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Imagery in the Twentieth Century Indian English Novel

Ajanta Dutt

Modern critics believe that a chain of words constituting an image can convey multiple messages that go beyond the one intended by the author. Previously, criticism paid more heed to magnifying the position of the writer, but the twentieth century trends of analyzing the literary text have accorded a worthier place to the reader who is the recipient of messages and can also add to them. Thus the audience is "that someone who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted" (Barthes 148). Any written text is critiqued in terms of its "destination" – and however gripping the narrative may be, it is the language of projection that opens itself to significant analytical measures. It is not enough to talk merely of the thematic construction of the plot; but one judges also the linguistic processes employed by the novelists who reveal the social realities surrounding their characters with relevance to time and environment.

The Indian English authors in the greater part of the previous century held the more traditional view towards their readers—that is they explained thoroughly the intended message within the text. These writers, invoking the methods of the ancient story-tellers of the indigenous languages of India,[1] attempted to take their place in contemporary settings. Therefore they compiled their messages of everyday meditations and sent them out to their novice-readers in a form they felt would be easily comprehensible. As Roland Barthes would have assessed, they did utilize the "multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, bend and clash; for them the text becomes an absolute tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centers of culture" (146). The audience became a more defined but less individually distinct object upon whom these "quotations" could be "inscribed." Most specifically, in order to stylistically transmit cultural images through metaphors, idioms and proverbs, the Indian English novelists had numerous resources to draw upon, and thus they could Indianise their textual language considerably. In these instances, the conscientious effort to present indigenous images showed a significant rise of the novel in India, especially in the decades nearest to Independence when the colonial influence was still very powerful.

Most writers chosen for this study presented metaphors steeped with cultural innuendoes which had been translated into English in their novels[2]. Rarely were they transcribed in English first, keeping the Indian words intact. This direct method of translating without recording the source carried its own advantages for it continued to shock and delight the audience as it sounded truly new in the English language, both at home and abroad. George Orwell in his most famous essay, "Politics and the English Language" had insisted upon the guarded use of metaphors in the English language for he claimed that an over-used metaphor

could well become a cliché.[3] Indian English authors circumvented this pitfall by taking the image straight from their native soil and transmuting it into the receiving language. Thus the direct translation of Indian words quite literally became innovative English, and was a method of culture transmission which other writers can even today simulate. When George Steiner further affirms the attributes of such translation as a linguistic instrument, he perceives that "every language offers its own reading of life. To move between languages, to translate, even within restrictions of totality is to experience the most bewildering bias of the human spirit towards freedom" (497). It is this level of freedom that Indian writers have sought when writing their novels in English.

These writers certainly experimented with English rhetoric to see if it could be fashioned to reflect their native areas of discourse. As exemplified by Chinua Achebe regarding Nigeria culture, metaphorical language can be an essential medium of an indigenous writer's contribution to the English language, without compromising English syntax. Achebe demonstrates this in his own novel *Arrow of God* where he assigns a deliberate strangeness to the rhetoric. Therefore the Chief Priest explains why it is important that his son be sent to church after the coming of the new religion:

> I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eyes there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share. The world is like a Mask, dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying *had we known* tomorrow (55).

In a later critical comment, Achebe refers to himself and describes how he might have written this very paragraph in Standard English:

I am sending you as my representative among these people—just to be on the safe side in case the new religion develops. One has to move with the times or else one is left behind. I have a hunch that those who fail to come to terms with the white man may well regret their lack of foresight (62).

What Achebe proposed is exemplified by Meena Alexander in her novel *Nampally Road* (1991) where she presents the distinction between a culture specific and a general, non-specific metaphor. She shows that an ordinary citizen's view of corruption is rife in post-colonial India and speaks of the parallel black economy that is carrying the country to its doom. In the first instance, the narrator cites Durgabai who draws a likeness between corruption and the poison contained in the hoods of the mythic serpent Kaliya. Durgabai announces, "I am waiting for Lord Krishna. He must press his tiny feet on Kaliya serpent, subduing it. How else can all this poison be spilled out?" (Alexander 18). This implies that an optimistic Indian continues to hope that there will be strong political leadership to crush the exploitation rampant in society. The vision of Krishna stamping upon Kaliya serpent conveys this message highlighting too the devoutness of the speaker in modern times

For the general, non-specific image, Alexander writes about the procession-eroding motorcycles that appeared in a straight line: "The first one buzzed like a gnat, its black body gleaming, headlights glinting in the heat" (7). The metaphor regarding the Kaliya serpent is obviously Indianised as it re-iterates a religious legend that Indians are usually familiar with. In the metaphor describing the motorcycles, there is nothing culture specific in the shiny body of a machine being likened to an ordinary insect.

In the same manner, other Indian English authors set up transactions with their readers which carry social influences from the regional languages. As critics have claimed, some of these transactions may require *a priori* knowledge (Rosenblatt 34-35). However, the beauty of a metaphor is that it implies messages beyond those the writer may create, and readers can indulge in their own interpretations through the act of reading. Dupery also notes that the stylistics of writing is dependent on the function of visual images and the understanding of what is being represented: "the metaphorical wins over the literal; the supplement over the origin; the copy over the original; the theatrical or ritual over the real… of course the hierarchy is entangled, but with itself" (118). In this paper, one representative novel of some major Indian English authors from the 1930s to the 1990s have been analyzed for the manner in which they have used imagery portraying Indian culture, supplemented and entangled in the standard structures of the English language.

In speaking about linguistic conservatism versus stylistic innovation in the use of imagery, Indian novelists present the English idiom at its best. Yet they frequently insert Indian metaphors which incorporate cultural signs, tropes and myths that are specific to the subcontinent. Traditional, culture specific imagery revolves most predominantly around legends, religion, the gods and the demons through which authors discuss conservative principles and the norms of society binding Indian sensibility. Thus when he describes beauty of the mountain ranges in *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937), Mulk Raj Anand writes of a credulous woman who believed that "the silver light reflected by the snow was the angry glance of the great god Siva" (10). In a similar religious vein a couple of decades later, Manohar Malgonkar's narrator speaks of his mother's alcove temple in the novel, *The Princes* (1963). Her goddesses were "the seven satis in the family, the Maharani's …who had immolated themselves on their husbands' funeral pyres" (23). Around the same time in *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965), Raja Rao recalls the long story of a hunter and the "bilva leaves" sacred to Lord Shiva (7-8), while Anita Desai discusses the bleak chances of survival for the Urdu language against that "vegetarian monster" Hindi in her book, *In Custody* (1984; 15).

Following the same methodology, Shashi Deshpande's heroine in *That Long Silence* (1988) thinks of Sita, Savitri and Draupadi from the Indian epics simultaneously, for they all share uncomplainingly in their "husband's travails" (25). These Sanskrit myths deepen the state of confusion for the otherwise modern protagonist, Jaya who speaks ruefully of Maitreyee, yet another woman from Hindu mythology:

> [she] so definitely rejected her philosopher husband Yajnavalkya's offer of half his property. 'Will this property give me immortality?' she asks him. ' No,' he said, and she immediately rejected the property. To know what you want…I have been denied that (25).

Are each of these women—the author, narrator and mythical character—questioning their own identities too? Such a culture specific chain of references linking Maitreyee to the others including Jaya, transmits to a universal audience the conflict that a woman—any woman—faces within herself. Time, past and present, offers little contrast as she tries to fulfill the idealized concept of her role as wife that is of paramount importance in Indian society.

As a complementary note to the position of women in the Indian English novel, we see her male counterpart in *Mano Majra* or *A Train to Pakistan* (1956). In this novel that goes back to the Partition, Khushwant Singh portrays the male dominated society of a little village where a group of dacoits mock their friend, Jugga who refuses to join them in their nocturnal adventure. They denigrate Jugga's manhood, advising him to "[w]ear these bangles and put henna on [his] palms" (10). He has fallen in their eyes; so metaphors related to feminine attire as part of the larger one of clothes establish this individual's nebulous identity, at least in the early part o the novel.

Good looks and physical appearance in Indian culture is as problematic as identity, and more so because they are intrinsically related to prejudice. In *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977), Kamala Markandaya while comparing the camellia hues of the queen's countenance to the "nodding English roses" (i.e. the British ladies), deems that colonisation has asserted the superiority of a rosy complexion. She comments ruefully, "Into a country already obsessed by colour a new dimension has been added" (20).

Ruth P. Jhabvala, who married into an Indian family, takes an outside-insider's view of India. She sees chauvinistic men joking through similes related to women and child-bearing. "Like a pregnant woman in the last month he looks!" she writes in *The Nature of Passion* (1956; 24). With her keen sense of observation, she presents the Indian prejudice of the new-born baby who is proudly proclaimed as "[f]air as a Kashmiri girl" (23). In the same decade following Independence, Bhabani Bhattacharya in his novel *He Who Rides a Tiger* (1956) also indicates that Kalo is pleased that his daughter is not dark like him but "[h]er complexion became even more fair than at her birth, like carved ivory…" and the eyes in heightened contrast had "a collyrium blackness" (10).

Meena Alexander shows that the Indians find beauty in rosy cheeks that are like apples from the Gulmarg Valley of Kashmir (19). In *The Shadow Lines* (1988), Amitav Ghosh chooses to describe the glossy black hair that Indians love by giving it an exotic hint. It is a screen hanging over the shoulder like "the head-dress of an Egyptian frieze" (12). It is to be noted that this image recalls another ancient culture as this part of his narrative is concerned with the imaginative configuration of an English woman called May.

The clothes imagery is enhanced in the case of Ila in *The Shadow Lines*, where Amitav Ghosh lays the foundation for her uncertain Indian status by imagining her in "a simple white sari with a red border, like any Bethune College girl on her way to a lecture" (18). This is an image wrought in fantasy for the totally westernized Ila who is incidentally the most travelled person in the novel; but she has lost any real roots she may have had with India. She does not know any more which country she can call her own—India or England. This entangled image is present in every Indian English writer's own task in fashioning the English language to carry an Indian identity.

Bharati Mukherjee echoes Ghosh's concept of a similar world where the national boundaries are disappearing in cross-cultural interaction. With her inverted vision of looking at American culture through Indian eyes, she offers a refreshingly contrastive image in *Jasmine* (1989), where the protagonist, Jasmine comments that she has given her lover Bud "a new trilogy to contemplate: Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. And he has lent me his: Musical, Brock and Gibson" (6). The trilogies presented here are certainly stark opposites—moving from the religious to the revered, from the classical to popular culture.

Both Shashi Tharoor and Salman Rushdie use culture specific metaphors to attack the political environment of India. Tharoor, in his masterpiece, *The Great Indian Novel* (1989) describes economists and intellectuals who speak of India as a developing country. Tharoor condemns them as being "the kind of fellows who couldn't tell their kundalini from a decomposing earthworm" (17). In the same manner, Salman Rushdie, in his allegorical novel, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990), hits out at Khattam-Shud, a political dictator who is the Arch-Enemy of all Stories, even of Language itself. He is the Prince of Silence and the Foe of Speech. And because everything ends, because dreams end, stories end, life ends, at the finish of everything we use his name. 'It's finished,' we tell one another, 'it's over. Khattam-Shud: The End'" (39).

As the dialogue structure is very controlled or even restricted in the Indian In the Indian English novels of the twentieth century, use of culture specific proverbs is also rather limited. Bhabani Bhattacharya, however, employs many such typically Indian proverbs and vernacular idiomatic images in translation. The protagonist Kalo arouses our sympathy when he speaks of his daughter's "shrimpy" leanness while he is a "brute of a father," bulky as an elephant. Typical of the rural setting, the common people in this novel "toil like a peasant's bullock" (24). Animal imagery is common with other writers too, so Singh compares a woman's eyes to that of a gazelle whereas Raja Rao gives the cat-like qualities of a woman a primary place in his novel. By comparison, the image of bullocks tethered to a cart is quite specific to India.

The Indian English writers do give their metaphors an earthy touch, culling them straight from the soil which gives them their vitality. Kamala Markandaya describes a trader smelling like his own grain-shop in *The Golden Honeycomb* and Bharati Mukherjee sees the grotesque gnarled trees of the village landscape as "she-ghosts" of old women who are guarding her heroine, Jasmine (2).

Ian Ramsey has called metaphors the "basic currency for mystery" through which writers can articulate their imaginative insight and elucidate that which is mystifying about life. This should be a useful tool for the Indian English writers to sustain the mystic aura surrounding India, especially as desired from a western audience. They can also promote the overlay of one linguistic image upon another, combining the spirit of each language to bring a uniqueness of flavour. Most Indian images in the English language remain distinct as they are clearly translated, and may not get completely assimilated in the language of the text.

Culture specific imagery is usually thoroughly explained in the text. For example, Malgonkar in his book *The Princes*, describes the formalities of Arab hospitality between host and chief guest through a dining event where the father offers his son the eye carved out of a roasted animal (35). The conversations that precede and follow the occasion spell out the fact that this is a rite of passage reserved for young men who must prove their mettle by chewing the unseemly morsel without a grimace. The episode gains dramatic importance as the emotions described lay bare what could have been kept mysterious. The metaphor of host and guest being conferred upon father and son in this grand moment of 'coming of age' is further demystified because the emphasis is upon storytelling. The image is not expected to create an environment of disgust. The writer controls the interpretation as the audience plays a less active role in the exposition of this message.

Sometimes there is a lack of completion about these Indian metaphors as they are so distant from each other in the text. They are like separate little island washed by the grand idiomatic waves of English rhetoric. For instance, in Markandaya's novel *The Golden Honeycomb*, the English Envoy singles out the man chosen to be ruler with the following words: "You bear the *star* on your *forehead*…. None care to work against destiny" (10, emphasis added). The Indian concept of an individual being a puppet in the hands of the Fate as inscribed upon his forehead at the moment of his birth is an idea immediately comprehensible to an Indian reader. The significance needs no explanation. The continuity of this thought, however, is broken by other general images that come before and after. Just prior to this, the Envoy had been likened to a barometer and Markandaya concentrates upon the logic of this figurehead for the State by explaining that the choice is simply made to provide "a sop with which to calm *vox populi*" (10). Not only is the Indian concept of the 'star' oversimplified by its explanation of destiny, but it is also merged into a turn of events dictated by British pressures. Among the three images presented in quick succession—that of barometer, star and a sop—the one involving the barometer is the most striking and innovative one, while the Indian 'star on the forehead' remains somewhat obscure.

Anita Desai and Bharati Mukherjee in their novels also have repeated metaphors for the comet and the third eye, which are related to fate and destiny like Markandaya's star. Raja Rao has the most prolific number surreal and therefore, different cat-metaphors in his text; but he makes them so ponderous and obscure

that they do not afford much enjoyment to the reader in terms of rhetorical language.

Indian English writers confine their images to description and general narration, but do not bring them into conversations. Thus the metaphors form the language of thought and not the language that the characters speak which remains almost entirely British in its composition. The authors concentrate upon the plot and mechanisms of story telling and believe with F. Kermode that a successful novel is dependent on a language that is comprehensible to many. As that choice in the previous century was so obviously pristine English, it brought in its wake a vast store of imagery from the language bestowed by the colonisers. There is only a brief scatter of Indianisms, especially in the earlier decades of Indian English writing, to lend these novels an aura of cultural reality. Experiments with language had been born, but were not as prolific as it now is in Amitav Ghosh's Ibis trilogy, especially *Flood of Fire* with its different linguistic patterns going beyond India into China.

The writers created an Indian environment through description. It is perhaps difficult to capture an Indian voice when the British tones of the English educated Indians, many of whom had actually studied abroad, intersected their novels repeatedly. The writers are present in their novels through their narrators who often employ the first person mode of storytelling. This guiding narrative 'eye' ensures through timely interventions and explanations that Indianisms presented in the text do not confuse a primarily international readership. The assimilation of the British tone is moreover indicative of the strong forces of English education that were adopted thoroughly by India's English-speaking discourse community. The Indianisms adapted into the texts were often instituted by British authors like Rudyard Kipling and E.M. Forster when they wrote about India. Thereafter the same norms were followed by the Indian English writers.

Cultural imagery became the process of colonisation in reverse because it was a conscious attempt to transpose native pictures into the novel, in order to acquaint readers abroad with what was still unfamiliar to them—but that too, in very limited measures. As language always incorporates changes from the environment, the twenty first century may see more of cultural rhetoric with non-explanatory native images being employed with greater abandon than in the previous century. Global employment and large scale travel has already started to play a role in this phenomenal diversification among the educated elite.

The precise, often very attractive use of the English language by the Indian authors shows the extent to which the language was internalized, and how its creativity was controlled by the dominating tongue. Imaginative thinking was moulded to the British ways of expression. Thus Edward Said's analysis for the intrinsic meaning of orientalism holds true for this linguistic power balance that has existed in the rise of English novel in India—from before the Independence till many decades later. As Said claimed:

> There are Westerners and there are Orientals. The former dominate; the latter must be dominated, which usually means

> having their land occupied, their internal affairs rigidly controlled, their blood and treasure put at the disposal of one another Western power" (36).

It is important to note that Indian English texts provided a plethora of chaste linguistic images that showed a familiarity with life and culture in England. They concentrated upon expositions of the colonial role that the English played in India such as in the tea-gardens of Assam. When Mulk Raj Anand describes the planter's bungalow as a highland castle and says it was built of wood in "the style of the pavilion on the race-course at Epsom Downs," it is perhaps with unconscious pride that he reveals his distinct knowledge of England to his readers (16). Furthermore, he describes a drawing room filled with hunting trophies interspersed with an array of European furniture that were "reminiscent of an antique shop opposite Harrods" (18). The saving grace is that an Englishman in the text is making these comments and not the writer himself.

Bhattacharya tries to mix cultures as he remembers World War II into which Indian was thrust by sheer dint of being a British colony. The author forces pride of his national heritage onto this "mighty war, like the one the epic Ramayana described. Western man had found the buried secrets of ancient India's arms and weapons." (19). He draws parallels with those ancient, even magical, arms and armaments that he likens to modern cannon-balls and missiles. He pays tribute to a young girl's beauty in language that closely resembles Shakespeare's: "Laughing a maiden uncovers a part of her that should be hidden! A maiden is safe only in gravity's cloak" (20).

For his part, Malgonkar describes the palace architecture that combines styles from "both the East and West, and which turned out to be a nightmarish grafting of a maze of turrets and domes on an ornate and quite hideous Victorian edifice of arches and corridors…" (37). At a more mundane level, Khushwant Singh focuses on trains and rail-roads, another gift of the British Raj to India. The rail-road symbolizes the macabre and violent Partition of India that the colonisers left behind. The divide-and-rule policy of the Imperial government became the rule of divide-and-leave. Besides mirroring the unleashed violence upon a political space, Singh's novel also unleashes the chaos of identities and confusion that language grafting can bring to the problematic socio-economic status of an indigenous people displaced in their own land.

Therefore, Singh describes a garden that is like "a pancake of plastered mud" at a time when most Indians would not be aware of what a pancake may be (17). If he had wanted some native variety of a floury snack, he could easily have found one; but he deliberately did not name it. It is his foreign readers who are given a pithy pen-picture of the Indian landscape through the metaphor of a pancake. Even Raja Rao who has more culture specific metaphors than most writers of his times, resorts to a much used English proverb to coerce his protagonist: "Let's begin buying this house…. A bird in hand is worth two in the bush" (20).

In *A Passage to India* (1924), British writer E.M. Forster lets Dr. Aziz speak idiomatically to Mrs. Moore when he discovers that they each have two sons and a daughter. But Dr. Aziz makes a mistake when he exclaims that Mrs Moore and

he are “in the same Box” (21). Indian authors rarely allow this kind of linguistic mistake to happen in their novels. For example, Markandaya combines the concept of sugaring the pill with the view that the British rulers are past masters in the act of puppetry. There is deliberate word-play in this complex imagery:

> …a puppet may found a dynasty, but the dynasty has to be consecrated by the British presence…. The presence of the native-born Minister is to sugar the foreign pill (13).

A few pages later, when education for the prince is under consideration, the author writes, “The pill, which is reserved till later, takes the form of an English tutor” (17). There is no mistaken substitution of the word ‘tablet’ for ‘pill’ as Forster deliberately ensures with ‘box’ instead of ‘boat.’

The Indian writer shows herself in absolute and sophisticated command of the messages she wishes her metaphors to carry. In fact, Nayantara Sahgal takes her boat-metaphor one step further by letting the party guests protest that Sir Nitin is “putting us humans in the same boat as vegetables” (35). There is humour in the statement that the guests are being de-humanized by having to travel in a craft which is far below their status. Similarly Shashi Deshpande invests into an English idiom her own small protest of the trodden worm turning. Her liberty-seeking heroine later admits that she had never really been the proverbial trodden worm.

Rushdie of course plays several games with the British idiom when he allows Haroun and the Water Genie, Iff to get into an argument. Iff demands that his Disconnector be returned to him with the words, “party’s over, fair’s fair.” (56). He asserts that Haroun’s father has not lost his gift of story-telling but discontinued the service—”thrown in the towel;” Haroun then retorts that it is all a mistake because “you’re up the spout, you’ve got the wrong end of the stick” (56-57). The raciness of Rushdie’s style is Indian; the chain of images is English.

The Indian writers use English rhetoric precisely and quite naturally; in fact their English imagery is usually more creatively employed than their Indian metaphors. This is often evident when Indian images are followed by copious explanations that show a self-consciousness bordering on awkward use of the language.

The British imagery often serves the Indian-English text better than the ones transmitted from any regional language. The language emphasizes the colonial influence even without reference to its actual presence. Thus Nayantara Sahgal in *Plans for Departure* talks about the “gaudy buccaneering days of the Company Bahadur [which] had at least breathed life instead of rules” (27). In *English August: An Indian Story* (1988), Upamanya Chatterjee contrasts a similar image with his hierarchical structure of district administration, “a British creation,” “imitative” and “a bequest of the Raj” (10). Between them, these two authors capture the slow, insidious process that colonization was. Yet it had sunk so deep, it could not simply be ousted from the system after the Raj ended. Of course, Chatterjee consolidates his argument by saying that the English language is one such bequest that will not stand for rejection or removal.

In *The Shadow Lines*, Ghosh deals with a kind of distancing imagery where elitist thought agrees with Western sentiments. It matters little that two Indians are talking—the Western point of view is apparent in one friend's invective to another: "stop carrying on like a third world tapioca farmer" (21). Mukherjee's *Jasmine* actualizes the American gaze of Bud who sees Asia as nothing more than a "soyabean market" while the agency is "charmed by the notion of Bud's 'Asian' wife" (11). Both writers gather together the folds of what the first world expects the third world to be—backward, but exotic.

It remains for Tharoor to make a final comment in *The Great Indian Novel,* spoken in the imperious, yet cynical tone of the colonisers: "Basic truth about the colonies, Heaslop. Any time there's trouble, you can put it down to books…. If ever the Empire comes to ruin, Heaslop, mark my words, the British publisher will be to blame" (38). Ironically perhaps, the Empire cannot come to ruin for the colonised have struck back from within the fetters of a foreign tongue, appropriating the language as its own, although it has imprisoned steadily and irrevocably, the linguisitic elite of India. If the British publisher is to be blamed, the Indian English writers can take some of the 'blame' too. That is the way they got access to a world of literature which prompted and promoted their own novels, while keeping them bound to linguistic conservatism in their use of the English language.

The East-West encounter has caused a problematic identity for Indian writers of the English novel and they have repeatedly debated the question in various ways.[4] Writers are fascinated with the concept of names and naming, symbolic in terms of identity. Thus the messages attached to a name continue as a leitmotif, threading together most of the Indian-English novels cited here. Salman Rushdie makes a most insightful declaration in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* when he writes:

> To give a thing a name, a label, a handle; to rescue it from anonymity, to pluck it out of the Place of Namelessness, in short to identify it—well, that's a way of bringing the said thing into being (63).

Perhaps that is why the writers conscientiously translate the Indian names of their central characters in most of their books and reveal their meanings to a foreign audience. They attempt to make their characters more real by investing in them this deeper sense of identity that will metaphorically spill into the English text along with its Indian context. As most names in India have a meaning, these novelists have a wealth of images to choose from. The novels and the literature itself is rescued from 'namelessness' that surrounded it in its early days.

Bhabani Bhattacharya opens his novel with his metaphor of a name. He explains that Kalo is called so because he is black in complexion. Of course, the man is delighted because he has been "paid" a beautiful name for his lovely daughter: "Chandra Lekha, the Moon-tinted One" (1-3). In fact, the priest warns him that there is a social status ascribed to names with such distinction, and the novel's entire movement thereafter exposes the rawness of class and caste connotations

in rural India. Similarly Mulk Raj Anand too elevates another daughter's name in his novel where 'Leila' means a romantic game:

> It was all in a play, *Leila*. He recalled that it was the vision of this enchantment in his mind… the smile on his daughter's face when she was a babe that had inspired him to give her that name" (63).

It probably matters little to these novelists that their domestic audience can understand the associations they are making regarding the choice of a first name. They still need to reaffirm for themselves that they are speaking in a creative voice and the literature itself has a purpose to fulfill in worlds beyond India. Perhaps that is the reason for Malgonkar's name for the ruling dynasty—"Bedar/ the one without fear" which establishes self-confidence that the Indian novelist in the twentieth century still needs to be recognized 'fearlessly' in the international literary genre.

When Markandaya's Mohini chooses the name Rabindranath for her princely son, it is a tribute to indigenous literature, Bengali literature which already existed but was also developing its identity in the early twentieth century. Mohini explains that "It's the name of a poet, who is also a great man" (41). What is left unsaid is that Tagore brought the first powerful recognition of the West to modern Indian literature with the Nobel Prize for *Gitanjali* received in 1908.

Desai's novel *In Custody* concentrates upon the language conflict between Urdu and Hindi. She symbolizes the prospect of fame and recognition with a number of significant metaphors attached to the poet, Nur whose name means light. The narrator Deven combines the meaning of this name with another Indian metaphor—that of the comet that indicates fate or [mis]fortune. Thus Nur is "the light that blazes in the centre and sends its rays to all corners of the world"—and later the dying poet is "the comet he was seeing, swift and pale in the dark like a bird of the night" (17). Because Khushwant Singh is dealing with horrifying images of communal atrocities, he chooses the name Iqbal/fame for the one character that should represent secularism. This is a name common to all three religious communities—Hindu, Sikh and Muslim. Indian names therefore contain messages that speak of enlightenment and unity. Such meaningful names also represent the dreams of Indian writers seeking recognition from an international audience as they make tentative experiments with innovative language.

Other Indian English authors also translate and use kinship terms quite frequently in their texts. Sahgal explains "Didi/older sister" first and then has her Dutch heroine being called "Tantanna" by the entire hillside community, except the foreigners. As the word establishes the relationship between Aunt Anna and the native Indians, Sahgal could be symbolizing the wish that the Indian-English novel bears the same bond of being a younger sibling of several literatures in the English language—at the centre of the Empire and at its margins.

Ghosh also introduces his novel with a metaphor of name-calling; that is, the narrator calls his grandmother's sister "Mayadebi" with a rare familiarity instead of the customary Mayathakuma ('thakuma' being the equivalent of grandmother in Bengali). He extends the meaning further as he says that respectful kinship

terms diminish her worth in his eyes for it is "something so arbitrary and unimportant as a blood relationship" (3). Such an explanation is intended to establish intrinsic appropriation of the English language which does not assert blood-bonds through kinship terms. Indian English writers are not outsiders to the English language and Ghosh shows an affinity for the first name salutation which is truly British, discarding the one that is old-fashioned and Indian.

Once again, changing Valli's name to "Vyakulamary, Mary Anxious for her Child," Gopal Gandhi pays a tribute to the Christian missionaries who spread English education during colonial rule. The combined image of Eastern and Western words in a single name gives meaning to a style these Indian English authors wish to convey. Thus Deshpande's heroine is Jaya for victory, named such for she is born on the day World War II began. The narrator introspects that no one but her father could have shown this sort of optimism in the face of all odds. As a symbol, this optimism is necessary for writers moving towards their own stylistic victory in terms of an Indian English idiom for their novels.

Chatterjee goes into a lengthy explanation of his narrator Agastya's name, referring him back to the Indian sage of the epics—and then relating it to the English month of August. Besides, an 'august' persona would indeed be sage-like too. Chatterjee is holding together the two essential features of Indian English prose, its traditional heritage merging with the language from across the seas. Both traditions belong indisputably to the writer, just as both names belong fully to the above narrator too.

Krishna Rao affirms the dual representation of an Indian experience couched in "a new idiom and a new style capable of absorbing ideas from the East and the West" (5). Therefore when Amitav Ghosh keeps his narrator nameless, he signifies Indian English writer seeking their niche within so many literatures in English. Indian writers of English have continued to engage in their search for a new voice which would bring its discourse communities of urban elite into a transaction with the changing order of English expression, taking them towards greater linguistic freedom.

Endnotes

[1] The narrators or 'sutradhars' are there in plays like Abhigyana Shakuntalam, in the Tales of Betal and in the Mahabharata to negotiate gaps between the thoughts of the protagonists and the events in which they are placed, and explain the same to their audience.

[2] This essay is a section from the research conducted by the author on the ways in which loan words from Indian languages, translation of cultural imagery, and syntax changes have been used to customize the Indian English novel in the twentieth century—prior to and in the decades following Independence. The study included 17 novels by Indian English writers and these were compared to novels written by British authors writing about Indian and Nigerian authors writing about the Ibo culture. A wide variety of examples relating to the culture-specific images are given in this essay.

[3] In a different context, George Orwell wrote: “DYING METAPHORS. A newly invented metaphor assists thought by evoking a visual image, while on the other hand a metaphor which is technically ‘dead’ (e. g. iron resolution) has in effect reverted to being an ordinary word and can generally be used without loss of vividness.”

[4] Arguments ensued from the baptism, classification and categorization of this ‘other’ literature in English. Critics such as K.R.S. Iyengar, M.N. Naik, V. Gokak and Meenakshi Mukherjee have debated whether these novels should be called Indo-English, Indian English, Anglo-Indian or Indo-Anglian to keep it distinct from the regional literatures of India. Descriptive terms such as ‘colonial’ and ‘commonwealth’ further complicate the debate because there are several English literatures from other countries too like Australia, Canada, the Caribbean, the Far East and the African countries that can be classified likewise.

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