from becoming “cool” and falling victims to the “hip-hop culture.” Where untranslated English words in the first category of articles on marital, sexual, and interpersonal issues evince an attitude of dismissal, here in discussions of personal development the English words are rendered untranslatable to add to their foreign and exotic allure, and make the objects and attitudes they describe more desirable. The selective display of translatability of these English words serves to reinforce their nativeness/foreignness, acceptability/unacceptability, and desirability/undesirability to strengthen the traditional patriarchal Hindu order. The space of the magazine is fashioned as intimate and as uniquely for women readers, which

conveys a sense that the (translational) choices suggested and made on their behalf must be favorable and in their interests. The linguistic hybridity of English and Hindi in these sections further distinguishes the perspective presented here from that in the main pages.

The use of positive sounding English words that urge the woman reader to adopt certain modes and styles of dress is enticing, but it is rarely inclusive. The English words that emphasize certain trends and objects, because they will add to the attraction of the woman reader, also underscore the impossibility of acquiring these. Bilingual writing about costume and lifestyle choices serves to catapult the objects being talked about into a valorized realm, which for all practical purposes is unavailable to the reader. She can copy the style, indeed she is encouraged to do so, but she can never acquire the original. Once described with adjectives such as “glamorous,” “hot,” “cool,” “fashionable,” or “popular” in the “अंतरराष्ट्रीय फैशन जगत” (international fashion world), these clothes and accessories are presented such that they cannot be adapted and transformed in the experience of being worn. The reader, in order to ensure that she be all that the item is, must replicate it with complete servile fidelity. The following is an excerpt from an article on the trend of “chunky bangles.”

आकर्षक चंकी बैंगल्स और कफ आजकल फैशन में हैं। यह चंकी बैंगल्स और कफ आपको प्लास्टिक, लकड़ी अथवा धातु में मिल जायेंगे। विभिन्न रंगों में उपलब्ध इन चंकी बैंगल्स को आप अपनी ड्रेस के साथ मैच करके पहें सकती हैं। यह चंकी बैंगल्स आपको स्टाइलिश बनाते हैं. [...] बॉलीवुड की अभिनेत्रियों को तो आपने अक्सर चंकी बैंगल्स पहने देखा ही होगा। खास बात तो यह है की आजकल अंतरराष्ट्रीय फैशन जगत में भी

चंकी बैंगल्स की धूम मची है। इसका अंदाज़ा इस बात से लगाया जा सकता है की कई प्रसिद्ध एवं मशहूर फैशन

ब्रांड ने भी चंकी बैंगल्स एवं कफ की विशाल शृंखला पेश की है<sup>67</sup> (Saxena, 3)

Attractive chunky bangles and cuffs are in fashion these days. These chunky bangles and cuffs are available in plastic, wood and metal. Available as they are in different colors, you can match these chunky bangles with your outfit. These chunky bangles make you stylish. [...] You must have often seen Bollywood actresses wearing chunky bangles. But the best part is that these chunky bangles are a rage on the international fashion scene. This is evident from the fact that many famous fashion brands have come up with a wide range of chunky bangles.

The enchantment and the disenchantment of objects such as the “chunky bangles” lie in the English language description. The article takes on an indoctrinating, even an evangelical tone. The incantatory repetition of the English words establishes the sacred quality of these bangles, which is further underscored by their museumified lack of variation. The writing above reads like an advertisement that highlights the uniqueness of these bangles as an article to be coveted. Never mind that these are exactly the ornaments that women in India have traditionally worn, here English description makes them seem the very epitome of trendiness, exotic and modern. The nomination “chunky bangles” is as much a desirable object as the bangles themselves. In a sense, English becomes its

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<sup>67</sup> *Aakarshak chunky bangles aur cuff aajkal fashion mein hain. Yeh chunky bangles aur cuff aapko plastic, lakdi athwa dhaatu mein mil jayeinge. Vibhinn rangon mein uplabhd inn chunky bangles ko aap apni dress ke saath match karke pehen sakti hain. Yeh chunky bangles aapko stylish banaate hain. [...] Bollywood ki abhinetriyon ko toh aapne aksar chunky bangles pehne dekha hi hoga. Khaas baat toh yeh hai ki aajkal antarrashtriye fashion jagat mein bhi chunky bangles ki dhoom machi hai. Iska andaaza iss baat se lagaya ja sakta hai ki kai prasiddh evam mashhoor fashion brand ne bhi chunky bangles evam cuff ki vishal shrinkhala pesh ki hai.*

own iconic brand in articles like this one. Ingrid Piller in “Iconicity in Brand Names” (1999) describes how brand names often function by invoking foreign language words that evoke the positive characteristics associated with that culture. So for instance Italian words might convey a sense of luxury, French language words convey style and beauty, and German language words bring to mind a quality of precision. In this piece, the use of the phrase “chunky bangles” conveys not only aspects of the international trend but also the enduring qualities associated with the English language—of modernity, of a class privilege, of freedom—in a postcolonial context, which makes it a desirable object.

English phrases like “chunky bangles,” rendered in English and transliterated in Devanagari script rather than translated into Hindi, are made to appear untranslatable. At the same time, these phrases are also shown to be assimilated—alphabetically and phonetically—despite that initial trope of foreignness. This simultaneously translatable and untranslatable English buttresses the traditionally patriarchal ideology associated with the Hindi language. English is made available to women in its capacity to ornamentalize rather than in its capacity to effect any kind of foundational shift, as in the case of Sunaina in *Mai*. The specifically material character of English here, in the shape of the chunky bangle, is a passing—if also global—fad. It is a trinket, a plaything, which calls attention to a surface level and distracts from the larger linguistic injustices both Hindi and English effect. It deflects meaning and attention in the way that English does in the supersign of Hindi-English, where English secures Hindi as part of India’s national identity after independence. If the English words “chunky bangles” were entirely translated into Hindi, which is possible and would be entirely unremarkable, they



would lose their capacity to modernize and globalize. Not only would “chunky bangles” not seem as attractive, Hindi itself would seem trapped in time and not at all globally oriented. The un/translatability of certain English words informs the politics of the vernacularization of English through and against Hindi. The English words, literally as objects, assume a symbolic value, an exchange value that in effect far exceeds their use value.

*Sangini* is not the only part of the newspaper that features transliterated English words or English words in the Roman script. A typical issue of the main edition of *Dainik Jagran* in the 1990s displays a carefully calibrated scale of translation between Hindi and English languages, which reinscribes the imperial history of Romanization of script even as it creates a new language that resembles aspects of both Hindi and English languages. In a context in which even the word “rape” is moralized as दुष्कर्म<sup>68</sup> (a bad deed) and sex drive referred to as the Sanskrit कामेच्छा<sup>69</sup> in a piece on Viagra on the first page, discussions of sex in *Sangini* are usually in the English language, with a liberal use of words such as “sex drive,” “sex,” and “chastity belt” in Devanagari script. In keeping with the Nehru-era invention of Hindi jargon, technical words are scrupulously translated into Hindi in the national news pages. For example, Executive Council is glossed as कार्यकारी परिषद<sup>70</sup> and Nuclear Suppliers Group as नाभकीय आपूर्तिकर्ता समूह.<sup>71</sup> The clunky Hindi words here are a result of translation from the English to create vocabulary that otherwise may not have existed. However, a number of words which have equivalents in Hindi—like hitlist, mastermind,

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<sup>68</sup> *Dushkarm*

<sup>69</sup> *Kaametcha*

<sup>70</sup> *Karyakari parishad.*

<sup>71</sup> *Nabhkiya Apoortikarta Samooh.*

media, dustbin, formal wear/party wear, prefer, diet, designer, nose, sweet corn *et cetera*—are transliterated into English in the same sections. Up until the year 1997, English words were written in Devanagari script, enclosed in quotation marks and translated or glossed within the text to mark the fact that they belong to a different linguistic discourse. For instance, a word such as “glamorous” was used in transliterated form but was defined within the text with a set of Hindi synonyms, as in “ग्लॅमरस यानी भव्य, आकर्षक, सम्मोहक, और लुभावना”<sup>72</sup> (glamorous as in grand, appealing, attractive, and enticing). In the next chapter, we will see the way in which the English word “cinema” was also defined anew, under shifting modes of production, by an informational article—even though the word had been in circulation for decades.

Quotation marks especially flagged the English word as distinct from the Hindi, as a citation of something spoken or written by another in a self-reflexive reference to the process of translation behind it. However, at the same time, the Sanskritized Hindi at large in the newspaper repeatedly shared space with advertising in Roman script. This advertorial content often would utilize some of the same vocabulary as the articles. Much like a pedagogical practice that had run its course, the practice of marking off English words was gradually dropped with the assumption that the audience now understood what these words meant. Later in the 1990s, the English words in articles were taken out of their quotation marks, though they were still written in the Devanagari script, unlike the advertisements which continued to use English words in the Roman script. In fact, the first five to six years of the 1990s were very different from the last few years of that

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<sup>72</sup> *Glamorous yaani bhavya, aakarshak, sammohak, aur lubhawna.*

decade and the early 2000s. The study of neoliberal economic reforms often overlooks the fact that their impact was never as dramatic or immediate as imagined. The shaping power of local contexts plays an important role in the reception and use of foreign language, as much as it does in the case of foreign investment and technological advancements (Oza, 5). The dominant narrative of a wholesale globalization spurred by economic reforms is a tempting one for its arguable freedom from the discourse of the colonial (to which it bears resemblance) by virtue of insertion into circuits of global exchange.

Hindi print media was the crucible in which the *shuddha* Hindi was forged towards nationalist agendas, and it was central to shaping and disseminating anti-colonial public opinion under British rule. With the departure of the British in August 1947, the Hindi press lost this ideological function. By the 1970s and the 1980s, the industry was languishing while the English press had monopolized sales agents and readership. In his study of the Hindi newspaper industry in post-independence India, *India's Newspaper Revolution: Capitalism, Technology and the Indian-language Press, 1977-1997* (2000), Robin Jeffrey points out that the intelligentsia of a newly independent nation, marching purposefully to the call of progress and modernity, was keener to read in English. The only people who were willing to read Hindi newspapers were either too poor or illiterate to do so. As most Hindi newspapers ran in losses and were unable to hire adequate staff, their editorial standards also suffered, making them less credible. The Hindi press was viewed as divisive and communal and, generally, as politically regressive.

The Hindi newspaper industry received a fresh lease on life with the advent of facsimile transmission via satellite (commonly known as fax) in the late 1980s. This newfound technology made it possible for newspapers to receive news at a much-reduced cost. It also made it possible to publish from various smaller regional centers simultaneously instead of competing with the bigger and more centrally located (urban) English newspapers. Thanks to this newfound technology, many newspapers made inroads into remote areas of the Hindi heartland. The Hindi heartland refers to the region of north central India where most dialects of Hindi are spoken. These include, among others, the states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Madhya Pradesh. Even so, the Hindi press survived only in the shadow of the English press as “the advantages of a good plant and distribution system, sustained by the advertisement revenue coming from English companion publications” (Jeffrey, 77), enabled the major English newspapers to make Hindi a mere ‘satellite’ press, “nothing but a *carbon copy* of its English counterpart” (77).

The phrase “carbon copy” as a description of the relation between Hindi and English newspapers gained a renewed meaning as translation played a vital role in the revival of the Hindi press. Jeffrey writes that translating English copy from the news services was one of the chief tasks in which the editorial staff at Hindi newspapers was trained. Hindi newspapers had “become *translation sheets*” (77, my italics), which took most of their copy from the English language wire services or publications (77). The resulting lack of “original” prose in Hindi newspapers has always been decried by the English language press and readership, even as the readership and political clout of the

Hindi newspapers grew exponentially. Yet, the distinction between carbon copies and translation sheets is an important one. Carbon copies are identical to the originals they reproduce, different only in the color of ink or the quality of the graphic marking. Translations, however, leave a lot of space to create equivalences and differences, and that is exactly what we see in the strategic use of the English language.

It is in the decades of the 1980s and the 1990s that *Dainik Jagran*, after a lull, grew to be the most widely read newspaper in the world, with a readership of 536 million across cities and villages, as the second round of the 2007 National Readership Survey reveals. *Dainik Jagran* also has the highest readership of all newspapers in India, 3.63 million in comparison to that of the second-ranked Malayalam newspaper *Malayalam Manorama* at 3.59 million. These figures surpass the readership of the top two Hindi women's magazines combined (Prospectus, 74). *Dainik Jagran* is also one of the oldest Hindi newspapers in India. Founded by Puran Chand Gupta in 1942, the year of the Quit India Movement, it has always maintained leanings towards the Hindu Right. Its self-description as the "free voice of the people" (Prospectus, 4), changed to "a newspaper of the changing times" in the early 1990s. The democratic goal of standing for the people transformed into one of becoming accessible and relevant to a variety of people under the new banner, "a newspaper of the changing times." An expanding English vocabulary was perhaps the most direct index of the newspaper's capacity to keep abreast with the times, and the most obvious way in which it expanded its constituency, reaching more people. The reference to the "changing" times promises a contemporaneity—perhaps, modernity—to its readers as it tracks a shift in step with the neoliberal economic reforms.

The English words, as we saw in the articles discussed above, also obfuscate the lack of change concealed in strategic un/translatability between Hindi and English.

Interestingly, the liberal use of English words in *Sangini* and in other sections is critiqued in the editorial pages, as well as in news reports that extol the virtues of Sanskrit, lampoon the fact that Hindi news on the state-sponsored TV channel is called “news” and not “समाचार,”<sup>73</sup> and condemn the fact that Hindi-speaking employees are paid less than their English-speaking counterparts in Indian government offices. For instance, when India completed its fifty years of independence, *Dainik Jagran* aggressively reported the fact that even under the aegis of BJP government the state exclusively used the English language in its celebration function. Under a passive-aggressive headline, “कम से कम अब तो बनने दो इंडिया को भारत” (At least, now, let India become Bharat)<sup>74</sup> the article declared that it was unfortunate that under the BJP government, the state had to suffer through an English-medium celebration. Another article invoked the idiom of the nationalist movement when it argued that *swa-bhasha*, or a language of one’s own (drawing on the notion of the *swa-deshi* that was mobilized during the nationalist movement) was (unfortunately) no longer a matter of national concern. Mocking the colonial bias of the English-speaking intelligentsia and political elite, the article asked that if in the times of the free market, it was only when White imperialists would ask us to embrace our mother tongue that the elite of the nation would follow. It claimed that the native elites were still under the spell of subordination, though perhaps the ex-imperialists were no longer interested in ruling.

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<sup>73</sup> *Samachar*.

<sup>74</sup> *Kam Se Kam Ab Toh Banne Do India Ko Bharat*.

Editorials in *Dainik Jagran* often use fashion as a trope to express anxiety about the changing times, as English challenges the dominance of Hindi, and supposedly replaces Indian culture and tradition (that is, *Hindu* culture and tradition) with “western civilization.”<sup>75</sup> One such article, condemning the growing obsession with English among Indians, specifically referred to it as a “thoughtless imitation.” Invoking a sartorial image, it read: “the problem is that just as we consider someone wearing a suit and tie superior, we also consider someone knowledgeable in English to be educated. This is a false benchmark and it has us losing sight of a truer benchmark” (6). Similarly, an article of June 9, 1997, in *Dainik Jagran*, “फैशन के बदलते आयाम”<sup>76</sup> (The changing regime of fashion), claimed to interview twenty women students and professionals and argued that all of them were crazy about fashion in one way or another. It warned the reader against the “craze” for fashion, where an undifferentiated Western world makes Indians forget their sense of decorum. The article concluded, “बढ़ते फैशन के साथ इमिटेशन आभूषणों का चलन भी बढ़ता जर रहा है. युवा पीढ़ी में बढ़ते जा रहे ड्रग्स के सेवन फैशन का विकराल रूप धारण कर लिया है।”<sup>77</sup> (With increasing fashion, imitation jewelry is also gaining popularity. The growing drug use among young people is the dangerous face of fashion.) (6). The paranoid string of arguments here and the broader alliance of English with fashion frame and diminish the translation of English as found elsewhere in the hybrid prose of the newspaper as necessarily fragmentary, artificial, half-baked. The article connects the “imitation” of English (never a thoughtful

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<sup>75</sup> The transcoding of English as foreign (therefore to be judged as undesirable or desirable), as we will see in the next chapter, is also popular in Hindi film. For instance, in 1983, a popular Hindi film magazine of the time, *Sushma*, characterized the film *Modern Girl* (dir. R. Bhattacharya, 1961) as a sharp satire on girls who liked to stay “up to date” and “fashionable.”

<sup>76</sup> Fashion ke badalte aayaam.

<sup>77</sup> Badhte fashion ke saath imitation abhooshanon ka chalan bhi badhta jar raha hai. Yuva peedhi mein badhte ja rahe “drugs ke sevan” fashion ka vikraal roop dhaaran kar liya hai.

learning of another language) to a societal imitation. This sense that English cannot be learnt as a language but is always only a step in the slapdash race of social mobility is reflected also in the ways *Sangini* teaches English to its own audience. Thus, this metaphoric relation of English to imitation jewelry further invalidates any possibility of experiencing English on “native” terms and re-instates English as a foreign language. In the same gesture, considered historically, the newspaper also rejects the ability of English to modernize Hindi (as imagined in its legislative alliance with English).

The analogy between the English language and cheap fashion to critique its “half-baked”<sup>78</sup> use by readers recalls the fact that all the unlikely speakers of English in Indian Anglophone writing such as Balram Halwai, Ram Mohammad Thomas, and Bakha had first expressed their transgression of class and caste limitations through changes in their attire. In his discussion of writing *about* fashion in *The Fashion System* (1990), Roland Barthes described fashion as a phenomenon specifically “of initiation,” that “naturally fulfils a didactic function: the Fashion text represents as it were the authoritative voice of someone who knows all there is behind the jumbled or incomplete appearance of the visible forms. Thus it constitutes a technique of opening the invisible, where one could rediscover, almost in secular form, the sacred halo of divinatory texts” (Barthes, 14). The hybrid English-Hindi writing on fashion in *Dainik Jagran* and its supplement, *Sangini*, perpetuates the pedagogical role of English through a translation of the transliterated English words via the images. In Barthes’s formulation, language supplements the garment being described. It imbues it with a material reality that can be imagined and experienced but at the same time, it also transports that object to a realm that is

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<sup>78</sup> A reference to Balram Halwai’s half-baked knowledge in Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger*.



enchanted, revealing in it the “sacred halo of divinatory texts.” However, in the case of description of clothes and accessories in *Sangini*, the clothes and trends also lend an imaginable magical quality to the language. The clothes and trends become desirable because the language in which they are being described is desirable and is associated with specific classed experiences in the world. In a dialectical relationship, both the language and the object being described impart a material heft and a magical quality to the other.

The hybridized English language renders the clothes and trends intelligible within a context of “international fashion trends” and of the power of the English language, making them objects to aspire to. It is through the varied but controlled degree of translation that the newspaper functions as a conduit through which a fitting degree of hybridization is negotiated for the modern-day reader of the newspaper. The varied grade of linguistic hybridization identifiable in the sections of *Jagran Sangini* is a close correlate of the notion of what is proper for women. The broader discourse in the newspaper, however, genders and censures the same hybridity and the very same acts of translation. The largely advertorial space of the supplement, along with the use of English words as a lifestyle worth emulating, exemplifies the way Hindu nationalism is made consistent with neoliberal modernity.

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In order to be successful, the Dalit goddess of Prasad had to have both “foreign” and “familiar” elements. Likewise, words like “independence” and “self-confidence” make traditional gendered divisions of domestic labor between men and women seem a radical gesture of self-development. The resignifications of independence and of self-

confidence are not only patriarchal but also neoliberal in their valorization of the individual, divorced from social or economic pressures and privileges. If these words were translated into Hindi, as for instance in the sections that focus on marital issues, then they would come across as blatantly conservative. Another example of the resignification of English (and Anglophone culture) through its un/translatability to bolster a Hindu (Brahminical) patriarchal worldview is found in an article that appeared on November 1, 2008, titled “पराए पति से प्रीत”<sup>79</sup> (Love With Another’s Husband). The article began by asking the reader if she was no longer attracted to her husband. Before one could answer such a serious question, the article went on to say “the same thing happened to Nanette and Steven” (1). The use of foreign-sounding names distances the problem under discussion just as it also de-stigmatizes it by making it seem common and almost familiar, as familiar to the reader as Nanette and Steven can be. The “foreignness” of English—its “untranslatability”—lies at the heart of the fungibility or “translatability” that enables it to be easily refashioned and variously claimed. At the same time, English words are also easily “translatable” in post-liberalization India, as in the case of Nanette and Steven, because of India’s openness to the world.

Most importantly, the feminized hybrid form of Hindi in *Dainik Jagran* characterizes the language as pliable, and with an immediacy that makes it suitable to different contexts. This neoliberal vision of what Hindi can do increasingly replaces the staunch androgynous Hindi-in-the-making just after independence. The quarterly journal *Rajbhasha Bharati* [Language of the Indian State] published by the government of India

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<sup>79</sup> *Paraye Pati Se Preet*.

has recently been promoting Hindi for its continuously evolving yet central role as the official language in India. In the late 1990s, when the English language was increasingly seen and heard in public spaces, the journal derided the influence of mass media on Hindi, its consequent “corruption.” However, more recently (January-March 2012, Issue No. 133) the magazine has dedicated a growing number of articles to the Anglicization of Hindi and positioned these as a testimony to the abiding vitality of Hindi language. For instance, an article titled “प्रयोजनमूलक हिन्दी: मीडिया और विज्ञापन”<sup>80</sup> (Utilitarian Hindi: Media and Advertising) reads, “मीडिया और विज्ञापन की एक बड़ी दे हैं कि इस के कारण हिन्दी का अखिल भारतीय रूप निर्मित हुआ है और दिनों दिन हिन्दी की लोकप्रियता आसमान होती जा रही है” (4). (It is a significant benefit of media and advertising that the all-India character of Hindi has been established, and its popularity has been rising sky high in recent times.) The qualities of “सरलता, व्यापकता, क्षमता” (ease, adaptability, and potential) (4) that are celebrated in Hindi are also very much the kind of attributes that are preferred in women as the articles I have analyzed from *Jagran Sangini* attest.

Read, however, along with the bilingualism and hybridity of *Mai*, the figure of the woman and the feminized terrain of language discourse present the site for an un/translatable vernacular of English. Apter writes that “translational language is loosely defined as a language in transit” (Apter, 2006: 160). The hybrid and translational language of *Dainik Jagran* and *Mai*, both, does not travel. Instead, it puts into motion degrees of mobility between the home and the world that produces the vernacular mode of global englishes. In its metaphoric extrapolation, the language also not does translate

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<sup>80</sup> *Proyajanmulak Hindi: Media Aur Vigyapan.*

the woman to a modernity engendered by English. If the English language grows in visibility and usage due to its presence in a Hindi newspaper, then it does so precisely by advancing patriarchal and religious orthodoxy associated with Hindi and with Hindi newspapers.

## Chapter 5: Cinematic Englishes

As a commodity in the neoliberal free market, the English language functions along a dialectic of exchange value and use value, where its symbolic meaning often gains more importance than its literal meaning. These symbolic meanings usually take the form of visual iconicity, as we witnessed in the way Aravind Adiga's Balram Halwai wields his knowledge of English like money. Its discursive determination as modern, scientific, and worldly makes English in India both justifiable and welcome as in the case of its legislation and in its presence in *Dainik Jagran*. How does its growing use in Hindi language films further illuminate what I have been calling the worldliness and vernacularity of the English language? This is the question that this chapter explores as it follows the cinematic production of the English language as a vernacular.

I argue that the presence of English in Bollywood and diasporic films, what I call cinematic englishes, demands a change in the way we understand the English language in studies of postcolonial and world literatures. Bombay cinema plays an important part in Indian Anglophone literatures, especially in the writings of Salman Rushdie where, as metonymy for postmodernist aesthetics, the "metaphor of cinema screen" is used to elucidate "this business of perception" (Rushdie, 1992: 13). Films expose audience to unorthodox techniques of representation. In doing so, they heighten their perception, and makes them more "sophisticated" consumers of representation. In films, language is not simply literary but also aural and graphic. This mirrors the objectification and circulation of English we have increasingly encountered in its neoliberal form in texts like *The White*

*Tiger, Q&A, and Dainik Jagran*. As it assumes representative power on screen in Bollywood and diasporic films, the English language embodies an aural intimacy and a spectatorial validity. Invested with meaning through wardrobe decisions, sound, and strategic on-screen visibility, English words and Roman script quite literally become an icon and a symbol that constellate both the local and the global and variously function as a vernacular.

In what follows, I will explore the question of language in film and film practices at multiple levels and intersections. I will attend to the film as text and to discussions of English, the linguistic medium of Bollywood and diasporic films, in popular press and censorship decisions. I begin this chapter with a broad survey of the different ways in which the English language has historically appeared in Hindi films. I show that the use of spoken English does not necessarily mark the speaker as foreign. Instead, it is the purported foreignness of the speaker's body and "western" mannerisms that marks English as English. This observation is important because it diminishes any notion of a constitutional foreignness in English in postcolonial India, and highlights its status as proxy for all that is deemed threatening to a nationalist and homogeneous "Indian" culture. Indeed, film censorship at the levels of the state and of reception betrays an overwhelming preoccupation with policing the foreign. However, English is not, as a matter of course, deemed foreign. In fact, its different visible, audible, and legible forms often cast it as "Indian" and familiar. As several governmental reports on censorship reveal, films are valuable in their instructional capacity, and the use of English is understood within this context. In its liberal guise of formal education, English

legitimizes the audience's ability to appreciate films. In its neoliberal judicious use, English itself emerges as knowledge worth gaining through films. As I continue to examine English in the broader multilingual context in which it appears in Bollywood and diasporic films, it is important to bear a key fact in mind: the Hindi used in these films is a popularly understood and *spoken* Hindustani, which would not be as divisive as the state *written* Hindi used and imagined in *Dainik Jagran* and state policies.

Following this survey, I will present a close analysis of two films: Deepa Mehta's *Fire* (1996) and Danny Boyle and Loveleen Thadani's *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008). In the context of *Fire*, I will briefly also refer to Mira Nair's *Kama Sutra* (1996). I draw attention to the occurrence of English in dialogues, subtitles, billboards and signages in these films. The English and Hindi bilingualism in both *Fire* and *Slumdog Millionaire* "summons the mimetic dimension of film" (Conley, x). However, as indicated in their publicity materials, the specifically bilingual medium is also an index of the glorified universality of emotions these films intend to capture and represent. Mukul Kesavan in his article "Lost in Translation" (2009) completes this thought by saying that the narrative choices in these films not only seek to capture and represent universal emotions, but also "that more pressing universal thing, the market" (Kesavan, 2009: 1). As such, the films betray the inadequacy of English as a sole global language not only in the text but in the world it speaks to and produces, and draw our attention to the role played by the other languages in a multilingual context.

*Fire*, *Kama Sutra*, and *Slumdog Millionaire* were made by diasporic directors for the "festival circuit" and commercially released in India, where they shared theater space

with mainstream Hindi films.<sup>81</sup> In their narrative and visual elements, these films invoke strategies characteristic of Bollywood. The release of *Fire* and *Kama Sutra* in India also marks the growing presence of the “diasporic” within the domain of the nation. In *Beyond Bollywood: The Cultural Politics of South Asian Diasporic Film* (2004), Jigna Desai notes that these two films were among the many English language films being produced and released in India in the 1990s. She writes that the liberalization of the Indian economy and the processes of globalization saw the English language (“mixed with vernacular languages”) become “a part of everyday practices for the new transnational and middle classes in the urban centers” (Desai, 2004: 185), and this multilingual literacy is prevalent in other cinema including Bollywood. At the same time that many films were transnationally funded, produced, and released (like *Fire* and *Kama Sutra*), an independent low-budget cinema also emerged, with many English language films like *Bombay Boys* (1998), *Hyderabad Blues* (1998), and *Split Wide Open* (1999) released in the 1990s. As a result, films like *Fire* and *Kama Sutra* (along with many other diasporic and crossover films of the time) struggle with audience expectations. Their mixed receptions, as we will see, reveal the differentiated visions of the place of the English language in India.

Reading this cinematic corpus within a broader survey of cinema and the English language in India, I suggest a strategic un/translatability of English, in both the intersemiotic and the interlingual senses of translation that Roman Jakobson invokes, that

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<sup>81</sup> Kai Friese writes in “End of an Eros” (2005) that Mira Nair’s *Kama Sutra* also resulted in many B-grade and pornographic spin-offs, which promised more explicit portrayals of sex than the advertising for Nair’s film had suggested. To lure audiences, Nair’s film was advertised as more explicit than it actually was.



locates the language as an “authentic” and an “intimate” spoken vernacular. The worldliness of English emerges in its visual iconicity and graphic pervasiveness and materializes in networks of circulation, in technologies of information and communication, in brand names, in “alphabetical and iconic writing in the field of moving image” (Conley, xxiv), and in moments where English does not even register as English. The very idea of what the English language is itself expands through the kind of citations and invocations that Voloshinov theorized as at work in a verbal sign.

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“You see the whole country of this system is juxtapositioned by the hemoglobin in the atmosphere because you are a sophisticated rhetorician intoxicated by the exuberance of your own verbosity” (Anand Bakshi, “My Name is Anthony Gonsalves”). This largely meaningless opening sentence from the song “My Name is Anthony Gonsalves” (which is predominantly in Hindustani) appears in the 1977 Hindi film, *Amar Akbar Anthony*, directed by Manmohan Desai. It opens with the character, Anthony Gonsalves (played by the actor, Amitabh Bachchan), climbing out of a giant Easter egg at an Easter dance social at the Catholic Gymkhana in Bombay. Anthony is crashing the event, and is in disguise, dressed like a vaudeville version of a gentleman in top hat, monocle, umbrella, and tails (figure 5.1). The scientific jargon in the first half of this sentence is followed by a fragment from Benjamin Disraeli’s July 27, 1878, speech at the Riding School in London about his rival, William E. Gladstone: “a sophisticated rhetorician intoxicated by the exuberance of your own verbosity.” One of the earlier and the more popular instances of the use of English words in Bombay cinema, this song

places the English language in an expected and identifiable frame. As Anthony is Catholic Christian, he speaks English. As he is a well-intentioned petty criminal belonging to a low class, neither is his English grammatically correct nor is his pronunciation customary. In keeping with this logic, in the previous scene, Anthony had conversed in English with the heroine, Jenny (also Christian), who has recently returned from Europe. In the scene before that, he had also pronounced the word “mistake” as “mishtake” when apologizing to a policeman. The opening sentence of the song, then, characterizes the English language as bombastic, jargon-ridden, and British. The quotation of Disraeli’s words in the song further reinforces the sense of English in India as a solipsistic amusement of an elite minority.<sup>82</sup> As the chorus, the people at the social, exaggeratedly exclaim “What?” after Anthony’s English language statements in the song, the language is, clearly, deemed to be incomprehensible by most. Anthony’s *use* of the English language in the film encodes his marginality as well as his linguistic facility and verve. His mispronunciations, excessive rolling of the ‘r’s, and his exaggeratedly jargony use of the language in “My Name is Anthony Gonsalves” convey a simplicity, an irreverence, and a playfulness in his character, which derives from the contradictory dynamics of speaking an urban hybrid English but not being quite at home in the Queen’s “proper” English.

The film *Amar Akbar Anthony* is an allegory about religious tolerance. The three eponymous characters, Amar, Akbar, and Anthony, stand for the Hindu, Muslim, and

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<sup>82</sup> This would be especially true in the 1970s when India was still a socialist welfare state, and the “world” did not impinge on the national imaginary in the same pervasive way as it did in the 1990s. To re-invoke Rajeswari Sundar Rajan’s formulation, English would still have been a language of an elite minority. It would still very much be the difference between those who could govern and those who were condemned to always be governed.

Christian religious communities in India. In the film, each of these characters is distinguished by his speech as language is tied to religious belief: Anthony speaks in English, Akbar is an Urdu poet, and Amar is a Hindi speaking Hindu police officer. The song “My Name is Anthony Gonsalves” and the film at large present English as the language spoken predominantly by Christians in India. It is still not common for Hindi films to have full songs with English lyrics; the only film to feature a full song in English was *Julie* (1975), which appeared before *Amar Akbar Anthony*. *Julie* also depicted the life of a Christian Anglo-Indian family in Bombay, where the daughter, Julie, falls in love with a man from a Hindu family. Julie is shown to be at once religious and sexually liberated, “westernized,” permissive, and not dressed in traditional Indian outfits. This unorthodoxness is, interestingly, also characteristic of the villains, as in *Amar Akbar Anthony*’s Robert (also Christian). Besides being used by lower class Christian or Anglo-Indian characters, English is very often spoken by members of the upper class. The English language thus lends itself to a comic effect or to associations with extreme apathy and cruelty, depending on the speaker. It advances the verisimilitudinal imperative and, at the same time, is itself made audible and intelligible *as* English by the marked foreignness of the speakers. Perhaps it is more accurate to parse this foreignness as a divergence from patriarchal and conservative Hindu values that is established as the norm. This divergence is often deemed undesirable or laughable or simply “cultural” in the contexts of the films.

Thus, accent and diction play an important role in separating the different kinds of speakers and different kinds of englishes. As Rey Chow writes in her discussion of

linguaging as a process of racialization in *Not Like a Native Speaker*, “language possession is translated into and receives its value as skin color” (Chow, 3) in the patriotic film *Purab Aur Paschim* (East and West) (dir. Manoj Kumar, 1970). However, in this film, the use of English is the mark of foreignness *and* of authenticity. For instance, the song “Twinkle Twinkle, Little Star” (figure 5.2) begins with the heroine asking the hero to sing an English song for her. The hero claims to not know one, after which the heroine proceeds to teach him. Among other things, the hero’s efforts to bring the heroine back from her errant “western” ways is an important part of the narrative, and this song dramatizes their mutual instructional impulses. The lyrics of the song are rather basic—nursery rhymes interspersed with a few other lines in English and Hindi. The hero is dressed in traditional Indian clothes, and the heroine in a short dress, blonde wig, holding a whiskey and a cigarette. They epitomize the east and the west respectively. As one teaches and the other repeats, both the hero and the heroine sing the same words but their pronunciations are entirely different. Careful enunciation and an incorrect Hindi grammar as she sings in Hindi mark the heroine as the Londoner she is supposed to be. The hero, on the other hand, speaks fast, flattening his English ‘w’s and singing the English rhymes to a folk Indian tune. The hero clearly knows English as he is able to formulate sentences in English (“I want a chance, baby”) and pun on the heroine’s lines as she calls him a “fool.” However, his pronunciation and the music to which his part is set are what set him apart from the “standard” English marking him as “authentically” Indian.<sup>83</sup> In a repetition with difference, the English nursery rhyme emerges as the very epitome of the “west” as well as the declaration of an incorruptible “Indian-ness.”

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<sup>83</sup> When the heroine calls the hero a “fool,” he “riffs-off” on the English word “fool” with its Hindi

For a long time, the catalogue presented in *Amar Akbar Anthony* and *Purab Aur Paschim* was a fairly accurate summation of the representation of the English language and its representative function in Bombay cinema. The language was spoken incorrectly by lower class characters for comic effect and to convey an earthiness; conversely, it was spoken correctly by villains and by upper class and cosmopolitan characters. When spoken by villains or characters from outside India, the English language indexed a divergence from patriotic sentiments and traditional patriarchal (glossed as “Indian”) values, even an out-of-placeness. “Correct” English, then, becomes an index of national, moral, and class-based inauthenticity.<sup>84</sup> This logic persisted for a long time, well into the 1990s, where diasporic Indian characters in Hindi films typically spoke in English to convey their “westernization,” but only until they truly became conscious of their Indian sensibilities. The figure of the *tapori* (the vagabond), as it gained prominence in the 1990s, also used English as part of a noticeably mixed urban idiom of Hindi, Marathi (language spoken in the state of Maharashtra of which Bombay is the capital), and English. The *tapori*, of which Anthony in *Amar Akbar Anthony* is a prototype, is often understood as a rebellious figure from the lower class who uses a characteristically urban hybrid tongue, Bumbaiyya. Ranjani Mazumdar in *Bombay Cinema: An Archive of a City* (2007) describes a *tapori* as “a figure of transgression who borrows from the world of gestures to create a new space for the performance of a bodily resistance in the public spaces of the city” (Mazumdar, 78). To this, I would add that the figure of the *tapori* also

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homophonic equivalent “*phool*” that means “flower.” He, then, makes a philosophical argument about flowering and maturity to say that everyone is a “fool” (the English word) in their youth. This is, obviously, a reference to the heroine’s degenerate ways in her youth, and the possibility that she may be able to mend those ways after all.

<sup>84</sup> I am grateful to Shaden Tageldin for this formulation.

borrowed linguistically in his resistance, as in the case of a prototypical *tapori* like Anthony.

Finally, an important instance where the English language is used by otherwise Hindi-speaking characters, as critics such as M. Madhava Prasad and Rachel Dwyer among others have noted, is in professions of love. In her essay “Kiss or Tell? Declaring Love in Hindi Films” (2006), Dwyer argues that love was usually declared via nonverbal cues and was contained, along with any physical intimacy, in song sequences. When declared in dialogues, the English expression “I love you” was used, which was very often the singular and the most definitive consummation of a romantic relationship in films. In *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction* (1998) Prasad discusses the changes wrought by economic liberalization, and writes that it is by virtue of the status of English as a “global language of youth or MTV culture—along with Archie comics, Hallmark cards and the whole public language (and their practices of kissing too) of the young lovers that the quote (as Barthes reminds us, ‘I love you,’ is always a quote) is from English” (Prasad, 110). According to Prasad, in films that focus on large family structures, the “quotation” in English transports the speaking subject and addressee to a different symbolic network—beyond the traditional authority—that sanctioned formal coupling and was marked by social privilege and distinction. This “other” was “as yet unformed, unidentifiable, its only trace being the obsessively recurring English expression that attests to the fact that something was being called into existence” (110).

In more recent films in India (Hindi and those in other languages as well), expressions of love, in English or otherwise, are not as covert and not only encoded in

song sequences. In fact, one of those most successful popular songs “Why This *Kolaveri Di*” (Why This Hysterical Rage, Girl?) (2011) in recent times uses fragments of English and Tamil sentences, without any Hindi words.<sup>85</sup> The first few lines to the song are, “Yo boys I am singing song/ Soup song.../ Flop song.../ Why this *kolaveri kolaveri kolaveri di* [...]White skin girl girl/ Girl heart black/ Eyes eyes meet meet/ My future dark/ Why this *kolaveri kolaveri... kolaveri di.*” Thus, this “soup song” begins as a homosocial conversation between the singer and his friends, other boys who have experienced heartbreak in relationships with girls. The word “flop” refers as much to the nature of their love lives as to the nature of the song. Along racialized lines, the girl is “white,” referring to her pale skin, which is a gold standard of beauty in India. However, her beauty is belied by her “black” heart, her harsh and cruel disposition. Thus, the relationship between the singer and the girl is doomed from the moment their eyes meet (their “future [is] dark”). This is not only because the girl, with her white skin, is presumably beyond his league but also because she is a cold-hearted and unfeeling person, and nothing good could come out his infatuation with her.

Most of the English sentences in the song, as you will notice, are grammatically incorrect. The grammar used in this song brings to mind John Mowitt’s theorization of enunciation in *Re-takes: Postcoloniality and Foreign Film Languages* (2005) of the native’s speech in films. The suggestion of illiteracy, Mowitt argues, is encoded in “incorrect” English, as for instance in the missing copula in Tarzan’s dialogues in William S. Van Dyke’s *Tarzan, the Ape Man* (1932). In our case here, “Why This

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<sup>85</sup> The song “went viral” on the internet, and was popular across many different Asian countries. There was a Turkish version among others.

*Kolaveri Di*” is a slightly sexist song from the perspective of a young college boy, who flippantly looks back at a failed relationship. Its popularity has been attributed to its “relatable” quality, its sentiment as well as its idiom, which is something college boys are likely to actually use in their daily conversations. Its incorrect grammar, thus, translates the elitism of the English, which also characterizes the girl as pretentious, into an “authentic” language spoken by the young man. The (mis)use of English language words is key in making a Tamil film song popular across the country, where the Hindi speaking Bollywood has always dominated.

“Correct” and “incorrect” English, thus, become important markers and epithets signaling the different roles of English in films. Oftentimes in a love story across class divides, the lower class hero would surprise the heroine by speaking in English, however incorrectly. Likewise, an upper class hero would use English correctly to critique the waywardness of her English ways as in *Purab Aur Paschim*. Or, as in “Why This *Kolaveri Di*,” the incorrectness of the man’s English itself signifies a critique of the woman’s ways. In these contexts—where the English language is intended as a marker of class or foreignness and exoticism—simple words, phrases and sentences suffice. The foreignness of the speaker is also conveyed in grammatically incorrect Hindi sentences. Increasingly, mainstream Hindi films out of Bombay have been incorporating the English language in their titles, dialogues, and songs, as for instance in titles like *Hello Brother* (1999), *No Entry* (2005), *Jab We Met* (2007), *Shootout at Lokhandwala* (2007), *3 Idiots* (2009), *Delhi Belly* (2011), *Rockstar* (2011), *Cocktail* (2012), *Gangs of Wasseypur* (2012) *et cetera*. For a while, especially during the mid- to late 1990s, it was trendy to



translate within the title so, for instance, one English word would be followed by a Hindi phrase (or vice versa) that explained the English word. Some of these titles are: *Hum Saath Saath Hain: We Stand United* (1999), *Vaastav: The Reality* (1999), *Daag: The Fire* (1999), *Rules: Pyaar Ka Superhit Formula* (2003), and *Waqt: The Race against Time* (2005) among many others. In English translation, these would be *We Are Together: We Stand United*, *The Real: The Reality*, *Shoot: The Fire*, *Rules: The Superhit Formula of Love*, and *Time: The Race against Time* (2005). All these titles would appear transliterated in the Roman script, and often the Hindi words would also be transliterated into the Roman script. For smaller, rural, markets, the entire title would be written in the Devanagari script. The brief “hyphenated” trend is reminiscent of the quotation marks around the English words used in Hindi newspapers before English words were included with no noticeable reference to their foreignness, and functions as a similarly pedagogical moment.

In its hyphenated and formulaic translatability, and in its repetition with a difference, the English language assumes vernacular resonances to such an extent that Harish Trivedi, in his article “All Kinds of Hindi: The Evolving Language of Hindi Cinema” (2003), reads English *as* Hindi. In what is an unpopular line of argument in Indian film studies, Trivedi identifies a variety of registers of Hindi to dispute the unwarranted entitlement of Urdu in discussions of Indian cinema: “Sanskritic” Hindi, “Bambaiyya” (as described earlier on page 211), Hindustani (Hindi and Urdu), and Hinglish. In his tautological suggestion that that Hindi cinema is known as such establishes Hindi as its “constituent” (Trivedi, 53) language, “Hinglish,” “Bambaiyya,”

and “Hindustani” all become Hindi. In their alliance with English and Urdu, “Hinglish” and “Hindustani” both reflect an upper class elitism, a cultural refinement (often attributed to Urdu) and a cosmopolitanism. “Hinglish” especially, according to Trivedi, also conveys a mobility which “has become a staple subject matter of [contemporary] Hindi films, much as the villages were half a century ago” (80).

Trivedi’s classification is peculiar because, as Mazumdar explains, “popular wisdom has it that it is the film industry that has kept Hindustani alive... The film industry’s use of Hindustani, in an official climate in which the national state language was gradually becoming Sanskritized, has been a remarkable achievement” (42). Mazumdar attributes this “achievement” to the urban formation of the Bombay film industry: “Urdu was the language favored by urban poets and writers, many of whom joined the industry. The predominance of Urdu/Hindustani in the industry now is an undisputed and an acknowledged fact, and can be traced to a number of reasons aside from the rural-urban split” (43). In an attempt to establish their marginality, Trivedi himself enumerates the (many) scriptwriters and lyricists, among other kinds of laborers in the industry, who were Urdu-speaking.<sup>86</sup> Likewise, Mukul Kesavan, in his essay “Urdu, Avadh and the Tawaif: The Islamicate Roots of Indian Cinema” (1994), also identifies a predominance of Urdu in Bombay cinema and traces it to the roots of Bombay cinema in Urdu Parsi theater. In fact, whenever the subject of the spoken language of Bombay cinema does come up (and it is not often), it is resolved within discussions of Islamicate influence, the role of the Progressive Writers’ Movement, and

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<sup>86</sup> Trivedi names the following: Saadat Hasan Manto, Ismat Chughtai, Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, Sahir Ludhianvi, Majrooh Sultanpuri, Rahi Masoom Raza, Kaifi Azmi, and Sardar Jafri (Trivedi, 58).

censorship practices. This neat resolution, however, opens up a further interrogation of “the intriguing problem of the dominant form of mass entertainment being steeped in ‘Muslimness’ in a country where the norm for ‘secular’ public life has become increasingly Hindu” (Taneja, 1). In his essay “Muslimness in Indian Cinema” (2009), Anand Vivek Taneja writes that work on the politics of Urdu and Hindi languages demonstrates that “the linguistic and affective registers of this elite culture, over the course of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in the long aftermath of the rebellion of 1857, became marked by ‘feudal decadence’ and identified largely with Muslims” (1). In his own argument, additionally, he sees in the temporal vision often attributed to Urdu a competing idea of modernity that is not necessarily linear or forward looking. So, while Trivedi is correct in identifying a critical focus on Perso-Arabic influences on the language of Bombay cinema, his claim that this attention is unwarranted is specious. Many critics, as noted above, have argued otherwise.

One of the ways in which Trivedi disputes the overwhelming argument in favor of Urdu is by quite literally taking stock of the titles of Hindi films chronologically listed in the *Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema* (1994). This dubious methodology leads him to the triumphant conclusion that there have always been more Hindi film titles than there were Urdu, though he does add a caveat that whether a particular title counts as Hindi or Urdu will depend on the bias of the reader. His exercise may have proven inconclusive to the question he began with, but—as he counts the English titles—it does show that the English language titles are not a new phenomenon. In fact, in framing the language question as Hindi versus Urdu/Hindustani—or as Taneja identifies, Muslim versus

secular—the role of the English language is often neglected. English is almost always read as the modern, foreign, a language of dynamism, youth, and fashion, and part of the globalization story. In neglecting to account for the ways in which the sign of English is itself amplified in films like *Amar Akbar Anthony* and *Purab Aur Paschim*, as both the native and the foreign, such a reading is insufficient.

My survey of the broad language politics in “Hindi” films and some of the specific ways in which the English language appears therein covers the dominant trends, though it is hardly exhaustive. However, it is sufficient to bring home the fact that English is regularly used and circulates as part of a media form that is considered largely Hindi and Urdu. The English language glosses character types and conveys vernacular energies. In moments of professing love, the English language is the most intimate idiom, while in the language used by a character like Anthony or the more generic *tapori*, the English language offers a site of resistance. As they identify fantasies and make intelligible degrees of foreignness, cinematic englishes bring into focus the spokenness, legibility, and visibility of global englishes. In its audible and visual forms, English often intercedes between the discursive categories of local and global.

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After the neoliberal economic reforms, like all other industries in India, the Hindi film industry in Bombay also expanded, and in conventional parlance became more “globalized.” Abé Markus Nornes writes in *Cinema Babel: Translating Global Cinema* (2007) that cinema has always been globalized: “[it] was one of the first globalized art forms, if we mean by this a mode of production so thoroughly internationalized that it

predicates itself in translation and traffic” (Nornes, 4). With this in mind, perhaps it is more accurate to say that the 1990s was the decade when Bombay cinema became globally recognizable as “Bollywood.” According to Ashish Rajadhyaksha in “Bollywoodization of Indian Cinema: Cultural Nationalism in a Global Arena” (2003), the word “Bollywood” first appeared “as a joke” (Rajadhyaksha, 29) on the “Bollywood Beat” page of *Screen Weekly*, a popular English language film magazine. The newly minted word was accompanied by Tollywood, referring to the Calcutta film industry based in Tollygunge, and Mollywood referring to the Madras (now, Chennai) film industry. Over time, the playfulness of the term “Bollywood” (a linguistic vitality reminiscent of Anthony’s) has come to refer to a trend, a culture, and exotica as much as the film industry based in Mumbai. Ravi Vasudevan, in his essay “The Meanings of Bollywood” (2008), identifies this change as a “displacement of nation as art form with nation as brand” (Vasudevan, 339). Though the term emerged from self-identification, it has met with complicated reception, and is resented by many members of the film industry for its morphological derivativeness, which suggests a constitutional derivativeness as well. In its name, “Bollywood” is already in a translational relationship with the Anglophone film industry of Hollywood, a “vernacular” attesting to the eminent translatability of Hollywood as theorized by Miriam Hansen. As a broader cultural trend on a global scale, Bollywood fashions itself as a vernacular and as more translatable within the multilingual context of India and, through its globalism, outside India. English plays an important role in the reinforced visibility, intelligibility, and popularity of Bollywood.

In *Producing Bollywood: Inside the Contemporary Hindi Film Industry* (2012), Tejaswini Ganti writes that the preceding decade of the 1980s (I would say, some years into the early 1990s as well) has been overwhelmingly characterized as “trashy,” “horrible,” kitschy, and the “worst period of Indian cinema” (Ganti, 81). In the 1990s and subsequently, Bollywood gained cultural legitimacy and “became ‘cool’ again” (77). While a majority of the films valorized patriarchal norms, “the Hindu joint family, filial duty, feminine sexual modesty, and upper class privilege, the family films from the mid- to the late 1990s were much more conservative than films from earlier eras” (104); however, their visual, narrative, and performative style made them appear modern and “cool.” For instance, the film *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (Something Happens) (dir. Karan Johar, 1998) presents a very material instance of this newly-gained status. This film is a love triangle between three rich and stylish protagonists who wear designer brands like DKNY and Tommy Hilfiger. Ganti quotes from her interview with Sharmishta Roy, the art director for the film, who says, “*Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* to a lot of people looked like a comic strip. It was meant to be Archie comic. It was meant to be Riverdale High” (Roy in Ganti, 104). One of the retrospectively cringe-worthy icons of English in this film is a necklace that Shahrukh Khan, the lead actor, wears (figure 5.3). The necklace spells the word “cool” and transcodes it as “C.O.O.L.” In this form, the English word “cool” becomes an acronym that expands to include not simply the literal meaning of the word, but also its popularity as an international slang word, and the young and trendy lifestyle of popular brand names. As merchandise, the necklace was also popular and commonly worn by young people after the release of the film, which shows the way the vernacular

of the slang word literally manifests in a commodity form *and* assumes the status of a sartorial vernacular.

In an essay titled “This Thing Called Bollywood” (2003), which invokes the “objectification” built into the idea of Bollywood, M. Madhav Prasad argues that in its renomination as “Bollywood,” the film industry now also shares the structural bilingualism of the nation state. Prasad defines structural bilingualism as

[t]he state of affairs where the multitude of Indian languages (here counted as one) are held together by a metalanguage in which alone the national ideology can be properly articulated. In this respect Hindi cinema has witnessed a very significant transformation in recent periods: The undisputed role of Urdu as the metalanguage of Hindi cinema’s ideological work has now been challenged by English. Of course, it is difficult to conceive of Urdu being replaced by English in a film without it becoming an ‘English film’, but it is nevertheless the case that English provides the ideological coordinates of the new world of the Hindi film.

(1)

I find Prasad’s notion of a structural bilingualism compelling but, as it becomes clear from the readings of the films and the examples I have given thus far, it is better understood as a structural bilingualism of the metalanguage itself: of Hindi and English together functioning as the metalanguage in which a specious “national” ideology is articulated. For instance, in the case of the song sequence “Twinkle Twinkle, Little Star” in the film *Purab Aur Paschim* the English language in its repetition with difference is

already bilingual. English sustains a nationalist vision by being spoken by the Indian hero to establish its equivalence with Hindi and by the London-returned heroine to distinguish its foreign Englishness. Thus, English is associated with two opposing ideological realms that comprise a structural bilingualism of the metalanguage. In fact, rarely does the use of the English language make a Hindi film an English film, or vice versa. Bilingualism is not the obverse of monolingualism as no language is only monolingual as Derrida theorizes in *Monolingualism of the Other*. So it seems to me that the question to ask is: does the structural bilingualism of the Hindi film industry respond to the same motivations and anxieties as the structural bilingualism of the nation state? Prasad seems to suggest that it does, as the populist energies of Urdu are replaced with English. Bollywood is an important part of the public life of India, and its resonance extends beyond the screen. The monolingualism that Prasad attributes to English in Bollywood is in fact a bilingualism made possible by a structural forgetting that the likes of Rajagopalachari had demanded of the Indian people and that the super-sign of Hindi and English sets in motion.

Desai, as you will recall, has also commented on the coincidence of Bollywood with greater use of English in films. Contrary to her theorization of English as simply a marker of cultural and economic status, Prasad seems to suggest a deeper and more foundational way in which English becomes the *metalanguage* of Bombay cinema. Indeed, posters and film credits no longer use Urdu words and *nastaliq* script, and the word “love” rather than the Hindi and Urdu words of “*pyar*,” “*mohabbat*” and “*ishq*,” is more likely to be used in titles, songs, and dialogues. Prasad writes,



English phrases and proverbs are liberally used to construct a web of discourse which the characters inhabit. The charms of Urdu, of course, continue to command a good price, but the language has now been reduced to its accumulated stocks of nostalgic sentiment. But structural bilingualism has a significance at a different level: today, it is the will of the English speaking classes that prevails in giving a name and an identity to the Hindi cinema. (1)

According to Prasad, English is the language of the dominant upper class. As Bollywood films cater to and showcase a fast globalizing and upper class lifestyle, the language also gives contemporary Hindi cinema its identity. However, I would argue that the accompanying presence of English has always defined Hindi, if not as the language of the dominant class, then as the language of the outsider and the other. Still, the shift is stark in its contrast to the place of English in the 1970s, as evident above. It is Urdu today that functions as English did in *Amar Akbar Anthony*, defining a specific constituency and naming marginality, while it is English and not Urdu so much (unless in a period piece) which conveys cosmopolitanism, class, and erudition. As film readings later in the chapter will illustrate, English is able to function so fungibly because of its formal familiarity and its commonplaceness.

Especially in the case of Bombay cinema, then, as the nationalizing discourse around Hindi grows, the rise of English seems to spell the decline of Urdu. In *Cinema and Censorship: The Politics of Control in India* (2009), Someshwar Bhowmick agrees that “since the 1990s, the Hindi film industry [had] acquired the habit of constantly

revising its strategy and repositioning itself. Its latest strategy [was] to claim some kind of a representative status for itself, ignoring and denying the plurality of Indian cinema. This claim to an imagined pre-eminence [rested] on its supposed role as the disseminator of official language” (Bhowmick, 270). With rising communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims in the wake of the Babri Mosque-Ram Temple dispute, Pokharan nuclear test explosions in 1998 and the Kargil War with Pakistan in 1999 in the background, mainstream Bollywood assumed a more Hindi and Hindu-cosmopolitan identity. The role of film personalities in the society at large was also evolving, and more and more of them made forays outside of the industry. Many famous actors campaigned for different political parties and some members of the film industry were also mixed up in the activities of international gangsters and dons who had set up their bases in Bombay. Many patriotic films such as *Border* (1997), *Tiranga* (Tricolor) (1992), *Prahaar: The Final Attack* (Attack: The Final Attack) (1991), *Krantiveer* (Revolutionary) (1994), *Sarfarosh* (One Willing to Sacrifice Himself for a Cause) (1999), among others—sometimes featuring either a local mafia or a blatantly “Pakistani” or a vaguely Muslim enemy—were released in this decade.

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Economic reforms and political developments of the 1990s not only threatened national borders and identity, they also shifted the nature of life at home. Both Ganti and Prasad discuss the resultant anxiety about family structures and the rise in films centered on themes of large families, marriages, and celebrating together. These films recontextualized the hero-heroine within the joint family and “sublated” romantic love,

and framed their traditional and conservative ideologies within a modern and global idiom of fashion. But, at another level, the liberalization of economic reforms also led to a rise in activity on television. The 1990s saw an unprecedented amount of English language programming on satellite channels such as MTV, Channel [V], Cartoon Network, Discovery, National Geographic and Star TV which showed international content, both sexual and violent, that was otherwise controlled on state-run television channels. The success of these television channels in the urban middle and upper classes led to conversations about developing Hindi language content in the second half of the 1990s. Along with the simultaneous release of Bollywood films across different non-Hindi speaking states and the release of Hollywood films in metropolitan cities, these developments in television made the spoken language an important concern for cinema.<sup>87</sup> In conversations both celebratory and anxious, popular and industry film magazines such as *Filmfare*, *Screen Weekly*, *Trade Guide*, and *TV and Video World* reveal that the question of the language of Hindi films gained center stage. For instance, in the January 9, 1998, issue of *Screen Weekly*, Aamir Khan, a leading Hindi film actor, was reported as having refused to use the English word “plumber” in one of the dialogues for an upcoming film. Khan wanted all the words in his lines to be Hindi. As a member of the audience, he claimed, he had often found English phrases like “objection sustained” and “objection overruled” in courtroom scenes as hard to follow in Hindi films. So while on

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<sup>87</sup> The film magazines of the time show a lot of anxiety about the simultaneous release of English and Hindi films. The fear was that the import and release of “foreign” films would be a threat to the stronghold that the Hindi film industry enjoyed. At the same time, distributors in the south of India wanted to ban the release of Hindi films. In perhaps a reflection of the changing times and an expanding vision of the “film industry,” *Screen Weekly* added a section dedicated to international cinema in its April 24, 1992, issue. It added a “Screen South” section focusing on the film industry in the southern states of India a few months later.

the sets, he improvised a translation of the word “plumber” to “नल ठीक करने वाला” (one who fixes faucets) (8). Recalling the slippage into Hindi of *Mai*’s Sunaina, the title of this news article, “No English, *Hum* Hindustani,” is itself an ironic acknowledgement of Prasad’s structural bilingualism. It can be translated as “No English, We Are Hindustani.” While the use of the word “Hindustani” draws attention to the conventionally recognized language of the Bombay film industry, it also falsely naturalizes the link between language and nation, in order to oust English. Even though the title of the article casts language as an aspect of national identity, it is clearly also (if not more accurately) a matter of class identity. Khan’s comment about his own experiences as an audience member further draws attention to dialogues and spoken words as independent of the image on screen in the kinds of pedagogical functions they perform for the audiences. This is an important distinction. In films, as I will show, cinematic englishes are indeed important in their visuality. At the same time, however, with the strong emphasis on dialogues, lyrics, and songs in Hindi films and contexts of reception, the spoken word also enjoys an independent life. To give another example, Gopaldas Neeraj, a poet and a song lyricist, saw in song writing an opportunity to enhance the Hindi vocabulary of the average film goer. In a November 20, 1998, interview with *Screen Weekly*, he remarked that growing up he learnt many new words through Hindi film songs. Now, as a lyricist, he aimed to include a couple of new Hindi words every now and then. “If a song has fifty words and among them I can incorporate even one rare or new word musically,” Neeraj said, “isn’t that a pleasant way of increasing the listener’s vocabulary?” (23).

Neeraj's desire to make songs an educational opportunity (in both Hindi and English) can, at least in part, be attributed to the fact that by the mid-1990s films were no longer watched by the "masses" alone but by the upper and middle classes as well.<sup>88</sup> Ganti writes that "reforming the tastes of the implied masses" (Ganti, 95) in light of the expectations and tastes of the upper and middle classes was an important objective of the times.<sup>89</sup> "Film makers argued that with audiences being exposed to the 'best' in the world, or to 'international' standards, they demanded no less from Hindi films" (95). The rise of the multiplex cinema halls with higher ticket prices and greater seating stratification preserved class distinctions inside the cinema halls and made them attractive to upper and middle classes. Cinema-going gradually became an elite pastime. As a result, the film industry exhibited a greater concern with subject matter and characterization. Issues of the industry magazine *Trade Guide*, for instance, often proclaimed that the old formula of action packed films (with a threadbare formulaic plot) was no longer working, and declared that the "demand is for pure entertainment instead of action films which don't appeal to the masses" (Mehra, 4). Further, newer kinds of films and topics required that the masses also be educated and made media literate to appreciate them. This process assumes a translational impulse in the Sunday edition of the Hindi newspaper, *Navbharat Times*, on July 11, 1999. In a front page spread titled, "यह फील गुड फिल्मों का दौर है" (This Is the Age of Feel Good Films), the newspaper discussed the

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<sup>88</sup> According to Shaden Tageldin, Neeraj's use of film song to teach new Hindi vocabulary also matches the pedagogical energies usually attached to English in contemporary (or post-1990s) film. As such, Neeraj's use of film songs as a pedagogical tool further confirms the structural bilingualism of the metalanguage of Bollywood cinema.

<sup>89</sup> Increasingly, many popular Hindi film songs include a few English words and phrases in the chorus. As part of catchy songs, these words usually penetrate the colloquial vocabulary of the audiences who may not be considered as users of English as a first language.

widening scope of cinema, as if it were a different thing from the popular Hindi films.<sup>90</sup> The article familiarized the readers with examples of what is understood as “world cinema,” and declared that cinema was now a means of entertainment for both the masses and the classes. In this instance, the globalism inherent in the idea of Bollywood expands to include “good cinema” from different parts of the world. So much so that the newspaper needs to define the word “cinema” in the kind of tautology we have observed in *Raag Darbari*, “सिनेमा मास और क्लास दोनों के मनोरंजन का साधन बन गया है. सिनेमा का हिन्दी में अर्थ है कलाचित्रा” (Cinema is the means of entertainment for the masses and the classes. Cinema means art-images) (1). This is an odd explanation of the word “cinema” because the more common literal Hindi translation thereof would be “चलचित्र” (moving image). Another term, “film,” is the more popularly used word in Hindi. Here it gives way to the expansive idea of “cinema” defined as a high art form that entertains both the masses and the classes. Entertainment, as imagined here, is not mindless viewing of a formulaic action-packed film from the proverbial peanut gallery. Instead, it captures a more edifying endeavor that benefits the “masses” and the “classes.” As in the case of the word “Bollywood,” the use of the word “cinema” recognizes the global scope of the film industry through the “good cinema” of the world.

This redefinition could be read as a response to the fact that the nature of films being made did shift enormously in this decade as the NRI (the Non-Resident Indian) became an important member of the audience and of the cast, global brand names became more common, and the slums began to disappear from the screen. Ganti has argued that

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<sup>90</sup> *Yeh Feel Good Filmon Ka Daur Hai*

the cultural legitimacy of Bollywood beginning in the 1990s is a result of an ongoing process of gentrification of the cinema and the film. At various points in history well into the early 2000s, members of the Bombay film industry appealed to the government to be recognized as an “industry.” Despite the immense pedagogical potential of Bombay film, these appeals were to no avail. The economic and political shifts in the 1990s ushered in a renewed call for recognizing the film industry as an “industry” and a separate portfolio under governmental supervision. The industry itself had grown tremendously as a result of the economic reforms and corporate funding, but it was never fully supported or managed by the government. While such a “management” would place the film industry under greater governmental control, it would also accord greater legitimacy to film as a national art form. However, the only way in which the industry felt government intervention was through censorship practices and taxation policies.<sup>91</sup>

The hierarchy of viewership between the masses and the classes—established through ticket pricing inside the theaters—sharpened the anxiety that the state, according to Monika Mehta in *Censorship and Sexuality in Bombay Cinema* (2011), had always felt around cinema (Mehta, 30) because of its wide circulation and influence on public life. As the various Indian Cinematographers’ Reports, specifically those of the years 1927 and 1951 reveal, it was assumed that the same enormity of influence, if correctly used, also made cinema an important pedagogical tool for the advancement of the audience. The *Report of the Working Group on National Film Policy* (1980) noted that the “audio visual medium had immense potential to mould (sic) the mind of man” (3). It also

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<sup>91</sup> One other way in which the industry receives occasional recognition from the government is in the form of “National Awards” when they are presented for work in commercial cinema.

remarked that cinema was an instrument of social change and not only a “luxury to be tapped into for tax resources” (3). In its role as the “moral guardian,” (Mehta, 36, 39) the state was very closely involved in controlling the content and viewership of films.

Tied to a pedagogical goal of creating good citizens, censorship practices are overwhelmingly concerned with policing the foreign. In the case of foreign language films, examining committees and censor boards presume that the necessary foreignness of their practices will make these unintelligible to audiences. However, the problem arises when these supposedly foreign practices appear not performed by a foreign body. For instance, the *Report of the Indian Cinematograph Committee* in 1927 argued that “western” (referring to Hollywood) films with explicit intimacy scenes were not as harmful because most Indian audiences did not understand, did not like, and did not go to see such films (in Mehta, 33). This line of reasoning continues to date as Hollywood films face less stringent restrictions in comparison to Bollywood films or films that are dubbed and released in Indian languages besides English. Physical and verbal violence is more acceptable in Hollywood films (Mehta, 68), as is the explicit performance of sex.

However, the concern with the foreign also raised the question: foreign to whom or what? The authority and the qualifications of the examining committees often came under attack, either by the “public” in media reports as in the case of *Fire*, or simply in appeals by the film directors and producers. Monika Mehta in her study of film censorship practices gives a detailed account of the way audiences were selected by examining bodies from different professions to represent the “average viewer.” Many of these members had strong conservative political views and belonged to a mix of class



positions. Criticism from these audiences, or decisions made by the examining bodies on their behalf, most often leaned towards the conservative. These acts of censorship were not liked by the members of the film industry who had to alter their work accordingly or face enormous economic loss because of stalled projects. Such a conservative approach also made it difficult to discuss or question the political status quo. Assumptions about literacy, media literacy, and the ability to appreciate art converged to deem these audiences inadequate to the task. What is often praised as the most progressive view on film censorship in India, the *Report of the Enquiry Committee on Film Censorship* (1969), or the Khosla Committee report, granted that a “film could be censored if it was against the interest of the security of the state, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency or morality or [involved] defamation or contempt of court or [was] likely to incite the commission of any offense” (in Mehta, 34). However, in an unprecedented move, it also laid down criteria for individuals who could be entrusted with the task of assessing and censoring—where an interesting vision of the worldliness for Indian cinema emerges. The ideal audience would be attuned to the social mores of India and hold a globally-oriented perspective. They must be educated and be culturally literate. The ideal audience would be vary of excessive checks at home as well as of the seductive license outside.

The censors must possess suitable educational qualifications and cultural background. They should be persons commanding public respect, they should have a broad outlook on life. They should know something about the arts and the cultural values of this country, they should have traveled

widely and should be persons who can be expected to deal with the problem of censorship without the handicaps of unreasonable inhibitions or an obsession with every petrified moral value or with the glamour (sic) of so-called advanced groups. (Khosla *et al*, 100)

The Khosla committee preserves the commonplace understanding of what the “global” or the world outside threatens the nation with. However, it also displays the abiding need for a balance between (never repudiation of) national and global values, which became even more urgent in the light of the shifts after economic reforms. A combination of economic liberalization and the rise of Hindutva added to the state’s anxiety about re-establishing its authority. By the 1990s and the early 2000s, we find that the censor board suggests many cuts based on language alone, whether it be English language expletives in films such as Mira Nair’s *Monsoon Wedding* (2001) and Mahesh Bhatt’s *Gunaah* (1993), or the title of Nagesh Kukunoor’s *Hyderabad Blues* (2000), where the Board felt that the word “blue” was misleading in its reference to amateur pornography in India, and demanded that it be changed. Shekhar Kapur’s film *Elizabeth* (1998) also had to lose words like “quinny” that referred to the female genitalia. These suggestions frame the translation of English afresh as the translation of an American or British English into an Indian English or an English that would be acceptable in India. In doing so, these instances again contest Minae Mizumura’s apprehensive vision of a global English bulldozing an indigenous language culture. Instead, we witness here the shaping power of a putative “local” context and a national regime of censorship. Monika Mehta writes that censorship occurs at multiple points, and not only in the “cuts”

suggested by the Censor Board. In fact, though censorship, film policy, and cinematographers' reports limit commentary on the subject of language to recommendations and observations about violent language, industry and popular film magazines, as we saw, reveal a greater preoccupation with these questions.

Besides controlling and imputing meaning to words, however, Bombay cinema also engenders a vocabulary enhancing the vernacular life of English. We already saw that the word "cinema" consolidated the global character of film industry in India, and the word "cool" assumed a material life that expanded the reach of cinema into other circuits of commodity exchange. The idea of "censoring" also received attention at this time. Print media both in Hindi and in English featured debates on questions of censorship, and court cases involving films like *Bandit Queen*, *Elizabeth*, and *Fire* consistently made headlines. Conversations outside India about the country's "oppressive" film censorship regime, "propped up by a suspicious state machinery, archaic rules and conservative, if not 'primitive' guidelines" (Bhowmick, 287), cast further doubts on the viability of democracy. This media hype, as Bhowmick writes, made films like *Bandit Queen*, *Fire*, and *Kama Sutra* marketable and prized (literally) because of their status as forbidden objects. This status was produced by the widely discussed and circulated knowledge that the film had been censored; and "the labels 'banned' and 'censored' became advertising gimmicks to entice global and local audiences" (56). As words like 'banned' and 'censored' entered common parlance, colonial categories of censorship and its discourse in English further the Hindu Hindi-fueled right wing agenda of preserving traditional patriarchal values.

While English was acceptable in its symbolic meaning and as a brand, it was not necessarily accepted as a linguistic medium. Take for example the following comment by Shakti Samanta, the chairman of the Central Board of Film Certification from 1991 to 1997, that “the psyche of the audience who watches English and Hindi films is different” (Samanta in Mohan, 4). An important instance in this context was the release of Mira Nair’s *Kama Sutra* in India. At the time of its release in English, the film did not create a stir, and received only minimal cuts and deletions. However, as soon as there were talks about dubbing the film into “vernacular languages” (Mehta, 2011: 75), the Central Board of Film Certification suggested more deletions and edits than it had suggested for the English language. This decision was guided by the argument that “the audiences who would view these films lacked ‘proper’ education, making them more inclined to imbibe and spew vulgarity” (Mehta, 2011: 75). This incident exposed the class pretensions and presumptions that counted being educated as being English-speaking and upper middle class. Ironically, when it did release, *Kama Sutra* met with a lukewarm response despite the controversy and the anticipation. While many viewers found the plot unengaging and the suggestion that homosexuality was “Indian” offensive, far more people commented on the film’s use of the English language. This extract from a review article published in *Screen Weekly* on February 13, 1998, reflects the dominant reception of the film: “[A] factor that takes away from the charm of watching the film is to hear an Indian story with Indian actors mouthing English dialogues. ‘Do not surrender to despair,’ says Rekha [one of the actresses]. It does sound a little too heavy for easy handling” (Rao, 1998: 8). The writer’s comment invokes the ponderous and archaic tone of the language as well as its

stateliness, which seems incommensurate to intimate discussions of love and despair. The sense here is that the English language is not only not the *lingua franca* of the Indian sixteenth century, it is also not “light” enough to assume the spokenness and ease of conversation in a film. In a film like *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, English assumes an iconicity by virtue of its “topological similarity” (Piller, 327) with brand names displayed on clothing items and as the wearable technology of the “C.O.O.L” necklace. These objects make the wearer legible as cosmopolitan, affluent, and stylish. In *Kama Sutra*, the English language fails to assume such an iconicity. If anything, English in *Kama Sutra* militates against the narrative and suggests conflicting responses. The iconicity of English in *Kuch Kuch Hota Hota* derives not simply from its functionality in dialogue but also from its association with the desirable and the aspirational. Such metaphorical and metonymical associations are lacking in *Kama Sutra*.

Based on the Urdu short story “*Uttaran*” (Hand Me Downs) (1977), by Wajidah Tabassum, Mira Nair’s *Kama Sutra: A Tale of Love*, is a feminist take on Vatsyayan’s third century text, *Kama Sutra*. Nair’s film is set in sixteenth century Rajasthan and features two female leads, Maya and Tara. Tara is a princess and Maya the servant who grows up wearing Tara’s hand-me-downs. Maya resents this unfairness and on the eve of Tara’s marriage to the king, seduces him to avenge her humiliation.<sup>92</sup> The rest of the narrative follows the rivalry between the two heroines and the king’s growing attachment with Maya.

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<sup>92</sup> The word “Maya” in Hindi refers to the world as an illusion, as well as the powers by which the phenomenal world becomes manifest. In the film, Maya represents an “illusion,” and a temptation to the king. In an important dialogue, the king remarks on the *maya*-like quality of Maya. However, in the English language dialogue, that comment is not at all meaningful.

The script with the cuts recommended by the Central Board of Film Certification or CBFC (as found at the National Film Archive of India in Pune) shows that only three cuts were recommended by the Examining Committee to the Hindi dubbed version of *Kama Sutra*. Of the three excised sounds, the first is a set of expletives that translate to “whore” and “bitch.” The second cut (figures 5.4, 5.5, 5.6) is of Doctor Mani putting his hands inside the hole cut into a piece of embroidered fabric to examine Tara, who has been deprived of physical intimacy by her husband and is “sick” as a result. This scene recalls Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981) where Adam Aziz examines his future wife, Naseem Ghani, through a hole cut into a bedsheet. In *Kama Sutra*, interestingly, the image on the screen is not excised but the dialogue “जाँच रहे हैं, जाँच रहे हैं” (“examining, examining”) are. The scene itself presents a complex dynamics of the seen and the unseen. The doctor (an anachronism in the sixteenth century?) is brought blindfolded into the women’s quarters and has to resort to examining his patient through a sheet because the queen must not be seen, even though the audience can see everything. The repetition of the word “examining” is supposed to be a reassurance to the audience in the scene that the doctor is only performing his professional duties. However, as the audience outside the scene can see the doctor’s fingers are being used by Tara to pleasure herself. Finally, the last cut is the line “यह अदा मुझे बहुत पसंद है” (“I like this style a lot” though in the English version it is rendered as “God’s grace is in you”) spoken by the Raja to Maya in praise of her art of seduction as they are having sex. Interestingly, all of these cuts are sound only. No scenes of nudity were required to be cut, and indeed, *Kama Sutra* had received a lot of praise for its cinematography and its use of color. However, the

Hindi script of *Kama Sutra* lists some “voluntary” deletions made by the applicant, which include cutting out visuals of Tara and Maya’s bare breasts, as well as of Maya’s *derrière* at three different points.

While the applicant, the director, assumes that the images of naked bodies would be unacceptable to a Hindi speaking audience or to an examining committee acting on its behalf, the division of the sound from the image in the decisions seems to suggest that what is said and heard holds greater impact than what is shown and seen. If the dialogues parse the images, translate them for the audience, then silencing the audio is akin to arresting that process of intersemiotic translation described by Jakobson in “On Linguistic Aspects on Translation” (1959). All the English words of the dialogues are easily translated into Hindi equivalents, but in their silencing they are rendered untranslatable. Ironically, however, the audience’s dissatisfaction with the English dialogues arises from the fact that they were discordant and unsuitable, that is, they were not commensurable translations. The examining body of the Central Board of Film Certification quiets the Hindi dialogues because they risk being understood and animating the erotic images. Without the Hindi “sounds” the images and the actions in a diasporic film dubbed from English, it is hoped, remain unintelligible.

The category of “intersemiotic” translation as theorized by Jakobson becomes important when one is confronted with an “untranslatable.” As he distinguishes between intralingual, interlingual and intersemiotic translation to understand meanings of words (without reference to “non-linguistic” signs), and the different ways in which that meaning can be grasped, Jakobson writes that any assumption of ineffable or

untranslatable cognitive data would be a contradiction in terms. “All cognitive experience and its classification is conveyable in any existing language” (115), however, sometimes “in jest, in dreams, in magic, briefly, in what one would call everyday verbal mythology and in poetry above all, the grammatical categories carry a high semantic import. In these conditions, the question of translation becomes much more entangled and controversial” (117). As Jakobson creates a sequence—intralingual, then interlingual, finally followed by intersemiotic—it seems that the precise function of intersemiotic translation might be to address the inadequacy of the first two kinds of translations to render a “high semantic import.” Thus it is when translation becomes more entangled and controversial that one needs to resort to the intersemiotic. It is in this case, among other strategies, that the translator considers the overall message that needs to be conveyed instead of the words, privileging information over verbal signs. In suggestions for censorship in *Kama Sutra*, the overall message seems to have been translated as the unintelligible—the message that the Hindi-speaking audience receives is that the original English dialogues are unintelligible (or even, irrelevant). A Hindi-dubbed version of the film would also not include English subtitles as part of the image on the screen. In their (linguistic and interlingual) untranslatability and inaudibility, these specific scenes in *Kama Sutra* are rendered as not belonging to the cultural context of the film and the audience. In *Translation and Subjectivity*, Sakai argues that we cannot imagine a truly intersemiotic translation without first separating languages and assuming that each language is self-evidently unified. With this in mind, it is reasonable to surmise that the examining body’s suggestion to only silence the dialogues is really an invitation to separate the



written/graphic English from its cultural associations. By separating scenes of sexual explicitness from dubbed dialogues, the state is inviting the audience to imagine an English that is not immediately associated with the vulgarity of foreign provenance. For instance, the excised Hindi dialogue of “I like this style a lot” is quite racy and presumably just as inappropriate for consumption by a familial and national audience as the original English rendering—“God’s grace is in you”—that uncomfortably joins a devotional register to a sexual one.<sup>93</sup> Instead, sanitized by removing all dialogues, we have an English that is fit for a national audience and ripe for its role as the state’s associate official language.

An important contrast to *Kama Sutra* is Deepa Mehta’s *Fire*, which was released in the same year. Unlike the sixteenth century tale of love, *Fire* is situated in neoliberal India of the 1990s, specifically in the capital city of Delhi. The film shows a middle class Hindu joint family where parents, married children, and their families all live together under one roof. This particular family consists of an old bed-ridden mother, her two sons Ashok and Jatin, and their respective wives, Radha and Sita. They are assisted by a live-in servant, Mundu, who helps out with household chores as well as with the family’s take-out and video library businesses. The film focuses on the development of an emotional and sexual relationship between Radha and Sita as they find themselves ignored and humiliated by their husbands, and deeply dissatisfied with patriarchal structures in general. Their husbands are unavailable; Ashok has taken a vow of celibacy and is a disciple of a guru, and Jatin is still in love with his Chinese girlfriend, Julie, who refused to marry him.

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<sup>93</sup> I am grateful to Shaden Tageldin for this formulation.

When the film, *Fire*, was dubbed into Hindi, the names of one of the two lead women characters, Sita, was changed to Nita. Sita is the name of the wife of the Hindu god Ram, and the character's portrayal as bisexual was considered offensive to Hindu religious sentiments. Otherwise, the film was released with no cuts. Like *Kama Sutra*, however, *Fire* also received some criticism for its use of the English language. Reviewers found the use of English "strange," and "inauthentic." Raka Ray compares the dubiousness of its characters' English to its shaky portrayal of queer politics, which implies that same sex desire emanates from unfulfillment in heterosexual relationships (Ray in *SAWNET Reviews*, 1).

With some exceptions, all characters in the film speak in English most of the time. The film itself, as Deepa Mehta writes in the press release by Zeitgeist Films, was conceived entirely in English. Mehta claimed that it could not have been made in any other Indian language. In a section entitled "Why *Fire* is in English," which I am quoting in full below, Mehta writes,

I am a victim so to speak, of a post-colonized India. The medium of my education was English. In fact, not unlike many children of middle-class parents, English was my first language and Hindi, my second. I wrote the script of FIRE (sic) in English, a language I am totally at ease with. The difference is in the "kind" of English. In India, we do not speak "pukka" English. We've made the language our own. It's totally colloquial and has many phrases that are distinctly Indian. We call this happy amalgamation "Hinglish." I thought about translating FIRE into Hindi, but more for the

Western audience rather than the Indian one. Western audiences find a “foreign” film easier to imbibe, easier to accept in its cultural context, if it is in its indigenous language. ‘A foreign film can only be a foreign film if it is in a foreign language.’ And if it isn’t, then somehow it is judged (albeit subconsciously), as a Western film disguised as a foreign one. All very complex but true to a large extent. Well, how to explain to people in the West that most middleclass Indians speak Hinglish? Eventually, I decided to go for the authenticity of spirit of FIRE rather than people’s expectations of what a foreign film constitutes. (Mehta, 1996: 4)

This passage raises many provocative points about the English language in India, especially its claim that some kind (kinds?) of “Hinglish” is the reality of “postcolonized” India, and that Mehta’s use of English in the film is in fact more authentic than her use of Hindi would have been. Mehta begins by naming a historical necessity (she was schooled in English, and thus she is at ease with it) and by identifying herself as a “victim” of that reality. The use of the word victim is revealing as it characterizes “postcolonized” India as the culprit or the perpetrator of the crime of using English. This could be a reference to the enduring colonial legacy that has proven hard to shake off as well as a reference to the postcolonial administration that willfully chose the English language as one of two official languages. Nonetheless, Mehta frames the use of English as neither a choice she has made nor a choice that is available to her. Her gesture is amusing in the way it seeks to absolve her of using an excolonial language or of using a “global” and “foreign” language that some critics may find untrue (even disrespectful) to

the context she describes. Thus, her formulation in the passage quoted above testifies to the overwhelming perception of English as foreign and as an invalid choice of idiom in which to write and discuss India.<sup>94</sup> At the same time, it also functions to settle the debate around English in India—as native or foreign—by pointing to a historical necessity.

As Mehta reveals further, this is not only her reality, but that of her characters as well, belonging as they do to class positions similar to her own. Mehta then points out the difference between her English, her characters' English and the proper Queen's English that may exist outside India. The irony of this sentence is unmistakable as she differentiates her English from a "pukka" (a genuine) English by using the word "pukka," which itself attests to the enrichment of the Queen's English by languages of the colonies. There is no "pukka" English as the phrase itself belies, and Mehta's use of English in her film in the spirit of authenticity also critiques the stark division imagined between discourses of the local and the global, where the local is imagined to index "authenticity" and the global its antithesis. In the film, *Fire*, different kinds of Englishes encode different experiences of the global and the local, and the different ways in which the "global" surfaces in the "local." For instance, unlike all the other characters, Jatin specifically references global popular culture, citing clothing brands like Armani or Kung Fu films. His girlfriend, Julie, speaks in English and has worked hard to acquire a U.S. American accent so that she sounds like a "Yankee."<sup>95</sup> Depending on how one

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<sup>94</sup> Thus, Deepa Mehta seems to predict the criticism that Vikram Chandra felt frustrated with and called a "cult of authenticity."

<sup>95</sup> The American accent, like American money in *Slumdog Millionaire*, itself becomes a multinational brand. Julie did not marry Jatin because she does not want to be trapped in a traditionally joint family; instead, she harbors dreams of migrating to the United States. In the variety of phonetic Hinglishes presented in the film, Julie's cultivated "Yankee" accent is

understands the phenomenon of “Hinglish,” invoked by Mehta, the characters speak only English, though their syntax may follow that of a Hindi sentence.

Two English words that drive the denouement of the film are “choice” and “desire.” Sita, the younger sister-in-law, introduces these words as concepts in the film as she blows open Radha’s world. In their invocation of third wave feminism, these two words especially also bring to mind the un/translated patriarchal and neoliberal vocabulary of *Dainik Jagran Sangini*. In her comments on the press release for *Fire*, Mehta writes,

We women, especially Indian women, constantly have to go through a metaphorical test of purity in order to be validated as human beings, not unlike Sita’s trial by fire. I’ve seen most of the women in my family go through this, in one form or another. Do we, as women, have choices? And if we make choices, what is the price we pay for them? (3)

The trial by fire refers to the test of the goddess Sita’s purity after she returns from Ravana’s capture. David Shulman in “Fire and Flood: The Testing of Sita in Kampan’s *Iramvataram*” (1991) writes that Sita’s trial is as much the trial of her husband, Ram, as it is her own because there is no doubt that Sita is in fact blameless. In Kampan’s *Ramayana*, this moment is the only one where Ram is overtly hostile to his wife in a relationship that is otherwise considered a paragon of ideal marriage. In Mehta’s film as well, the test of purity by fire that Radha undergoes towards the end of the film is as much a commentary on Ashok’s apathy and patriarchal attitudes as it is a vindication

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presented as a visa and a recognizable brand that will move unrestricted and allow her to move with it.

of Radha's and Sita's relationship. However, the "threat" to the purity of women issues both from their same sex relations as well as from the linguistic impurity of the discourse of third wave feminism in words like "choice" and "desire."

This linguistic impurity is challenged and humiliated by characters who do not speak in English, or do not speak at all. Mundu, the servant, usually speaks in English when he is with the family. However, in a scene that has received praise for its "spontaneity" and for its "authenticity" (Ray in *SAWNET Reviews*, 1), Mundu speaks with another lower class character, the milkman, in Hindi. This scene is subtitled for the audience and reinforces Mehta's assumption that only middle and upper classes in India speak in English, or what she names, "Hinglish." The only character who does not speak at all in the film is the paralytic grandmother. In an important scene toward the end of the film, she is shown spitting on Radha to express her disapproval of the intimacy between her and Sita. These are the characters who stay at home; who do not enjoy mobility—social and spatial. Perhaps to drive home her argument that the "post-colonized" middle class speaks in English, Mehta shows those outside its fold. While English itself is mobile in its vernacularized form, that mobility is not available to everyone. For the evident and commonplace translatability of English, the reality Mehta wishes to reveal, there are some figures who must remain untranslatable as foil.

At the heart of the film lies a word and a relationship that is translatable but untranslated. Towards the end of the film, Sita says to Radha that "there is no word in our language" for the relationship between women of intimacy and of solidarity in a challenge to patriarchal structures. This statement can be read in many ways; this

language could be of Hindi or English or, as is most likely, of patriarchy. In the “languages” of Hindi and English (the two spoken in the film), there are of course words to describe same sex intimacy as also for feminist rejections of patriarchy. As if to reinforce this absence of the “word in our language,” when Mundu goes to tell Ashok (who is at a prayer service) about the relationship between Sita and Radha, he does not actually “say” anything. In fact, we see Ashok see Radha and Sita in bed. The absence of the “word in our language” leaves the precise subject of the film vague—the film is and is not both a case for same-sex intimacy and a critique of patriarchy. Such an equivocation helps Mehta navigate different (and differently conservative) contexts of reception. It also helps the film generate conversation on a set of allied concerns without showing a heavy-handed preference for one over the other. This silencing of the “word in our language” is generative also because as Mehta writes in the press release, her film was received well and she has “been thanked for opening a ‘dialogue’ between men and women” (4). Through the act of not translating, or of translating by censoring, Mehta is able to bring her point across more volubly. Again, the act of silencing is generative as it allows Mehta to “de-mystify India” (3). She writes,

The India of the British Raj, of Maharajas and beautiful Princesses surrounded by abject poverty, just does not exist anymore. I wanted to make a film about contemporary, middle-class India, with all its vulnerabilities, foibles and the incredible, extremely dramatic battle that is waged daily between the forces of tradition and the desire for an independent, individual voice. Even though FIRE is very particular in its time and space and setting, I wanted its emotional content to

be universal. The struggle between tradition and individual expression is one that takes place in every culture. *FIRE* deals with this specifically in the context of Indian society. What appealed to me was that the story had a resonance that transcended geographic and cultural boundaries. (3)

The interplay of Hindi, English, and images allows Mehta to expose the “truth” about India in a way that also translates into a universal tussle between tradition and modernity, and a quest for individualism. The universalism of human emotions is, in turn, translated via the universalism of the market. To further illustrate the changing landscape of India and its similarity with the world at large, the film also focuses on this universalism of the market. Besides the figure of Jatin who mentions brand names, the film often shows the pervasiveness of global brand names and the vocabulary of businesses rendered in English on billboards and banners (figures 5.7, 5.8, and 5.9). The iconicity of English plays an important role in this process of making visible and demystifying neoliberal India. The English brand name “Crush” splashed on a store shutter (figure 5.10) figuratively crushes Ashok as it poses a challenge to traditional sexual and gender politics. The cross stitched wall hanging in the family living room with “Home Sweet Home” embroidered on it offers a sustained critique of the joint family structure as it subordinates the desires of women to those of men.

The familiarity and authenticity of English as encoded in these moments function as a translational device. It is English, the familiar language, which comes to bridge the gap between a reluctant audience both in India and outside, and a subject matter that may be hostile to conservative beliefs. *Fire* uses English to show a living truth about India and



its middle class but loses credibility among global audiences who cannot place the film—its politics appear dated but its language is English, which must be modern. In India, on the other hand, the question of the subject matter eclipses the seeming incongruity of the language that some have identified. Most of the reviews only peripherally remark on the oddness of English dialogues despite Mehta's claims to the contrary. Even the censor board does not exclude any dialogues but asks only that a character be renamed. "Language" is closely tied to religious communities in the reception of *Fire*, and gestures to a mode of language outside the verbal.<sup>96</sup> Unlike in *Kama Sutra*, no distinctions are made on the basis of assumptions about language literacy of the audience. As the uncertain validity of English undermines itself, its figuration in *Fire* seems very similar to its uncanny presence in Vaidyaji's dream in *Raag Darbari*. In the subtextual argument that English not only belongs to rarified global domains but is also spoken in the middle class family of Old Delhi, the globally thriving English almost seems to belong nowhere, literally becoming the *unheimlich*.

By contrast, English is right at home in the India of *Slumdog Millionaire*. As it takes the distinct form of the visual, the language also becomes a way to secure the authenticity of representation in the film. In *Fire*, Mundu speaks in Hindi with the milkman but perplexingly switches to a grammatically perfect English with his employers. In *Slumdog Millionaire*, the illegitimate speakers of English establish their right to the language through a series of episodes where English consistently impinges on their lives. *Slumdog Millionaire* does not restrict English to a linguistic medium but

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<sup>96</sup> This extra-verbal mode of language would overlap with Jakobson's "cultural" meanings, which elude intra- and interlingual translations and can, arguably, only be captured in intersemiotic translations.

exaggerates its presence and, arguably, even personifies it. It highlights the visual life of English which we have consistently encountered in our discussion of postcolonial India. It is a visual English that incarnates the fetishistic materiality of English in postcolonial India where the “language” is intelligible as desirable and powerful even if it remains, in literal terms, unintelligible. *Slumdog Millionaire* establishes the “authenticity” of English to India by capturing its pervasiveness, reproduction, and familiarity. In contrast to Mehta’s motivation to use English—that English is unavoidable in “postcolonized” India— *Slumdog Millionaire* clarifies that this inevitability does not imply that everyone understands the language. As such, *Slumdog Millionaire* affirms English language as the vernacular and places it right at the heart of all its sensationalist squalor.

It is the ubiquity of English that bestows the language with an aura even in the absence of intelligibility. This aura of English, as it manifests in *Slumdog Millionaire* with the ability to reward Jamal, is very different from the aura theorized by Walter Benjamin in “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Mechanical Reproducibility” (1936), which depends on the presence of an original and which “withers in the age of mechanical reproduction” (Benjamin, 1936: 221). The authenticity and the aura of English derive precisely from its mechanical reproducibility in advertisements, foreign-origin pornographic videos, governmental informational posters, clothing brands *et cetera*. As in many of the texts before (*The White Tiger*, *Raag Darbari*, and *Q&A*) English is encountered in *Slumdog Millionaire* as an image and not necessarily as text. Benjamin writes that “we define the aura of [natural objects] as the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it maybe” (222). In *Slumdog Millionaire*, the English

language does not lose its aura no matter how close it comes to the viewer. In fact, as we saw in the transformative function of English when worn by Balram Halwai, as read by the residents of Shivpalganj in malaria eradication, and as imagined in the Constitution's language legislation, proximity only activates the magical qualities of the language that Pietz also theorizes in his study of the fetish.

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Based on Vikas Swarup's *Q&A*, which I discussed in Chapter 3, *Slumdog Millionaire* enjoyed tremendous global success but was often dismissed as "inauthentic" and "unrealistic" in its reviews in India. Commercially produced films in India regularly demand a generous suspension of disbelief but *Slumdog Millionaire*, a film "about" India, received criticism for not being "realistic" enough. The film also earned criticism for its "slum slam" and "poverty porn" and for portraying an unflattering image of India nevermind how true. For the Indian audiences accustomed to Bollywood films, this gesture was especially shocking because it came at a time after the gentrification of Bollywood when not only had "all signs of poor people [...] disappeared," but also "no one in the industry [wanted] to show a slum anymore" and "slum [had] become a really bad word" (Ganti, 99). Thus, the English word "slum" in the title itself indicates the contentious status of language in *Slumdog Millionaire*.

The language spoken in the film is the primary challenge to the claims to realism made by *Slumdog Millionaire*. Since it is a bilingual Hindi-English film, all of the Hindi dialogues in the film are subtitled in English. In the more recent bilingual films out of Bollywood (including a non-Bollywood film like *Fire*), English is usually spoken by

middle class or upper class characters, and is supposed to capture the spoken language of this demographic. For the most part, this is also the way *Slumdog Millionaire* uses the English language. However, it makes some crucial exceptions. One such exception appears in the first third of the film, which features the young hero and his brother, Jamal and Salim Malik. Unlike Ram Mohammad Thomas, who is given an expansive and national secular name crossing the borders of Hindu, Muslim, and Christian communities, Jamal Malik is marked specifically as Muslim. Salim is his brother, not friend as in the novel, and the two have lost their mother in communal riots in Mumbai. The two young actors, who were actually children from the slums in Mumbai cast to play the characters, speak bilingual dialogues. Their speech is always a mix of Hindi with English words like “sorry,” “urgent,” “time pass,” “border,” “customer,” “time,” “limit,” “helicopter,” “autograph,” “double,” and “triple.” This use of English is, to an extent, strategic so that the audience that is not familiar with Hindi can follow. At the same time, these words (mostly a vocabulary of business and economics) perform a mimetic function as they show that India’s openness to the world has not only brought in foreign money but also a foreign language of money and as money. In this regard, the use of the word “autograph” is exemplary. In response to one of the first questions about Bollywood on the quiz show, Jamal recounts the time Amitabh Bachchan, a famous Bollywood actor, visited his slum. In an iconic scene, Jamal, covered in excrement, rushes to get his autograph. The crowd around a famous actor parts because of the stench from Jamal who victoriously receives the autograph. His brush with a kind of contemporary royalty is denied to him later when Salim underhandedly sells the piece of paper with Bachchan’s autograph for a few

rupees. This episode dramatizes very memorably and literally the currency-like quality of writing, and foreshadows the many ways in which language symbolically itself become tradeable like money for Jamal.

As in the case of *Fire*, the strategic use of bilingualism in *Slumdog* is certainly a means to speak to audiences outside of India. At the same time, it is true that the film's bilingualism critiques, via an "authentic" glimpse of India, the traditionally understood binaries between the global and the local. So for audiences in India especially, it is very uncomfortable to see Jamal part ways with the bilingualism of his childhood and start speaking in English fluently and monolingually once he grows up and returns to Mumbai. When young, the characters of Jamal and Salim evoke the *tapori* figure and are legible within that convention. However, when they continue to live on the streets but speak impeccably correct English, they become confusing to Indian audiences. The switch to English can be traced to the brief period when Salim and Jamal worked as tour guides at the Taj Mahal and had to extemporize in English language to lure the richer "foreign" tourists. Even here, their knowledge of the Taj and their knowledge of English are both shaky, which lends them credibility as characters if not as tour guides. At the level of the narrative itself, it is unbelievable that from speaking falteringly in English at the Taj Mahal, Jamal speaks so perfectly later. This transition is so abrupt that it subverts the realism of what Ajay Gehlawat has called the "shit narrative" (Gehlawat, 166), where images of excrement characterize the dark underbelly of a developing nation and validate to the audience of *Slumdog* the verisimilitudinal claims of the film. The representative capacity of English is now more or less accepted in Anglophone novels but not in films,

where it must be explained by privileges of class and location. In *Slumdog Millionaire*, the discomfort for a spectator like Kesavan, as he writes in “Lost in Translation,” does not arise from the presence of English *per se* but from the fact that the language is spoken flawlessly by a young man of no education. As we can conclude from the dialogues of young Jamal, Salim, and Latika, even the slum children can speak English words. However, what is further disconcerting, beyond the fact that Jamal speaks in English, is *how* he does so. The presence of English in films demonstrates the ways in which the language is understood differently in its spoken and written forms. English spoken incorrectly by an unlettered slum dweller is not as uncanny as its grammatically correct use by the same figure. Indeed, it comes down to the slumdog’s lack of formal education, which was precisely also the factor that delegitimized the narratives of Ram Mohammad Thomas in *Q&A* and Balram Halwai in *The White Tiger*. It is because Jamal did not complete his formal education, not even through the informal means available to Ram in the novel, that his portrayal risks appearing unforgivably unrealistic.<sup>97</sup>

In the face of criticism that threatens to trouble the verisimilitudinal logic governing English in the film, the English language appears, literally, as an animated figure, an *actor*. In *Cinema Babel*, Nornes argues that the way poor (or really, any kind of) subtitles censor a film is through their illegibility and their imputation of meaning to the movement on the screen. In *Slumdog Millionaire*, subtitles assume a life of their own. In an interview, co-director Danny Boyle said that he wanted the subtitles, in fact, “to be read like a comic book” (Beaufoy, Boyle, and Feld, 141), making the film an experience

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<sup>97</sup> In *Q&A*, Ram never goes to school but benefits from Father Timothy, who teaches him nursery rhymes and the English alphabet.

to be read as much as seen. Ironically, Boyle explains that he wanted the subtitles to be easy to take in, so that the audience could *watch* the film and not *read* the subtitles. English, thus, becomes enjoyable at two levels. Anjali Pandey in her essay, “The Million Dollar Question: How Do You Sell English on the Silver Screen?—A Visio-Linguistic Analysis of *Slumdog Millionaire*” (2010), writes that “in *Slumdog Millionaire* visual English is both *naturalized* (everyone in the film is comfortable with it) and *elevated* (it is prized as the language of education)” (Pandey, 1, my italics). For audience members who know the language, this kind of book-like organization of English subtitles only reinforces the naturalness of English in the postcolonial Indian milieu of the slum. The Barthesian “readerly” quality of the film only magnifies the way in which audiences in India would be attuned to “reading” English around them on billboards, store fronts, advertisements *et cetera*. For audience members who may not know the English language, these subtitles remind them of the visual experience of English in present-day India, intensify the interdiction (the tragic paradox of prohibition and incitement) to read, learn, and speak the language, and in turn, also function like interactive pedagogical tools to aid that task. In the article “An Out-of-Character Role for Subtitles,” Rachel Beckman writes that “green and amber-backed subtitles bring jewel tones to an otherwise brown-toned shot” (Beckman, 5) (figure 5.11, 5.12, and 5.13). Beckman describes the move from a static, bottom-screen, predictable placement of “subtitles as plain white lines of text tethered to the bottom of the screen” (5) to dynamic, floating subtitles unpredictably appearing on the screen. These animated words and sentences, against the background of “real” India, create a powerful impression of the translational power of the English

language. The “jewel tones” turn the English language into shiny, colorful, and precious objects that not only feel luxurious but hold immense promise of social mobility. English emerges not only as an actor and a translator but is “self-consciously established as a visually pleasurable object to the viewer” (Garwood, 175) as in the “C.O.O.L” necklace worn by the actor Shahrukh Khan in *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*.

In *Slumdog Millionaire*, the depiction of life in slums was so unsavory that several international businesses such as Mercedes-Benz and Pepsi did not want to be associated with the film, and their brand icons were concealed. In the absence of these brands, the English language, cast in jewel tones, itself becomes a currency and a brand in the film. Piller writes that brand names have both connotational and denotational meaning, and that most brand names are iconic, while some may be indexical. As an iconic brand name, the English language immediately points to a dominant Anglophone culture that has made inroads into the most underprivileged enclaves of urban India. English stands for itself—as a language of global markets, media, and diplomacy. However, at the same time, as it translates the dialogues of the young slum children and occurs in their dialogues, it also *becomes* the most underprivileged enclave of urban India. Its function as a brand, in this reading, subverts the branding of the nation in the “India Shining” campaign.<sup>98</sup>

We *hear* as well as *see* English in this film in the questions as well as in shots of the cities, the writing on trains, on buildings, posters, cellphone and television screens, and on billboards (figure 5.14). For instance, the geographical iconicity of the

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<sup>98</sup> I am grateful to Shaden Tageldin for highlighting the subversive potential of English as a brand in the film *Slumdog Millionaire*.



Anglophone world is visually and verbally brought to the screen in *Slumdog Millionaire*. The city of London is visualized as specific streets in the call center where Jamal works, and is made prominent in several scenes in the film. In the one scene where Jamal and Salim are shown at school, the lesson for the day is Alexandre Dumas's novel *The Three Musketeers* in an English translation. As the boys struggle to keep up with the class (to which they are already late), their tiny hands are shown frantically flipping the pages till they come to the title page (figure 5.15). This page takes up all the screen space after the quiz master announces the last question of the game show, which requires that Jamal name the three musketeers from Dumas's novel. As Ram in the novel does not know the answer to the question on Shakespeare, Jamal also does not recall the answer here. Jamal finally is able to guess the answer, which turns out to be correct. For each question, it is usually a *visual* memory that helps him track the answer and eliminate options. In fact, for most of the questions, the flashback usually settles on an iconic or a graphic marking. So when Jamal is quizzed on the geography of London, we see a sped up flashback of the call center that mimics the plan of the city of London. Significantly, questions also take up the entire screen space. The final cinematic forefronting of the letter "B," with Jamal Malik in the background, shows the extent to which the protagonist's destiny "to be" is tied to the language he does not know (figure 5.16).

The call center scenes, where Jamal works when he goes on the quiz show, remind one also of the instructional mission of Macaulay. In *Not Like a Native Speaker*, Rey Chow writes that the "offshore call center is the scene of literal calling and vocation, [which] embed[s] in its smooth operability the memory of that earlier scene, whereby the

colonized were recruited into the ideological state apparatus that was English” (Chow, 10). The call center may be the most glorified site of interpellation into a globalizing economy of cheap international labor but in *Slumdog Millionaire*, Jamal’s interpellation is aborted and incomplete. In one scene, Jamal has to take a call as he is filling in for another employee who slips away to “jam the lines” of the quiz show. Thus, per Althusser’s example, Jamal does respond to the “hey” from the other side. And, while Jamal is able to improvise a little bit and talk to the customer (thus, not lose the call), he is shown to be comically ill-equipped to actually help. Instead, once the caller irately disconnects the call, Jamal uses that opportunity to look up his brother, with whom he has lost contact. Ironically, Jamal uses his knowledge from the call center not to serve the callers or the business but himself—by locating his brother and later by answering questions about British culture on the quiz show. However, as in the case of Macaulay, Jamal’s “education” in English is not a deep immersion into another culture. It is only as a matter of picking up enough trivia and knowledge that one is, for practical purposes, both Indian and English.

The economic value of the knowledge of English is further dramatized in a number of scenes in *Slumdog Millionaire*. For instance, one of the questions Jamal is asked on the quiz show is, “On an American One Hundred Dollar Bill, there is a portrait of which American Statesmen?” As the quiz show host reads the question, we are taken—through another flashback—to the time when Jamal learnt its answer. We see Jamal’s visually challenged friend—a beggar in Mumbai—smell and determine if the bill just handed to him was of Indian or U.S. currency. Once he realizes, from the shape, that

it is indeed a dollar bill, this young boy asks Jamal to “read” the bill for him, describe it to him, so that he can assess its dollar value (figures 5.17, 5.18, 5.19, 5.20). Clearly, the dollar bill is more valuable for the young boy and we see his face light up when he realizes that the figure on the bill is, indeed, Benjamin Franklin.

The beginning of the film portends this political economy of English when the multiple choice question about how Jamal won is posed against the background of a tub full of thousand rupee notes (figure 5.21, 5.22, 5.23). The bills of Indian rupees literally come to stand for Jamal’s destiny, not only because of the money he wins but also because its visual iconicity is part of the vernacular and experiential knowledge which helps him answer a question, as described above. The opening multiple choice question invites the audience to consider Jamal Malik’s win in the quiz show along four different possibilities. The English sentence, “It is written,” one of the answers to the question, appears again at the end of the film to confirm and influence the audience’s reading of the film. The idea of the “written” reminds us—as the characters have already known from the first instance of Amitabh Bachchan’s autograph—of the power of the written word and its visual and graphic economy. The simplicity of English words illuminated on a dark screen, the idea of destiny, conveys the very essence of the story. The specificity of the English words ties together the premodern logic of destiny (often associated with Hindu culture) to the booming neoliberal economy of India. For those who are unable to read the writing on the screen, the still only confirms what they have perhaps known and feared. Their destiny, like Jamal’s, is tied to the English language. The reference to the “written” reminds one also of the film as a literary adaptation. Even though the film is

about the victory of the underdog and the unlettered, the very crux of the film as expressed in this sentence is available and accessible only to the audience who can read (English).

While the narrative repudiates knowledges policed by class privileges, it ironically does so through Jamal Malik, the only character who speaks no other language besides English. At the police station, the inspector and constable question Jamal and express surprise that while the “millionaire genius” knows the answers to questions that test global knowledge, he does not know the inscription under India’s national emblem, which ironically is: “Truth Alone Triumphs!” In response, Jamal valorizes experiential and vernacular knowledges, *other truths*, and asks his questioners, “What is the price of *Pani Puri* at Harish’s stall in Chowpatty?” and “Who stole Constable Verma’s bicycle in Santa Cruz?” Even little children know the answer to these questions, Jamal declares, though the police remains clueless. While the narrative affirms vernacular knowledges, since it is through vernacular knowledge that Jamal wins the show, it seems to not affirm vernacular languages. But what if the film is really an invitation to reconsider what we understand by the vernacular itself? In highlighting the ways in which all the answers are a part of Jamal’s world, even as those answers require knowledge of dominant Anglophone worlds Jamal has never traveled to, the film *drives home* the vernacularity of English.

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The English language appears as a material presence—as money, as a translational device, as a stand in for the authentic—in the films described above. This

has been true from the very first instance of Mathai's *India Demands English*, where the different advocates of English saw in the language different, even conflicting, values. All the texts under consideration in the dissertation critique the hierarchy of scale that frames any study of English language and literature. From *Raag Darbari* to *Slumdog Millionaire*, the encounter with English, in India and elsewhere, is not a matter of sprawling across unbridgeable scales or a collision of different worlds, but a matter of plumbing the complexity of the worlds themselves.



**Figure 5.1.** *Amar Akbar Anthony*. Dir. Manmohan Desai. 1977.



**Figure 5.2.** *Purab Aur Paschim* (East and West). Dir. Manoj Kumar. 1970.



**Figure 5.3.** *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (Something Happens). Dir. Karan Johar. Dharma Productions, 1998.





**Figure 5.4.** *Kama Sutra: A Tale of Love*. Dir. Mira Nair. Channel Four Films and Mirabai Films, 1996.



**Figure 5.5.** *Kama Sutra: A Tale of Love*. Dir. Mira Nair. Channel Four Films and Mirabai Films, 1996.



**Figure 5.6.** *Kama Sutra: A Tale of Love*. Dir. Mira Nair. Channel Four Films and Mirabai Films, 1996.



**Figure 5.7.** *Fire*. Dir. Deepa Mehta. Zeitgeist Films, 1996.



**Figure 5.8.** *Fire*. Dir. Deepa Mehta. Zeitgeist Films, 1996.



**Figure 5.9.** *Fire*. Dir. Deepa Mehta. Zeitgeist Films, 1996.

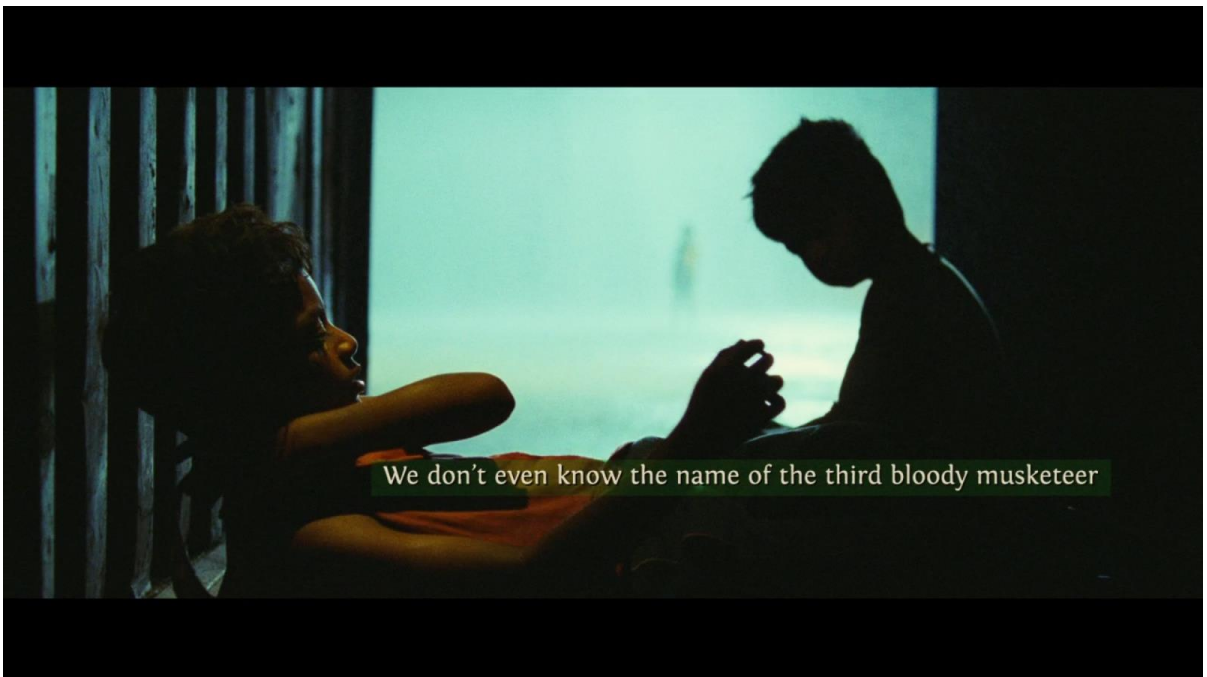


**Figure 5.10.** *Fire*. Dir. Deepa Mehta. Zeitgeist Films, 1996.

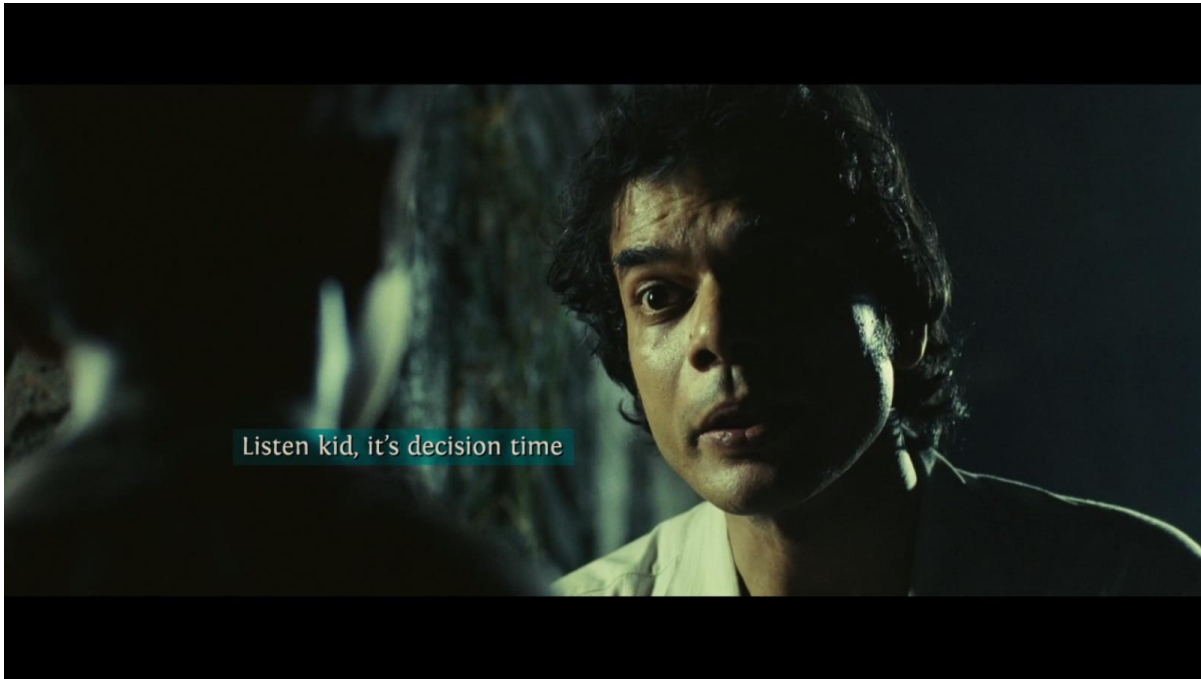




**Figure 5.11.** *Slumdog Millionaire*. Dir. Danny Boyle and Loveleen Thadani. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2008.



**Figure 5.12.** *Slumdog Millionaire*. Dir. Danny Boyle and Loveleen Thadani. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2008.



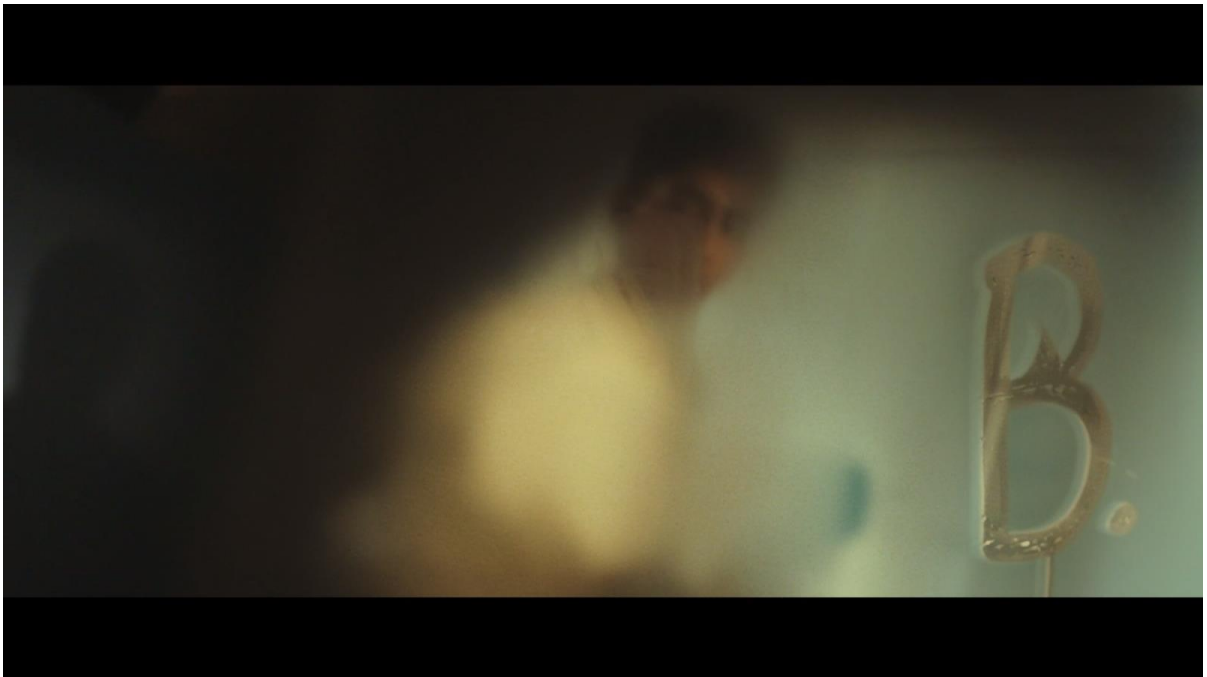
**Figure 5.13.** *Slumdog Millionaire*. Dir. Danny Boyle and Loveleen Thadani. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2008.



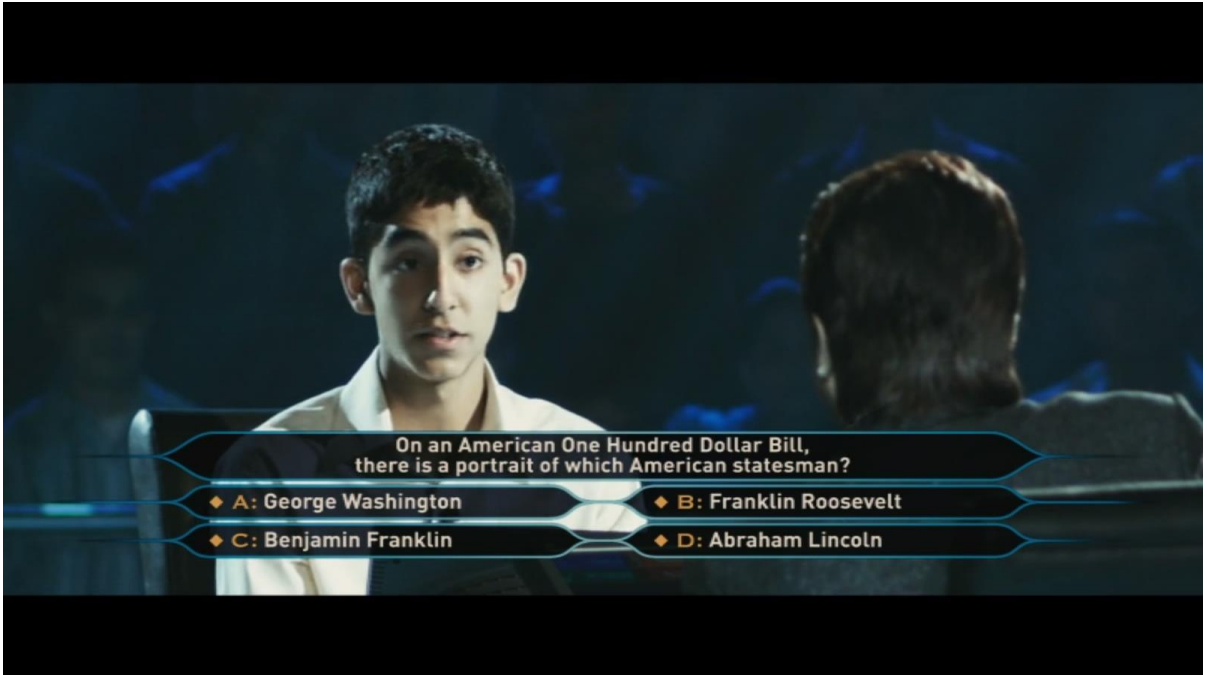
**Figure 5.14.** *Slumdog Millionaire*. Dir. Danny Boyle and Loveleen Thadani. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2008.



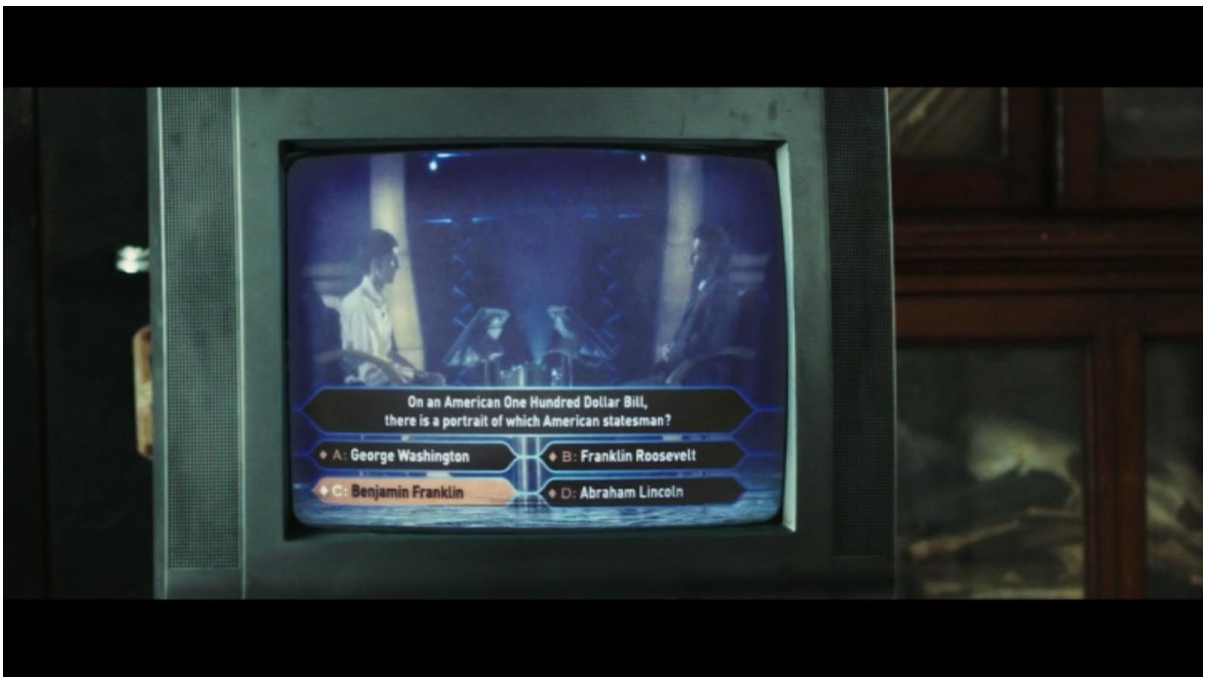
**Figure 5.15.** *Slumdog Millionaire*. Dir. Danny Boyle and Loveleen Thadani. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2008.



**Figure 5.16.** *Slumdog Millionaire*. Dir. Danny Boyle and Loveleen Thadani. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2008.



**Figure 5.17.** *Slumdog Millionaire*. Dir. Danny Boyle and Loveleen Thadani. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2008.



**Figure 5.18.** *Slumdog Millionaire*. Dir. Danny Boyle and Loveleen Thadani. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2008.

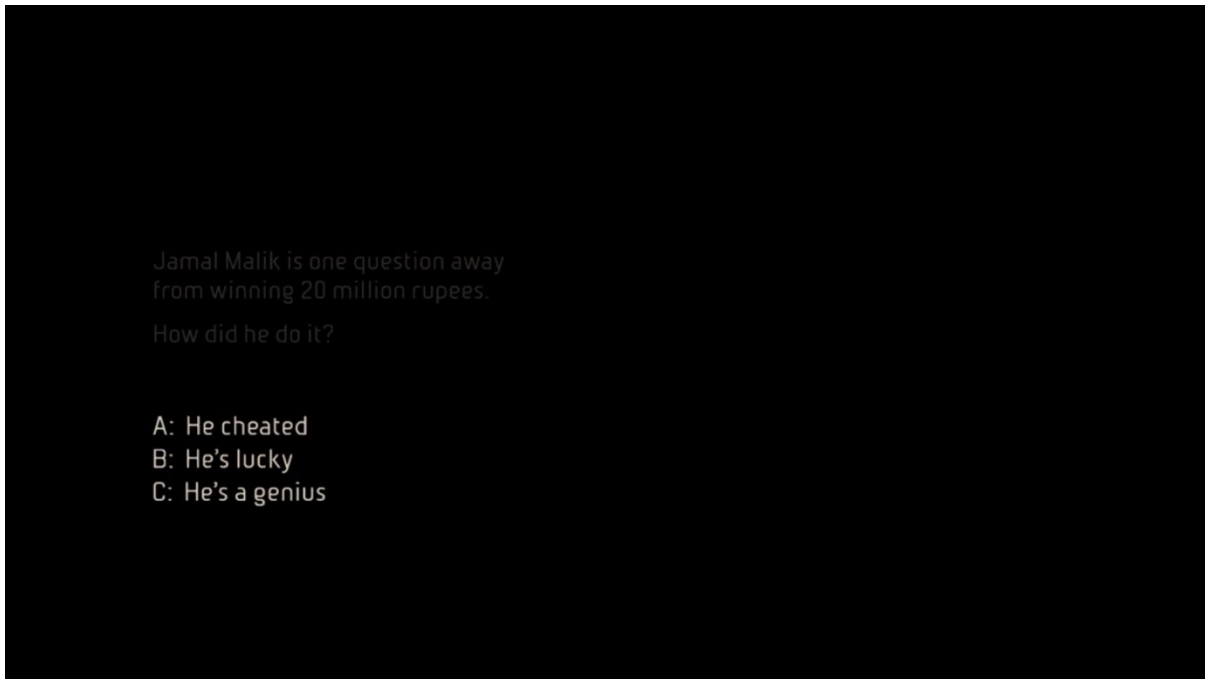




**Figure 5.19.** *Slumdog Millionaire*. Dir. Danny Boyle and Loveleen Thadani. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2008.



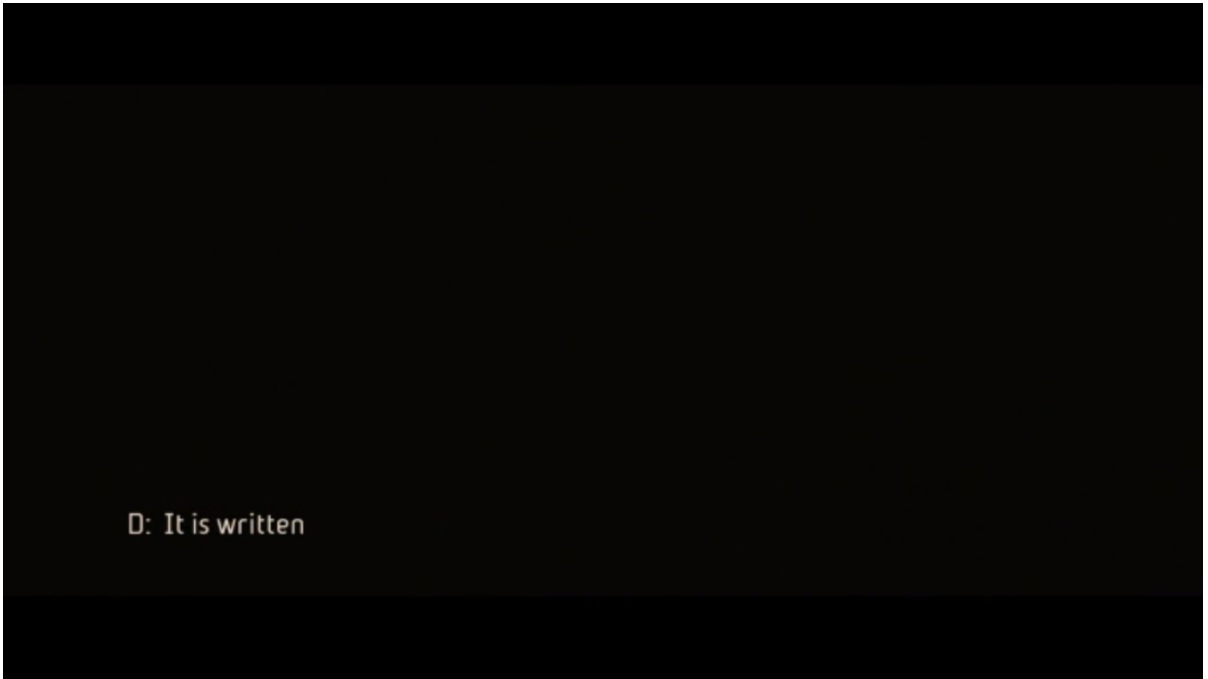
**Figure 5.20.** *Slumdog Millionaire*. Dir. Danny Boyle and Loveleen Thadani. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2008.



**Figure 5.21.** *Slumdog Millionaire*. Dir. Danny Boyle and Loveleen Thadani. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2008.



**Figure 5.22.** *Slumdog Millionaire*. Dir. Danny Boyle and Loveleen Thadani. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2008.



**Figure 5.23.** *Slumdog Millionaire*. Dir. Danny Boyle and Loveleen Thadani. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2008.

## **Coda: Narendra Modi's English and Rohith Vemula's English**

As I write this dissertation, two illegitimate speakers are transforming the political landscape of India with their use of English. In turn, they are also transforming the way in which we understand this (neo)imperial language of global power. These figures are: India's 15<sup>th</sup> and current prime minister, Narendra Modi, and a deceased PhD scholar from Hyderabad Central University, Rohith Vemula. There are some similarities between them—their illegitimacy is certainly one—but for the most part, Modi and Rohith stand at opposite ends of an ideological spectrum. Their political positions make them enemies, and it is said that Modi's government has Rohith's blood on its hands.

But, *together*, Rohith and Modi typify the vast range of vernacular englishes in postcolonial India that I have discussed so far. In his fascination with technology for its role in economic development, Modi mobilizes the English language itself as a technology. He draws on the symbolic power of English and capitalizes on its un/translatability to entrench more deeply a neoliberal and religious orthodoxy. As a tentative speaker of the English language, Modi not only falters in the literal address of democracy—recalling *Raag Darbari*—but he also epitomizes the hustle and humiliation of Adiga's Balram Halwai. Rohith, on the other hand, in his suicide note reaches for English as the language used by B. R. Ambedkar and the science writer Carl Sagan. As the language of scientific rationalism, English makes it impossible to hold a casteist vision of the world, which had marginalized him. In a manner of speaking, English remains the language of aspiration and of a myriad desires, as well as the language of glorified global domains, for these figures. But it also exceeds that characterization when,

steeped in the asymmetries it offers to erase, English holds the *promise* of democracy, parity, and equality. English manifests its destiny as the language of democratic address when—in competing ways—Modi and Rohith marshal it into a populist discourse, and speak up, speak to, and speak as power.

When situated in our studies of postcolonial English literature and world or comparative literature, the examples of Modi and Rohith significantly alter our sense of the way English and/in the world take(s) shape. As the most powerful and, arguably, the most disadvantaged men in India struggle to speak in English, we see English *in* the world—magnanimously evocative in its promise, and violently lacerating in its limits. It is difficult not to think of Balram Halwai. His opening statement, especially, comes to mind: “Neither you nor I speak in English but there are some things that can be said only in English” (Adiga, 3). Let us now turn to see what some of these things are.

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Narendra Modi belongs to a low caste and, as he never ceases to remind his audience, used to be a tea seller (*chai wala*) in the early years of his life.<sup>99</sup> Modi’s humble-origin narrative is, for many, a welcome contrast to his political opponents and predecessors who have been fluent in English. In fact, as a lifelong member of the *Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh* (RSS)—a Hindu nationalist paramilitary group—Modi has always mobilized Hindus against Muslims through inflammatory public speeches in Hindi and Gujarati. Before becoming the prime minister of India in 2014, Modi was the chief minister of the state of Gujarat. He was accused of allowing and abetting the Gujarat 2002 riots, though the Supreme Court of India has found no evidence against

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<sup>99</sup> Modi belongs to “Modh” caste that is considered among the OBCs in Gujarat.

him.<sup>100</sup> For his many supporters, what redeems him and his hardline Hindutva ideology is the fact that Modi is also India's "*Vikas Purush*" (Development Man). As the Gujarat chief minister, he focused aggressively on economic development. Modi's infrastructural achievements here were branded and publicized as the "Gujarat model" of economic development, and they won him many supporters—especially among the middle class and the business community. Thus, Modi's success in the 2014 general elections in India and his rise to the prime ministerial spot represent the victory of many things: the victory of Hindu nationalism, of exclusionary economic development, and of the low-caste "*chai wala*" underdog.

However, unlike the English-speaking *chai wala* of *Slumdog Millionaire*, Jamal Malik, Modi speaks primarily in Hindi. In fact, the victory of BJP and Modi has turned out to be the victory of Hindi. The equation is almost mathematical: Hindu nationalism=Hindi, but in the figure of Modi, it constellates seductive associations with economic development and social mobility as well. For instance, the personal journey of Modi—as a Hindi speaker—to the prime minister's office rewrites the relationship between Hindi and success. It gives hope to the *Dainik Jagran* editorial that Hindi is no longer only the language of errand boys. The dynamism of Modi's language—always Hindi when he's addressing a national or international audience—also presents him as a doer, and provides a contrast to his immediate predecessor, Manmohan Singh, who had cemented

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<sup>100</sup> In 2002, he was the chief minister of the state of Gujarat when at least a thousand people were slaughtered in the Hindu rampage against Muslims. As the prime minister, Modi refuses to answer questions about the 2002 pogrom and in a rare comment said that he regretted Muslims' suffering as he would the death of a puppy run over by a car. After his government came to power, a number of churches were also destroyed in India and members of the Christian community were forcibly converted "back" to Hinduism. This initiative was called "*ghar wapsi*" (the return home).

an unfortunate reputation as a silent and ineffective leader due to his softly-spoken English addresses.<sup>101</sup>

Modi also proves that Gandhi's concerns were unfounded. As a global leader, he has addressed the United Nations in Hindi, and he routinely converses in Hindi with the United States President, Barack Obama, leaders of various Asian countries, and audiences in non-Hindi-speaking parts of India. As such, Modi strengthens the false naturalization of Hindi as India's national language, boosts his Hindu nationalist stance, and intensifies his brazen attempt to alienate non-Hindi speakers within India. His proud embrace of Hindi only further infuses other Hindi-speaking and Hindu resident and diasporic Indians with confidence.

Still, even (especially?) Modi cannot resist the allure of English, and he regularly appeals to the symbolic power of the language. In 2015, when Modi wore a pin-striped suit to meet his guest, Barack Obama, the stripes were really his own name embroidered (in gold thread) in the English language across the length of his outfit. Modi's outfit brings to mind the many instances when illegitimate speakers of English—as identified in the dissertation—have looked hopefully at the English language as found on English (brand name) clothes. Bakha's hand-me-downs from the British sepoy, Balram Halwai's

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<sup>101</sup> Unlike the previous BJP-majority government in New Delhi under Atal Bihari Vajpayee (1998-2004), the Modi government has made concerted and controversial efforts to replace English with Hindi. For instance, in June 2014, a month after the BJP came to power, India's home ministry instructed civil servants in Delhi to use Hindi rather than English in all social media communications. This move drew criticism from non-Hindi-speakers in BJP itself and from members of the opposition. Most vocally, the chief minister of Tamil Nadu, a state that had seen anti-Hindi violence in the 1960s, reminded Modi that the directive ran counter to the spirit of the Official Languages Act of 1963 which lists both Hindi and English as official languages. Eventually, the government amended the instructions only to apply to Hindi-speaking states—a move that still asserted the priority of Hindi over English. Under the Modi government, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs has also initiated efforts to promote the Hindi language abroad.

T-shirt, Ram's Levi's jeans, and *Dainik Jagran's* chunky bangles for its woman readers, are all expressions of such caste and class transgressions. In its inscription with an English brand name, or in its association with English by way of provenance, such clothing items achieve the materiality of a fetish object as described by Pietz. In these instances, the usefulness of the piece of clothing is really determined by the exchange value commanded by the English language and the associations it convenes.

However, Modi uses the English language to spell his own name! In his meeting with Obama, Modi maintains his pro-Hindi stance by conversing in Hindi, but he literally *wears* the English language to make up for its absence and to summon its prosthetic promise. As in the case of *Dainik Jagran*, the English language itself transcodes a brand value, and Modi uses the language to accrue transnational recognition of his own person. Using an interpreter in his meeting with Obama frees Modi from the burden of *speaking* in English. Despite that, relying solely on the symbolic and visual resonances of the English language, Modi literally makes a name for himself in it. Modi's self-branding of and in his outfit overturns the exploitative logic of multinational garment sweatshops in the Indian subcontinent, and places his name right where it can be seen.

However, Modi's sartorial choice received much criticism from national and international press that saw in it the most indefensible act of a megalomaniac and a "narcissistic parvenu" (Nandy, 1). Contrary to a worldview where association with English escalates one into the upper echelons of society, Modi found himself to be the laughing stock of the nation. His exhibitionist use of the English language showed him to be *lacking* in sophistication and worldliness. In *Slumdog Millionaire*, it is the use of



English that becomes the means with which to authenticate the squalor of the film. Likewise, instead of uplifting him, Modi's use of English as a brand offered the surest characterization of him as an upstart.

In contrast to the sartorial splendor of Modi's English, the few times he has *spoken* in the language, his speeches have lacked luster and he has been critiqued for sounding self-conscious, slow, and strained. Modi's poor English language skills have been mocked, and he has been farcically "challenged" to speak in English by his political rivals.<sup>102</sup> It is reported that he uses a concealed speech teleprompter to speak in English fluently, which often also leads to some gaffes.<sup>103</sup>

One of the very few times Modi addressed an audience in English, as the prime minister, was at the launch of a space satellite, the PSLV C23, at Sriharikota in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh in 2014. The event came up shortly after the controversy regarding the use of Hindi on social media (described in footnote 101 on page 277). Thus, the medium of Modi's speech was most likely also a symbolic gesture—an attempt to calm ruffled feathers, especially in southern India where anti-Hindi sentiments run high. The use of English could also have been a concession to the scientific community that Modi was addressing, although Modi and his government have consistently held an anti-science position, and invoked ridiculous examples of scientific advancements from Hindu mythological texts. For instance, the elephant-headed Hindu

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<sup>102</sup> The "challenge" is even more humiliating and comical because it comes from Lalu Prasad Yadav, another politician famous for his poor English language skills.

<sup>103</sup> To cite one example, in 2015, while introducing the wife of the Sri Lankan President, Maithripala Sirisena, Modi read out her name as "*M-R-S* Sirisena" rather than "*Mrs.* Sirisena."

god has been touted as the proof that Indian scientists have always known the secrets of cosmetic surgery.

Despite his disinterest in scientific scholarship, Modi is an admirer of technology and its role in governance. He believes in the democratizing power of social media, and has called it a “catalytic agent” that connects him with people and with other global leaders. Over roughly two years of his government, Modi has launched a number of campaigns that include: Digital India, Make in India, and #selfiewithdaughter. These initiatives have been widely criticized for ignoring the ground reality and missing the structural issues that need to be addressed. For instance, #selfiewithdaughter was an initiative to raise awareness about the deteriorating gender ratio and growing cases of female infanticide. As a solution to this long-enduring sexism, it asked fathers to post on social media their selfies with daughters.

In initiatives such as this one, Modi relies not only on the power of social media to reach (only those who have access to the internet) but also on the power of the English language to make these initiatives seem progressive, globalized, popular, and trendy. His invocation of the symbolic power and sociotechnical effects of English is reminiscent of the therapeutic potential attributed to English in anti-malaria campaigns of *Raag Darbari*. As he favors Hindi as a political gesture, Modi consistently instrumentalizes English for its metonymic association with global capitalist modernity.

In another example, Modi spoke briefly in English at Central Park in New York in September 2014 when he visited the United States after being banned from entering the country on account of his involvement in the Gujarat riots. The occasion was the Global

Citizens Festival, a music festival attended largely by college students. Just the next day, Modi would be wearing a symbolically saffron jacket and leading with “Bharat Mata *ki* Jai” (Hail Mother India) in his address to an NRI audience. But on this day Modi spoke in labored English about the role of the youth and the future, and ended, comically, with a line from the *Star Wars* films: “May the force be with you!” As in the status of the suit as a fetish object to be worn on one’s body, the popular English sentence literally becomes a benediction, if not a goddess, in Modi’s use.

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But the scope of this benediction is restricted. On January 17, 2016, Rohith Vemula committed suicide in the hostel of Hyderabad Central University. Rohith was a PhD student in Life Sciences, an active member of the Ambedkar Students Association, and a Dalit. In July 2015, he and a group of other students had clashed with the student wing of the BJP on campus. University administrators then barred the students from public spaces on campus and withheld their fellowships, citing administrative delays as the reason. In Vedic times, molten lead would be poured into the ears of the Sudras who heard the sacred texts and tongues would be cut off of those who dared to utter the knowledge denied them. In contemporary times, this proscription takes the institutional form of expulsion and of social alienation. Reports claim that a number of Dalit students commit suicide, especially in institutions of higher education, as they are unable to keep up with the constant harassment and the pressure of functioning in an Anglicized society. In the campus where Rohith ended his life, “eight other Dalit students [had] committed suicide in the last ten years” (Kurien and Gogoi, 1).

However, unlike the other young Dalits, Rohith left a suicide note—an autobiographical life narrative—in the English language. Rohith’s death has sparked a strong wave of broadly Ambedkarite unrest in India, and the clarity of the note—heartbreaking and inspiring—has become a symbol of that agitation. It has also been excerpted on posters and is being adapted into a play. The English of Rohith’s letter—now visible in public spaces—draws our attention to the educated Dalit subject of Navaria’s stories. It stands for Ambedkarite Dalit politics, which rejects religious, patriarchal, and nationalist Hindutva with rational humanism and universal liberation. Ever since Savitribai Phule and her husband, Jyotiba Phule—recall the lines from “Mother English” on page 169—this radical Dalit discourse has questioned the very existence of a Hindu society, and highlighted the brutality and inhumanity of the caste system.

Rohith’s letter brings to mind Balram Halwai’s letter to the Chinese Premier where he presents his life as a counterexample to a nationalist state narrative and to management and self-help books. Rohith presents his life-narrative as a rejection of the casteist bias of the modern Indian state that deems his “birth his fatal accident” (“My Birth is My Fatal Accident: Full Text of Dalit Student Rohith’s Suicide Letter,” 1). The English language appears in the letter as Rohith’s means to access the works of Carl Sagan, and thus to a realm of “Science, Stars, Nature.” The promise of English is highlighted not only in the Ambedkarite politics Rohith practiced, the letter that has outlived him and sparked a revolutionary fervor, but also in the fact that—inspired by the works of Sagan—he believed he could “travel to the stars.”

Rohith's death reveals the possibility and the limits that the English language signifies for the educated Dalit. Rohith wanted to be a writer like Sagan but finds himself hopelessly condemned by and to his caste identity. Though he wishes to imagine the human as "a mind" and "a glorious thing made up of star dust," Rohith finds that the value of a human being is reduced to a vote and a number. Rohith's death brings poignancy to Chandrabhan Prasad's *Dalit Goddess*, which may seem gimmicky. Contrary to the characterization of English as abstracted from native categories of postcolonial India, Rohith's letter reminds us of the role that the English language plays in narratives and experiences of caste. As an indictment of the caste-based politics in India, Rohith's letter is an invitation to take seriously—through Ambedkar, Chandrabhan Prasad, Narendra Jadhav, Kancha Ilaiah, and Meena Kandasamy—the role of English in advancing as well as thwarting a Dalit critique of the casteist state.

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The use of English by Modi and Rohith calls our attention to the many vernacular englishes that are belied and buried by an overwhelmingly one-dimensional narrative of global englishes. Modi's English limns the limits of his pro-Hindi stance and the inadequacy of only Hindi in the democratic address. It also shows the ways in which "correct" English—not simply a grammatically but also a socially and sartorially correct English—secures the class and caste bastions that Modi prides himself for crashing. Rohith Vemula's English, on the other hand, brings to us most forcefully the need to reckon with the role of English *in* caste struggles and *as* a site of caste struggle. Together, these two men stand in testimony to how different English looks in India today—on

Modi's suit and in Rohith's crushing note—and how inadequate our conceptual understanding of it is. With a comparative perspective, both local and global at once and alert to the un/translatability of English, the category of the vernacular uncovers the vulnerable pomposity, preposterousness, and pathos of a language that has long been held as foreign and monolithic.

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