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From collision to creation : East-West encounters in Markandaya and Mukherjee

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FROM COLLISION TO CREATION:
EAST-WEST ENCOUNTERS IN
MARKANDAYA AND MUKHERJEE

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Vibha Bharati Bansal

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ABSTRACT

FROM COLLISION TO CREATION: EAST-WEST ENCOUNTERS IN MARKANDAYA AND MUKHERJEE

by Vibha Bharati Bansal

Kamala Markandaya and Bharati Mukherjee, postcolonial writers of the Indian diaspora, address in their works the issues of cultural identity, authenticity, and orientalism. Both of them are primarily concerned with the displacement that results from the meeting of two cultures. While their concerns overlap, however, their differing ideas of "home" and cultural space give very different shapes to their stories and to their language. Whereas Markandaya's characters lose their foothold on the original culture and remain stranded on the peripheries of the new one, Mukherjee's people carve out their niche in those outskirts, eventually changing both the mainstream and themselves. Similarly, while Markandaya uses a formal, largely "un-Indianized" English, Mukherjee freely sprinkles her text with Hindi words. The authors' perceptions not only shape their characters' lives, but also forecast their struggles in their adopted homes. These perceptions also determine their place in postcolonial literature.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Chapter 1 The Portraits of Immigrants	8
Chapter 2 The Question of Authenticity and the Problem of Orientalism	32
Chapter 3 Between Belonging and Uprooting: the Postcolonial Play with Language	60
Works Cited	82

Introduction

Few literary genres incite as much political passion among critics as does the post-colonial. The mere mention of the phrase "post-colonial" seems to heat up critics' blood. And post-colonial literature seems fair target for all sorts of inquisitions: political, literary, and linguistic. Are the writers concealing a form of "neo-colonialism?" Do they romanticize their homelands? Do they create and represent their actual homelands, or, as Salman Rushdie calls them, "imaginary homelands?" Worse still, do they exoticize their pasts for more comfortable consumption by their new hosts? How do they voice their native thoughts with their colonizers' vocabulary? Though often perceived with suspicion, these academic musings have transcended the confines of the classrooms and the lecture halls. These questions were asked of African writers who rebelled against their colonizers. Chinua Achebe wrote defensively, albeit eloquently, about the merits of using English instead of his local dialect. These same questions have also been asked of American writers. Perhaps most significantly, these questions are still being hotly debated at kitchen tables. Do immigrant parents clutch to dead traditions? How do Hindi-speaking parents and English-speaking children meet across the linguistic divide? If language is, indeed, a vehicle

for culture, then is theirs a hopeless struggle—the linguistic divide now having become a cultural chasm?

These questions persist because they point to the very core of our identities. They ask if we are natives or foreigners. Once expatriated, should we ever look back or must we always pioneer ahead? As national boundaries and identities become fluid, and as an increasing number of us leave our places of birth, these questions become ever more pertinent. As the works of Bharati Mukherjee and Kamala Markandaya show us, such questions of identity bear heavily upon all aspects of our lives—and, of course, the works of these writers. They affect the memories they keep, the character of the new homes they build, and the language they use to describe both of these.

Mukherjee takes a fairly self-empowering attitude toward immigration. In lectures and talks, she has repeatedly denounced the hyphenated description many immigrants adopt: Vietnamese-American, African-American, Indian-American, and so on. Having immigrated, she considers herself an American, sans hyphen. She challenges America to redefine itself, to make more plastic its definition of “American.” In fact, that pliability is the hallmark of Mukherjee’s America. There is no need to identify oneself as “Indian-American” or “Vietnamese-American” when “American” already includes all immigrant cultures. For Mukherjee, a first generation Indian-American is as “American” as a fifth-generation German-

American. This stance is insurance against the marginalization that plagues non-European immigrants for generations.

Mukherjee expects a similar flexibility from immigrants. The newcomers should adopt the American ideal, singing the Whitmanesque song of rebirth through travel and immigration. They should not rigidly hold on to the icons of a lost past. Rather, they should move forward, create and be created by, their new homes. In this ideal, there is little room for romanticizing the past or for playing the victim of a lost culture. Mukherjee challenges immigrants to transform themselves and their new country.

Kamala Markandaya, on the other hand, maintains a more conservative stand on this issue of immigration. She represents here the older school of thought in postcolonial literature than does Mukherjee: for Markandaya, the East is East, and its meeting with the West invariably results in tragedy. And history seems to validate her views: Emerging from nearly a millennium of foreign rule (British for 200 years, and before that Mughal), India saw all East-West encounters as head-on collisions. The two traditions--Indian and Western--often butt heads, and until only very recently, the latter invariably won, leaving the former scathed, humiliated, feeling completely victimized. For Markandaya, the East is pastoral, innocent, and the stuff of fond memories, despite its often tragic history.

Thus, Markandaya's perception of the process of immigration is very different from Mukherjee's. For her, there is no easy absorption of one

culture by another; one culture always suffers a mortal blow. Without exception, in Markandaya's works, that one culture is the Indian. Of course, Mukherjee also admits readily that one culture must submit—indeed, must often die—in order for the new, immigrant culture to emerge. But in her works, one rarely senses a nostalgia for days past. Whereas Mukherjee looks forward to a world of possibilities, Markandaya is suspicious of the glitter. Whereas Mukherjee willingly pays the price of cross-culturalization, Markandaya laments the heavy dues.

From these disparate responses to the cultural emerge different languages, writing styles, and critical legacies. Most analysts of the two writers' works have their own strong views on cultural encounters. This is not surprising, since most of them know India, and thus think they know how it should be depicted. They too have immigrated, and maintain strong views on immigrant issues. Postcolonial literature generates many forms of criticism, including, all too prominently, the mimetic. Knippling, for instance, argues that Mukherjee confuses her own upper-class, upper-caste, educated sensibilities with those of her characters—who share none of her privileges (Knippling 148). From Knippling's perspective, she creates unbelievable characters, and her experience of the new world itself is limited. Others have argued that Mukherjee paints a very lopsided, incomplete picture of India, and that she shows only the vile, violent India. Anindo Roy,

for instance, asserts that when she does present the spiritual side, she tends to flavor the image of India for Western tastes (128).

Mimetic criticism also attacks Markandaya. Her biggest blame lies in romanticizing India. Writing from England, married to an Englishman, and departed from India for decades, she is assumed to have become nostalgic for India. Some, however, praise this romanticism. Jasbir Jain commends Markandaya for creating characters who confront Westernization but do not succumb to it (37). He thinks she has created sturdy Indian characters who, unlike Jasmine and Dimple, maintain their "Indian-ness" in the face of a dominant Western paradigm. Others, like Homi Bhabha, would argue that the India she depicts never even existed. He would maintain that in focusing so much on the East-West duality, Markandaya misses altogether the only real culture: the one that emerges from the intersection of the two cultures.

Beneath these issues of representation lie still more fundamental questions about the relationship between language and culture. How, for example, can a writer claim to represent the "native"—as does Markandaya in Nectar in a Sieve—when the very language she employs belongs to the oppressor? Can Rukhmani, the protagonist of "Nectar," really convey to us, city folk in California, her intimacy with the corn paddies in the tropics of India—and do so, too, in the Queen's English? Does the very language condemn Markandaya's work to inauthenticity and inaccuracy? Perhaps it is here, in immigrant authors' creation and use of language, that we gain the

most useful insight into the new linguistic and cultural boundaries they are inscribing. Here, we witness the slow metamorphosis of both the immigrant and the native heart and tongue. In this arena, the authors, relatively free of political partisanship and immigrant sensitivities, join the generations of bi-cultural writers before them. Word by word, they chart new literary territories, and return to this genre its most powerful weapon--its evolving lexicon. Here, they create a language that befits the bi-cultural world they inhabit, a language that well suits the divide. The nature of the liberties they take with it spring directly from their perception of their place along that divide. While Markandaya handles English gingerly, Mukherjee whirls it through her artistic blender. To different degrees, both authors not only manage to subvert the linguistic traditions of both places, but also the critical assertions that would classify their political motives.

Chapter 1

The Portraits of Immigrants

Xenophobia can afflict anyone. For some, however, encounters with foreigners invoke centuries of frightening memories. Such is the case with Bharati Mukherjee and Kamala Markandaya. Immigrants from a formerly colonized nation, they are naturally preoccupied with the phenomenon of cultural collision. They have experienced it in their own countries as well as in their new homes, the United States and England, respectively. In addressing this issue of cultural conflict, they are dealing with the ghosts of their own lives. Even more than that, though, they are coming to terms with the ghosts of generations of Indians before them. All Indians, whether or not they came in direct contact with Westerners, were affected by their country's encounter with the West. Those who lack personal memories of the experience partake of the cultural and national memory. To a large degree, both groups are dominated by a sense (be it vague or vivid) of exploitation and a loss of cultural identity. To be sure, the British were not solely responsible for India's identity crises. Even without the raj, India would have smarted from the pains of going from an agricultural economy to an industrial one, from a largely rural society to an urban one. As we see in Markandaya's novels, that transition itself alienated all those who had found

a comfortable emotional and physical existence in the traditional society. And to those pains of modernization was added the trauma of colonization. As with most cases of colonization, this cultural collision took its energy--and its violence--from the disparity between the parties. While one had the power to make national decisions, to influence world opinion, and to grant and withhold economic stability, the other, oppressed for an age, came to see these cross-cultural encounters as ready-made disasters. In the colonized minds, the Western world would come to be a place where Indians would forever remain foreigners. Any acceptance of them would be superficial, and any significant integration would require tragic sacrifices from Indians. To different degrees, Mukherjee and Markandaya partake in this memory of India's history. When they write, they do so against the backdrop of this historic apprehension and suspicion. And in their own ways, they both respond--either in agreement or in derision--to the psyche that evolved as a result of the colonization. As we shall see, the experience of living in a post-colonial India elicits very different responses from these authors. While Markandaya tends to draw a clear distinction between "them" and "us," Mukherjee's characters are much more of a blend. They often do not know where "Indian" ends and "American" begins. This is only the first of many differences that, one suspects, are caused by authors' different proximity to the raj.

When Markandaya published her first novel, Nectar in a Sieve, in 1955, India had been free for only eight years, compared to Mukherjee's first novel, The Tiger's Daughter, published in 1971, twenty four years after independence. As expected, attitudes towards cultural encounters in Markandaya's works tend to be more conservative than in Mukherjee's. Perhaps because she was writing in an era still wounded by colonization, her characters seem to embody more completely the trepidations of post-colonial India than do Markandaya's. While the two authors agree on one thing—that assimilation takes a heavy toll—they concur little on other matters, such as the worthiness of paying that toll. On this ground, Markandaya, surprisingly, is the more cynical of the two. We see this reflected in her stories and her characters. The Nowhere Man, for example, nicely depicts the ironies and contradictions of the assimilation process. Typically of Markandaya's writings, it also casts a gloom over the fate of those in midst of the confrontation. Despite all their efforts, her characters are unable to forge a culture that embraces both Indians and Britons; they fit into neither world as it exists. What results is a desperate oscillation between the new life and the past. When we first meet Srinivas, the protagonist of Nowhere Man, he is still trying to find his place in England, the country he has lived in for fifty years. Srinivas had immigrated there in his twenties, hardworking and full of hope and goodwill. He had raised his sons in England, served in the British army, and tried to befriend his neighbors. But while hoping to

assimilate, Srinivas is constantly homesick. He and his wife, Vasantha, cling to their memories of India. Together, they carefully store away the dhoties and other articles of Indian garb that they hope will come in handy when they return to India. Like many immigrants, they nurture this dream of going home. Perhaps in that hope, Vasantha never completely lets go of India. She moves into the English culture selectively, unlike her children, who prefer to do it wholesale. She never quite parts with her saris, for example, and after years in England, still longs for the warm climate of coastal southern India. Although he later realizes otherwise, Srinivas, too, thinks for much of his life that he can return to India one day. And these longings come laden with a sense of defeat abroad. He knows that somehow, despite all his effort, he will never be one of the English. His elder son validates his fears when he observes that his parents do seem as odd and embarrassing as Srinivas fears: "Her clothes, like the robes Jesus Christ wore, only worse with the cardigan. Her face, scrubbed clean and yellow like a plain deal table, and her English, which was not the country's or his own" (35). Srinivas imagines his son would also see him in the same dreary light: "an ill-dressed ancient Indian, deficient in good living and small talk, with whom they would have nothing in common, nor even want to find out if they did" (94). Still, trying so desperately to find peace in his new home, even developing a sense of patriotism for England, Srinivas serves as a fire watcher for his younger son, who drives an ambulance for the British army: "He had always, of course,

performed these duties conscientiously; but now personal interest added keenness to his eye. England was becoming his country" (30). His younger son dies on duty, we are told, a tragedy requiring, on Srinivas's part, immense understanding if he is to achieve emotional reconciliation with the country. Yet to the end, assimilation remains a struggle. Markandaya suggests that both parties, the hosts and the guests, add bricks to the dividing wall. Srinivas's longing for India and his constant gaze homewards, the English refusal to see beyond his strange garb and manners, and a mutual and constant misinterpretation of cultural codes—all contribute to the making of a lonely man.

Markandaya understands that reminiscence obstructs the mission of integration, but she is patient with those who long for the homeland. Unlike Mukherjee, who considers such longing a product of an idealistic, inaccurate, romanticized memory, Markandaya empathizes with the pain of losing a place called "home." (In fact, she does not even consider memory to be fallible: "... it is the early years which are most deeply etched . . . and the memories persist and are not subject to fluctuation" (Nowhere Man 6)). She points out that Srinivas's desire to cradle those memories of India and to find comfort in his new country are not mutually exclusive. A humble, well-intentioned man, he readily admits to his own short-comings and short-sightedness. After his wife's death, for example, he befriends Mrs. Pickering, a widow who awakens him to the beauty of English clothing and climate. He

confesses then that with Vasantha, he had lived like an exile—always trying to recreate the India of his memories in England, but now:

She—the brisk, weathered Englishwoman—made him see the beauty of a crisp winter morning, where before—infected by Vasantha, shivering in unsuitable clothes—he had been conscious only of a cold that pierced to the marrow. . . . During his years with Vasantha—exiles both—he had longed like her for palm trees and oleander, sighed with her for the rivers of their vanished youth, for the ramifications of family they had sustained and been sustained by. . . . Mrs. Pickering introduced him to English rivers no whit less enchanting, took him to areas of total peace, added sycamore and even oak to his limited appreciation of rosebay and goldenrod. . . . Obscure longings, nurtured over the years by him and his wife and lingering on, Srinivas now put aside, though gently enough. These had served their turn: had even, perhaps, acted as blocks, preventing an absorption of a country and its people that offered, quietly and without meanness, many compensations. (Nowhere Man 71-2)

There is no stubbornness in Srinivas's attachment to India; nor is there any malice. Markandaya's characters simply make the sincerest attempt to find comfort in their new countries. She portrays with much compassion this internal battle over reminiscence and acceptance. While it is certainly nice to have one's horizons broadened and mind opened, as does Srinivas, Markandaya shows that having learned to appreciate the English ways, he is left feeling more detached than ever from his India (by now mostly imaginary), and thus more defenseless in face of the hostile racism he encounters in the likes of Fred, the skin-head who harasses him. Whereas before he could have said, "I'm Indian, they're English," and thus have consoled himself that the attacks were coming from without, now, in this

precarious state of semi-integration, he cannot even do that. He feels as if he has lost that one comfort--a sense of belonging to his own culture. Back then, he thinks, there was no confusion about which side he belonged to and who was right and who was wrong. As Srinivas chooses a response to Fred, he longs for the one-sided comfort his wife provided, the comfort of a single-culture identity. As the racist attacks persist (he is, at one time, tarred and feathered by the neighborhood hoodlums, and on several occasions harassed by the police and the neighborhood kids), and as his identity begins to be more and more threatened by the encroaching racism, he reaches out for anything familiar, anything Indian. Perhaps if he can anchor himself to one tradition, he will be less likely to be blown away by destructive winds. He finds a dhoti, and parading around the streets in yards of flowing muslin, manages to alienate himself even further.

Markandaya very expertly details the various reactions this type of foreignness engenders. This, after all, is a huge concern of her novels. Time and again, Markandaya suggests that in such cultural conflicts, the danger and the threats come from without. The homeland, or in novels like *Nectar*, tradition itself, provides safety, comfort, and most importantly, belonging. The foreign land, despite its occasional generosity, is normally a hostile, and at best, a deceptive, place, she seems to say. Even when characters land securely on the path of assimilation, they eventually learn that all that

security was merely a mirage. Thus begins the making of the Srinivases and the Valmikis (protagonist of Possession), of this world.

In The Nowhere Man, the hostility manifests itself in the behavior of several breeds of bigots. The easiest to identify are the young, arrogant skin-heads like Fred. Unabashedly bitter, they make no pretense of accepting the newcomers. They tar and feather the old man and burn his house. Then, there are the neighborhood women. Catty, gossipy, obtuse, and domineering, they make quick, baseless judgments. Although never outright rude—they are much too well mannered for that—they are the ones who truly isolate Srinivas. For them, Srinivas is just an oddity—neither English nor Indian. As Gyan Prakash points out in his essay, the assimilation produces a “not white/not quite” creature:

If the colonial discourse produced a “reformed” other—the Anglicized Indian . . . who resembled the English—the strategy of assimilation acknowledged a recalcitrant difference: the Anglicized Indian was a Brown Englishman, at best—“not white/not quite.” (16)

To them, he is *seemingly* a harmless old man, but one never really knows, does one? After all, his clothes are strange and his habits even stranger. Srinivas’s reputation as an eccentric spreads on the wings of misinformation. A rumor starts that years after his wife’s death, Srinivas keeps a jar of her ashes in the house. “It was a big tea caddy,” notes Mrs. Glass, a neighbor. “What’s more, from what our Bert saw, it still has her ashes in it, to this very day.” Their Bert, one of the reigning racists of the lane, had neglected to note

that Srinivas had actually floated his wife's ashes down the Thames (there, a constable had reprimanded him for "polluting" the chocolatey river), and the jar in question now contained Indian soil, one of Vasantha's favorite belongings. Ultimately, the neighbors have determined that no matter how respectable the Indians seem, they will never quite be one of them. In the following passage, for example, the women speak of Vasantha:

Mrs. Glass considered. "She was a nice little thing, really," she said fairly. "Of course, she was Indian. I mean, she couldn't help it, could she? But I will say she kept her place spotless. Like one of us, although she wasn't if you follow what I mean."

Mrs. Fletcher followed these non sequiturs quite easily. Mrs. Glass had known she would. As she often said, that was the advantage of living in a good locality: everyone understood, they knew what you meant, you didn't have to spell it out. (74)

These women's husbands could point out the inequities to which their logic leads, but captive to their meekness, they refrain.

Markandaya is a complex enough thinker, however, to understand that not all differences arise from mean-spiritedness. Sometimes, the gulf is widened by a genuine lack of understanding even from those who love Srinivas. When a neighborhood kid leaves a dead mouse on his doorstep, for instance, Srinivas finds it and gives it a somber, respectful cremation. "It had been killed and left," he says. "I am of course, in a way, responsible for its death." After all, the mouse was used to terrorize him, he thinks. When Mrs. Pickering also fails to understand the man she is living with, the man who seems to her on the brink of dementia, he continues reasoning with

himself: "And the loss, he thought, it involved: so great, so terrible. Shall I, he asked himself, tell her? That a mouse has entitlements no less than a man?" (237). Mrs. Glass, the neighbor, thinks the cremation was "some kind of rite, like" (235). Thus, an act of respect and homage turns into a weird, cultish ritual.

Much like Srinivas, most of Markandaya's characters remain homeless, lost in a changing world. Unlike Mukherjee's people, they are rarely endowed with the gusto and the energy—or, perhaps, the idealism—to row their vessels through the storms. Mostly, they shipwreck and stay lost on the beaches, forever on the peripheries of the new land. Markandaya realizes that one need not leave one's home to encounter such homelessness. In Nectar in a Sieve, Rukhmani, a subsistence farmer in south India, becomes a "Nowhere Woman" as industry invades her village and farming begins to lose its economic hold on her sons. As do Srinivas's neighbors in The Nowhere Man, Rukhmani initially notices the little peculiarities of the encroaching life—the clothes, the manners, the habits. The overseer, for instance, was "dressed in a shirt and trousers, and he had a hat on his head such as [Rukhmani] had only seen Kenny wear before" (Nectar in a Sieve 30). These city folks—like the overseer—bring with them Western garb, the kind only Kenny, the British doctor, had worn thus far. And they earn a lot: "They were very well paid, these men, some of them earning two rupees in a single day, whereas even in good times we seldom earned as much, and they

bought lavishly" she recalls (31). Soon, the new ways invade her home, rob it of its familiar comfort. Rukhmani, by now a late-middle-aged woman, never quite finds a home in this new culture. The news that their son has left his wife, for instance, completely shocks Rukhmani and her husband. The very idea of leaving one's spouse is foreign to them. "What do you mean? Are you not his wife?" they ask of the abandoned daughter-in-law (162). That this divorce happens in the city, where new ways first infiltrate, is not surprising. But even the village community, as it existed prior to the factory, begins to unravel. The tannery rising at the edge of Rukhmani's village brings with it strange men and a strange culture. This new industry helps and hurts their lives. It lures her sons away from the land, but it also provides a more dependable living, a living that does not rely on the whims of a tropical climate. And when starvation knocks, the tannery's men, unfamiliar and uncaring, pay Rukhmani's daughter a good penny for her body. They can do so precisely because they are strangers. In the tight-knit rural community, no one would have dared—or at least so thinks Rukhmani. "Ira had ruined herself at the hands of the throngs that the tannery attracted. None but these would have laid hands on her, even at her bidding" (136). In the end, the tannery destroys the only life she knows.

Rukhmani and Srinivas are typical among Markandaya's cast of displaced persons. Although they always achieve some degree of understanding with their new lives, in the end, the sense of homelessness

persists. Rukhmani, for example, does appreciate the modern medicine that helps her daughter conceive, but typically, these blessings come laced with tragedy. In this case, the medical intervention comes too late, and Ira is ostracized as a single mother with an albino child. Srinivas also learns to appreciate the British ways from his companion, Mrs. Pickering, but he also dies a lonely exile. Efforts toward assimilation prove largely futile. Even the surviving son, who had wished so fervently that his parents would lose the embarrassing accents and the ridiculous outfits, finds himself treated like a foreigner by fellow Scotsmen. While Markandaya does not wholly condemn the West or modernization for the woes of such lost souls, she does bemoan the heavy toll they levy.

In part, this is so because Markandaya knows that once the new modes of life are introduced, one can never return to the old ways. Rukhmani goes to the city to find her son, but when she returns to the village, tired and defeated, her sense of loss is almost tangible. Her daughter welcomes her back, but the reader knows that Rukhmani's life will never be the same again. Srinivas, the "Nowhere Man" had also tried going back to India, but found that once departed, one can never return. To help offset the trauma of this loss, Markandaya's characters reach for their homelands, often, in the process, losing their grip on the integration process in their new homes. Markandaya understands this and she empathizes. In The Nowhere Man, she writes sympathetically for those trying to adapt: "Each year that went by laid its

ineffaceable rings upon the bark of his children, making it increasingly difficult for them to thrive in another climate" (Nowhere Man 21).

Mukherjee, on the other hand, mostly condemns this response, because she has a very different perspective on immigration. While Markandaya nurses her people's wounds and sympathizes with their difficult lots, Mukherjee tells them to stop playing the victim and to start taking charge of their own lives--and of the culture they're now inhabiting. Whereas Markandaya remains in what seems to be a largely "colonial mentality," where "home" (in all senses--home of culture, place, and feeling) and "strange land" were distinct entities, in Mukherjee's world the line between the two is considerably hazier. In her works, white people do atrocious things to Indian immigrants--Mukherjee's experiences with racism in Canada are well-known--but so do Indians to Indians. In her writings, Indian cities like Calcutta are mired in senseless violence, poverty, and corruption. In fact, much of Mukherjee's mission in writing seems to be demythologizing the homeland. The real home is hardly worthy of nostalgia. Emmanuel S. Nelson, a Mukherjee scholar, finds that in Days and Nights in Calcutta Mukherjee comes to terms with "her growing realization that the 'real' India is vastly different from the imagined 'home' of her expatriate nostalgia" (Nelson xi-xii). Indeed, the grim pictures of Calcutta can also be

found in her fiction, as in this passage from Tiger's Daughter:

In time the sidewalks beneath Joyonto grew restless with refugees from East Bengal and Tibet. Rioters became insolent. Powerful landowners were at first tormented, later beheaded. Businessmen padlocked their factories and sneaked off like ghosts to richer provinces. Housewives cried at night, or retreated into screaming hate. (49)

Here, politicians make convenient puppets of religious zealots, and riots enflame the city. The rich, more or less unaffected by poverty, make rash, thoughtless remarks about it. "How is it the lower classes have such a good time?" asks one naive girl, "It's just us people who have to suffer!" (119).

Really, there is no reason to reminisce, thinks Mukherjee. Immigrants leave home because life there must have been lacking in some way. Indeed, it is foolish to forget that and to romanticize the very place one has chosen to leave. While Markandaya allows that at least there may have been a time when a single culture provided that sense of comfort and belonging, Mukherjee believes that that state is purely imaginary. There was never a time of pure peace, or, for that matter, an unadulterated culture. Conflict and duality are to be found in all societies, no matter how old, established, and apparently unchallenged. As Brinda Bose writes,

Duality and conflict are not merely a feature of immigrant life in America; Mukherjee's women are brought up in a culture that presents them with such ambiguities from childhood. The breaking of identities and the discarding of languages actually begin early, their lives being shaped by the confluence of rich cultural and religious traditions, on the one hand, and the "new learning" imposed by British colonialism in India, on the other. These different influences involve them in tortured processes of

self-recognition and self-assimilation right from the start. (Bose 30)

It is an awareness of this ubiquitous "duality and conflict," as well as a tenacious faith in one's free will, that separates Mukherjee's immigrants from Markandaya's. Their own choice brought them abroad, and now, armed with this understanding, they must choose not be victimized. In fact, in order to separate herself from the traditional immigrant writings (in which Markandaya, presumably, would be included), she draws a distinction between immigrants and expatriates:

In my fiction, and in my Canadian experience, "immigrants" were lost souls, put upon and pathetic. Expatriates, on the other hand, knew all too well who and what they were, and foul fate had befallen them. Like V. S. Naipaul, in whom I imagined a model, I tried to explore state-of-the-art expatriation. (Darkness 1-2).

Mukherjee finds an intellectual ally in Salman Rushdie, who, in Imaginary Homelands, ponders this state of expatriation and of a bi-cultural existence. As the title of his book suggests, the land that remains in the imagination of immigrants has the greatest pull on their psyches. Ultimately, they reside in a place between that and the adopted land. And in order to avoid becoming ghosts of the past, they must ask some crucial questions:

What does it mean to be "Indian" outside India? How can culture be preserved without being ossified? How should we discuss the need for change within ourselves and our community without seeming to play into the hands of our racial enemies? What are the consequences, both spiritual and practical, of refusing to make any concessions to Western ideas and practices and turning away from the ones that came here

with us? These questions are all a single, existential question:
How are we to live in the world? (Rushdie 18)

Mukherjee answers that question thus: in order to achieve a sense of belonging in the new home, immigrants must consciously sever the emotional ties with homeland. Nostalgia, the romanticized memories of a time past, is not only inaccurate by definition, but worse, it hinders belonging. Immigrants must charge forth with the integration process. Only a full-hearted relinquishment of the past will give them the freedom to proceed. Otherwise, they are doomed to remain “nowhere” men and women.

Mukherjee writes in her introduction to Darkness:

If you have to wonder, if you keep looking for signs, if you wait—surrendering little bits of a reluctant self every year, clutching the souvenirs of an ever-retreating past—you’ll never belong, anywhere. (Darkness 51-2)

If necessary, immigrants must symbolically murder the past in order to secure a place for the new culture. Jasmine burns her dead husband's clothes in a trash can—and with them, her only ties to her old life. Dimple, the protagonist of Wife, murders her husband, because, as an icon of the old world, he hinders her progress. (Mukherjee has said in interviews that while she does not condone violence, she does recognize it as a common fallout from the trauma of immigration.)

Instead of nostalgia, Mukherjee brings to the New World a pioneer’s sense of awe, wonder, and empowerment. In that, she is very Whitmanesque. Well aware of her own post-colonial context, Mukherjee

even responds to earlier colonial novelists by presenting a newer, more optimistic vision of *post*-colonialism. Whereas Conrad's Kurtz, after entering the depths of the unexplored jungle and of his own psyche, had exclaimed "The horror! The horror!" Mukherjee sees great, luminous, creative potential in the individual:

Out there, I am not sure what Mother imagines. On the edge of the world, in flaming deserts, mangled jungles, squelchy swamps, missionaries save the needy. But for me, for Du, In Here, Safety. At least for now.

Oh, the wonder! the wonder! (*Jasmine* 18)

Each person has immense capacity to adapt, to grow, to create a new life. With this energy, Jasmine manages to find love, comfort, and for a time at least, even a sense of belonging in Iowa. Jasmine/Mukherjee wants to be recreated by her new world, as much as she believes it her prerogative to create it. For her, immigration is literally the gift of another life. Emmanuel Nelson concurs:

What is fascinating . . . is Mukherjee's determined rejection of the emotional paralysis of exile and her enthusiastic affirmation of the immigrant condition; her remarkable success in forging a coherent vision out of the chaos of her multiple displacements; and her ability to articulate a vision in a voice that is as subtle as it is insistent. (Nelson x)

Of all of Mukherjee's characters, Jasmine best embodies these ideals. This nineteen year old Punjabi woman initially comes to the United States to help realize her dead husband's dream of attending a university in Florida. But she also craves an escape from the senseless violence in the crowded,

oppressive India. She has lost her husband to a bus bombing and her father to the rampage of a mad bull. Now, she wants freedom from the chaos and senselessness of this life, and, once and for all, attain the beauty that life should have offered from the beginning. Her plan, she thinks, is perfect: by going to a Florida university, she will, symbolically, achieve her husband's mission for him, and once there, she will light his clothes on fire and with them herself--becoming a modern-day "sati," thus regaining all the grace of her lost married life. Her dream, to say the least, is idealistic: "I had dreamed of arranging the suit and twigs. The vision of lying serenely on a bed of fire under palm trees in my white sari had motivated all the weeks of sleepless, half-starved passage" (Jasmine 107).

But this starry-eyed, oddly idealistic vision seems quite ill-fitting in a girl who had, while in India, protected a group of women from the rampage of a mad dog. Other than this questionable period where her dreaminess seems an anomaly to the rest of her life, Jasmine soon evolves into Mukherjee's ideal: clear-headed, energetic, and determined. From the beginning, when she falls in love with a philosophy student, to her reckless move to the United States, Jasmine firmly establishes that she is no fragile blossom. Throughout her journey, this impression never falters. Quickly shedding the immigrant ideals for expatriate ambitions, she begins to transform herself from one persona to another. Jasmine becomes Mukherjee's quintessential expatriate. The book, in fact, serves as the vehicle

for Mukherjee's ideal, rather than a mimetic representation of an immigrant's life.

Thus, early on, sati loses all its charm with a single encounter with Half-Face, the man who would rape her repeatedly, and Jasmine goes from being a martyr to a survivor. Ironically, Half-face awakens her to her own instinct for survival. This instinct, along with sturdy optimism about individual adaptability, makes for the Whitmanesque persona Mukherjee idealizes. With an invocation to Kali, the Hindu goddess of strength and destruction, Jasmine murders the lecherous man in his sleep, and heads off on a journey that would take her from Jyoti/Jasmine to Jase, Jazzy, and Jane. Her first stop is the home of Lillian Gordon, a kind farm woman whom she finds along the highway. For Lillian, Jasmine is "Jazzy," cute but dangerously conspicuous to INS watchdogs. To disguise her new-immigrant status, she trades in her flimsy sandals for old tennies and lessons in walking American-style. Working as an au pair for Columbia's literati in New York, she learns the appeal of her own foreignness. These people call her "Jase," "Jasmine" with most of the orientalism still intact. Circumstances then take her to the Iowa, where she becomes "Jane." To them, she is ordinary enough, only tanned. This farming community simply glosses over all the differences between her culture and theirs. And for her part, Jasmine blends in almost imperceptibly into all these settings. The new land provides an endless stream of possibilities. Only the most foolish would risk losing them.

This by no means implies that Mukherjee sees the United States as only a land of milk and honey. Much like Markandaya's works, her stories detail the various breeds of racism her characters encounter. Time and again, Jasmine notices undercurrents of hostility and misunderstanding. Much like the neighborhood women in The Nowhere Man, some Iowans make vague correlations between their own miserable lots and the immigrants--all pointing to an easy scapegoat. In Jasmine, one woman being interviewed for a story about INS regulations says to the news crew, "I don't think they're bad people, you know. It's just that there's too many of them." Another pipes up, "Steve, my husband, lost his job. That was last November. We were doing so good, now we can't make the house and car payments. Are you listening, Mr. President"? (Mukherjee, Jasmine 23)

Jasmine notices very astutely the fine shades of differences between the various groups' treatment of her. While some like to highlight her otherness, others minimize it. None are wholly accurate, and all reveal their own mind-sets more than they do Jasmine's. In the following passage, she summarizes the reactions to her foreignness:

Educated people are interested in differences; they assume that I'm different from them but exempted from being one of "them," the knife-wielding undocumented hiding in basements webbing furniture.

In Baden, the farmers are afraid to suggest I'm different. They've seen the aerograms I receive, the strange lettering I can decipher. To them, alien knowledge means intelligence. They want to make me familiar. . . . I'm from a generic place, "over

there," which might be Ireland, France, or Italy. I'm not Lutheran, which isn't to say I might not be Presbyterian. (28-9)

Like Markandaya, Mukherjee is well aware of the misunderstanding and racism immigrants encounter, but unlike Markandaya, she lays much of the responsibility on the immigrants' shoulders. She considers it as much their duty to make their new home a home as it is the hosts' duty to let them do so. None of this is possible if they keep longing for their old countries. The Indian family she lives with for a time in Flushing, Queens, for example, exists in a little island of things Indian:

Professorji and Nirmala did not go out at night. "Why waste the money when we have everything here?" And truly they did. They had Indian-food stores in the block, Punjabi newspapers and Hindi film magazines at the corner newsstand, and a movie every night without having to dress up for it. They had a grateful servant who took her pay in food and saris. (Jasmine 129)

In a heavy-handed stroke, Mukherjee makes her point very clear. Memories of home are clouded by homesickness and nostalgia. When Professorji starts to muse about the virtues of India, he loses all touch with reality:

"Indian women are purists, they're cleansing their hair with berries or yogurt only, they're not ruining their hair with shampoos, gels, dyes, or permanents. American women have horrible hair--this I have learned since settling here. Their hair lacks virginity and innocence."

I got the point. He needed to work here, but he didn't have to like it. He had sealed his heart when he left home. His real life was in an unlivable land across oceans. He was a ghost, hanging on. (Jasmine 135-36)

Both Markandaya and Mukherjee acknowledge the trauma of displacement and immigration, and both understand that one reaction to this is to reminisce and romanticize the homeland. But while Markandaya considers this natural, empathetic behavior, Mukherjee considers it cowardly. It seems that Markandaya, still entrenched in the colonizer-colonist paradigm, is actually the more pessimistic of the two. Her writing betrays little belief in a dark, violent subconscious, yet in her vision of immigration, pessimism reigns large. No amount of effort, sacrifice, and detachment from home can position the immigrants for complete integration, she thinks. For them, the loss of a home is permanent. In The Nowhere Man, Srinivas's eldest son becomes even "more English," if that's possible, than the English themselves. In an effort to subvert the Indian influence on him, he moves far from his aging parents, climbs high on the corporate ladder in Scotland, and even marries an English woman. Critic Hena Ahmed describes the son as "the second-generation immigrant who, in his desperate effort to belong to the white social class, completely denies his Indian connection and conforms to the social values he sees around him" (145). But ultimately, even he feels like a foreigner in England. Other characters, such as Valmiki of Possession, become cozy with the English literati, but only as much as he can be exploited by them. Soon, like Jasmine, Valmiki (shortened to "Val" in England), becomes aware of this, and even learns to use their "orientalizing" instincts to his benefit, but ultimately, he, too, can never make England his home, or

the English his people. In this sense, compared to Markandaya, Mukherjee, despite all the murders, riots, and general violence of her prose, is almost the wide-eyed optimist. She has incredible faith in people's potential to adapt and create. Instead of seeking integration in the traditional sense, she seeks to contribute her share to the immigrant culture so that it can harbor newcomers without alienating itself or them. Of course, for this system to work, one must also be willing to redefine oneself. One must sacrifice memories and longings, and more than anything else, believe wholeheartedly in the immigrant dream. For all this, Mukherjee has received much criticism.

Chapter 2

The Question of Authenticity and the Problem of Orientalism

Can an American know the heart of an Indian? Can a pauper know the heart of a landlord? In a town meeting, can the former speak on behalf of the latter? Or vice versa? This question of representation plagues minority writers everywhere. For whom do they speak? Whenever they produce a written word, they are presumed to be doing so on behalf of someone, representing someone. Simply by the virtue of their positions, they are endowed with such responsibility and power. One need not be of the postcolonial heritage to encounter this phenomenon, however. A recent magazine article describes Toni Morrison's situation:

People honored for making up stories or poems or plays are then expected to make pronouncements, in front of packed houses, on public issues. As an African-American woman, Morrison has faced such expectations constantly. "Most of the questions I get after readings or talks," she says "are anthropological or sociological or political. They are not about literary concerns." (Gray 65)

Thus, these writers face daunting decisions: With all this *sociological* influence potentially at their disposal, what should be their role? Indian writers living and writing abroad do not escape such questioning. Should they portray India as they--now departed for decades--see it, or should they try to strip themselves of the Western influence that must necessarily have

entered their conscience? Is it their duty to speak on behalf of their native compatriots--or should they write only for the literary value--with ne'er an eye towards ethnicity? Invariably, post-colonial writers find themselves at the center of such controversies. And no wonder. As writers, they occupy a much-ballyhooed position, where they hold the audience of not only their countrymen, but also their hosts. Because they are minority writers in the Occident, their voices ring out from the corners as if they were the elected spokespersons for their cultural groups. The fallout is easily anticipated. The authors are generally judged on the basis of one major criterion: their success at representing the old country and their readers. For the critics of these writers, literary concerns fall secondary to sociological ones. And at least at a cursory glance, compared to Mukherjee's performance, Markandaya achieves stellar success at this venture. While the first condemns some Indian practices, the latter glorifies the Indian life. While the first is faulted for selling out to the Western mentality, the other is praised for a sympathetic depiction of her subject. A closer study reveals, however, that neither artist writes from a purely Indian or Western perspective. Both writers defy the immigrant's expectations of representation.

The reason for the expectations is understandable. For the entirety of the colonial period, and usually through the post-colonial, these groups have been objectified. They have been observed, interpreted, and analyzed by their colonizers. For centuries, the world heard the white man's observations of

their lives. In Western eyes, India became a land of ancient mystics and Indians a people of ridiculous superstitions. The Indian people were thought amusing, but not necessarily intelligent. Their creations, like the Khajraho temples, were deemed exotic for all the acrobatic, erotic sculptures, but the architectural achievements of those same temples went largely unnoticed. Thus, Indians were (and would be for centuries since) perceived as a spiritual, but not scientific, people. India became known as a place with a luminous past, but a dark present and an even gloomier future. Here, an occasional wise man in a loin cloth would be seen standing importantly above the dirty, poor, masses, but that was really the extent of the positive recognition Indians were to receive. The old India was a home of jungles, maharajas, and holy men. In a more modern setting, it becomes a land of lepers, a chaotic, corrupt government and, somehow, deep spirituality. Like a patient lying on a table, India found herself thus objectified, time and again, observed from without. Often, these premature conclusions led to stereotypes that to this day breed racial tension, misunderstandings, or worse, political subversion. Thus, when a writer of Indian origin speaks, and is *heard*, she breaks a millennium of silence and objectification. Finally, the writer defines herself. No longer merely a character in someone else's story, she tells her own story.

The complication arises when the author's audience assume that instead of her own, she tells their stories, as well. Judging from much of the published criticism, the assumption among the critics is that as the most

outspoken and influential members of their ilk, the writers should function as their representatives. Finally, they can set the record straight. Through them, the entire group can gain validity. They can become subjects instead of objects, and achieve a far more dignified status. These writers can help them “represent” themselves. While it is not difficult to see how the authors can be expected to become the ambassadors for the community, this notion of “representation” is most problematic. Whose India, whose immigration experience, and whose America should they represent? Should it be the experiences of the largest number of Indian immigrants? Or, should it be simply the India the author has known—even if it does not reflect the India of the masses? Perhaps, since this is their big chance, they should focus on salvaging India's image, or on de-orientalizing a much-orientalized India.

Further, critics often believe that the goal of de-orientalizing India can only be achieved if the author herself knows India *as it really is*, and not as the colonizers have portrayed it, as the “other” and the “exotic.” This is where the authors themselves come under scrutiny. One wonders, for example, if Markandaya is even capable of representing the real India. After all, she hails more from the Western tradition of writing than from the Eastern. Her influences seem to be Wordsworth and Coleridge, rather than Kabir and Kali Das. Nectar in a Sieve, for example, begins with a quote from Coleridge, “Work without hope draws nectar in a sieve, And hope without an object cannot live.” Critics have wondered if she, immersed in their

influence--and thus probably their mentality--could have even known the hearts of the people she wrote about. Others wonder the same about Mukherjee. How can this highly-educated, wealthy woman from a prominent upper-class family in Calcutta know anything about the plight of the average Indian immigrant? Like Markandaya, Mukherjee does not seem nearly common enough to represent the common person. The only difference between the two authors is that while Markandaya gets accused of glorifying India, Mukherjee is taken to task for being unfairly critical of it. Markandaya's pastoral landscapes are as troublesome to some as Mukherjee's dreary city-scapes are to others. Ultimately, though, the two stand defensive on the same platform: both are said to reveal minds that are overly colonized. Essentially, both are accused of not portraying (representing) India authentically enough.

We would be hard put to discuss the notion of authenticity without first understanding in detail its most relevant counterpart: orientalism. Ever since Edward Said used this term, it has kept the colonizing world on the defensive. For Said, orientalism is a "system of knowledge about the Orient, an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness" (Said 133). This is the mechanism with which the West makes sense of the East. Crudely, it is a set of stereotypes which, applied to any new observations, provide a familiar, comfortable way to analyze the subject. For instance, once orientalism deems Hindus (and Hinduism) fatalistic, all practices of

Hinduism will be judged within the parameters of that perceived fatalism.

What has emerged is a mythos almost entirely uncontested and unchallenged:

...there emerged a complex Orient suitable for study in the academy, for display in the museum, for reconstruction in the colonial office, in theoretical illustration in anthropological, biological, linguistic, racial and rhetorical theses about mankind and the universe, for instances of economic and biological theories of development, revolution, cultural personality, national and religious character.

Additionally, the imaginative examination of things Oriental was based more or less exclusively upon a sovereign Western consciousness out of whose unchallenged centrality an Oriental world emerged, first according to general ideas about who or what was an Oriental, then according to a detailed logic learned not simply by empirical reality but by a battery of desires, repressions, investments, and projections. (Said 134)

But this is not to say that "the Orient," a man-made concept, in reality does not exist. On the contrary, "One ought never to assume that the structure of Orientalism is nothing more than a structure of lies or of myths which, were the truth about them to be told, would simply blow away" (Said 133). Far from "blowing away," this phenomenon of orientalism has given birth to a battery of stereotypes about the East that, divorced from reality, still continue to inform our biases. This body of generalizations--orientalism--became the sole means of making sense of the East. As Said puts it, the orientalizing efforts of the colonizing era have created

a body of ideas, beliefs, clichés or learning about the East, and other schools of thought at large in the culture. Now one of the important developments in nineteenth-century, Orientalism was the distillation of essential ideas about the Orient--its

sensuality, its tendency to despotism, its aberrant mentality, its habits of inaccuracy, its backwardness—into a separate and unchallenged coherence. (Said 143-44)

Anindo Roy, a critic of Mukherjee's works, asserts that she subconsciously subscribes to orientalism and thus, in spite of her generally good intentions of setting Indians apart from Americans, only succeeds in perpetuating the oriental stereotype. Too many of her observations are laced with the Western perspective, with "orientalism." He finds evidence in Mukherjee's Days and Nights in Calcutta:

A Hindu writer who believes that God can be a jolly, potbellied creature with an elephant trunk, and who accepts the Hindu elastic time scheme and reincarnation, must necessarily conceive of heroes, of plot and pacing and even paragraphing in ways distinct from those of the average American. [Days and Nights 286]. (Roy 128-29)

Roy contends that anyone who can describe Ganeshji as a "jolly, pot bellied creature" and the Indian sense of time as "elastic" is clearly voicing Western thought. Here, Hindu gods once again become silly and amusing, and Indians once again imprecise and inexact. And worst of all, this time it happens through the eyes of an Indian.

But perhaps even more than to such minor incidents, Roy objects to the entire construct of the immigrant "epic" experience as it relates to Indian immigrants in part, again, because it promotes "orientalism." This "epic" celebrates the immigrants' escape from an oppressive environment and their adaptation of the new home and culture, and ultimately, a new identity. He

writes, "This experience is made possible as fictive construct by circumventing and suppressing the historical exigencies of Third World immigration" (128). He argues that the post-colonial, immigrant myth succumbs to the same weakness as the colonial one: Both hide behind gross generalizations and simplifications of historical truths, and, once committed to this system of beliefs, must continue to uphold them. Roy notes that Mukherjee tries to form an ideological alliance with the European immigrant who entered generations ago through Ellis Island. He argues, however, that it is an uneasy friendship. Their circumstances are simply too different. While the European's cultural heritage is greatly admired, even revered, the other must defend his from historic prejudices of inferiority and weakness. In Mukherjee's vision, Indians, like any immigrants coming to the United States, adopt a new nation, adapt to a new culture, and assume a new persona. They are reborn. Thus, while the immigrants' origin changes from time to time, the great American vision perseveres. But Roy insists that in lumping Indians together with European immigrants, Mukherjee not only overlooks the actual circumstances of an Indian's life and thus fails to speak for real Indians, but in the process, reinforces the West's "orientalized" image of India. "Mukherjee fails to question how this freedom to reinvent oneself stems from her own, urban, English-educated, upper-class, postcolonial background," Roy asserts (131).

Through this scathing critique, Roy fails to point out the particulars in Mukherjee's works that misrepresent the experience of the common Indian. Nor does he say why an upper-class person is more likely to have the freedom to reinvent herself. (After all, at least this immigrant, a child of two teachers from India, feels completely transformed by the experience of relocating. Though not entirely conscious, the transformation process was no less dramatic, as the new society offered me, even in early adolescence, new rules of caste and social structure.) What he does offer, instead, is vague discomfort in uniting with Europeans in this venture. Somehow, it seems to him a betrayal of the cherished Indian past.

One critic who does offer some specifics is Gurleen Grewal. She maintains that Mukherjee's white washing of the Indian experience shows in her lack of acknowledgment of the immigrants' social class. While Mukherjee imagines that *all* immigrants partake of the same opportunities, Grewal thinks the offerings are graduated, based largely on the immigrant's socio-economic status and education. Mukherjee projects her own privileges of wealth and education on to every immigrant, she thinks, revealing an inexcusable naiveté. Grewal calls this "the violent disjuncture at the heart of the novel:"

the (il)logic by which the identity of Jyoti, a peasant woman who has only just made the transition to an Indian city, yields--without the benefit of the requisite elite education--to the identity of the narrator, Jane Ripplemeyer, a middle-class American woman consorting with a white banker. To the extent

that the novel does not consider this an anomaly, it is complicitous with the myth of the American Dream: It suppresses the issue of class. (183)

No common village woman who has not had Mukherjee's privileged upbringing could so easily float from one culture to the next, Grewal argues. Grewal calls this "suppress[ion] of the issue of class" disingenuous because, she says, in reality the immigrants' social class has great impact on how they adapt to the new culture, and on what they bring to it. Ultimately, she finds that Mukherjee, in trying so hard to comply with America's vision of an immigrant nation, completely misrepresents the actual, various immigration experiences. When Mukherjee starts out by so blindly buying into the American mythos, it is inevitable that she would thus orientalize India, Roy argues. In order for the immigration story to work, in order for Mukherjee's voice even to be heard among the American literati with whom she really identifies herself, India must get orientalized. Roy asserts that "the politics of Mukherjee's aesthetics of immigration are evident in [her] selected representations; they are clearly deployed to highlight Jasmine's difference so that she can be constructed as the perfect agent of immigration" (134).

Roy's cry of disapproval has a chorus of agreement behind it. Critics have often said that Mukherjee exoticizes India just enough to appeal to an American audience without subjecting them to any discomfort. And indeed, there is evidence aplenty—especially in her early novels—to justify their complaints. Mukherjee tends to paint incredibly vivid pictures with the

intent to achieve a single effect. At times, as in the following excerpt, that effect comes at the cost of a mimetically accurate representation:

Howrah Station took Tara by surprise. . . . Coolies in red shirts broke into the compartment and almost knocked her down in an effort to carry her suitcase. The attendant sneezed on her raincoat and offered to wipe up the mess with his dusting rag. A blind beggar who had slipped in and had begun to sing and rattle his cup was thrown bodily out of the train. . . (The Tiger's Daughter 33)

As in this passage, beggars and fortune tellers do tend to make regular appearances in Mukherjee's works. Jasmine's opening sentence, in fact, reeks of orientalism: "Lifetimes ago, under a banyan tree in the village of Hasnapur, an astrologer cupped his ears--his satellite dish to the stars--and foretold my widowhood and exile" (1).

But ironically, all the while that Mukherjee gets the blame for orientalizing, she seems perfectly aware of this phenomenon of orientalism. Her characters understand the discrepancy between the world's perception of the East and the actual East. Time and again, we see this understanding filtering through Jasmine's observations and behavior. Jasmine knows, for instance, that she has little in common with the New Age devotees who try to share with her their admiration of Eastern mysticism. Instead of the real India, they are fascinated with their *imagination* of things Indian. When Mary Webb, a woman who claims to have out-of-body experiences on a regular basis and to have been reincarnated from an Australian aborigine, tries to find in her a fellow mystic, Jasmine recognizes undiluted orientalism.

At one point, Mary asks her if she believes in reincarnation. Yes, she too believes in reincarnation, Jasmine thinks in response to the New Ager, but a reincarnation in the form of the many lives she has lived. Unlike Mary Webb, Jasmine knows that over centuries and across continents, traditional concepts have to be re-defined and re-interpreted. Here she elucidates her updated, more relevant form of reincarnation:

Jyoti of Hasnapur was not Jasmine, Duff's day mummy and Taylor and Wylie's *au pair* in Manhattan; *that* Jasmine isn't *this* Jane Ripplemeyer having lunch with Mary Webb at the University Club today. And which of us is the undetected murderer of a half-faced monster, which of us has held a dying husband, which of us was raped and raped and raped in boats and cars and motel rooms? (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 114)

And this is not the only instance of orientalism being laid bare. Just as much as Mary Webb stereotypes the Orient, thinking all who are born of it must be enlightened sadhus, Mukherjee shows that Bud loves Jasmine for what she represents: exoticism. "Bud courts me because I am alien. I am darkness, mystery, inscrutability. The East plugs me into instant vitality and wisdom" (*Jasmine* 178). Jasmine recognizes this, and ever so shrewdly, capitalizes on it. For dinner, she serves up roast pork with curried potatoes--just enough exoticism to appeal to the midwestern palate. She actually uses orientalism to her advantage. There seem to be few better ways to undermine its effect.

These images, however, have done little to undo the damage done by beggars and fortune tellers. Many critics have also taken great offense at Mukherjee's portrayal of India. As we saw in the previous chapter, she paints

Calcutta in incredibly dark hues. Mired in filth, Mukherjee's city pulsates with violence and corruption. Riots form the backdrop to The Tiger's Daughter. Once again, the critics say, Mukherjee reinforces the West's patriarchal attitude towards the East. As the West always suspected, Mukherjee's India, the cumbersome, impoverished nation, cannot manage its own politics. It must need intervention from without. Grewal suggests that this patriarchy is extended to the people of India as well. She notes that Mukherjee depicts even rugged village women as weak, defenseless creatures who must be protected from natural elements. And she suggests that for those who are strong enough to leave the dark and static India, Mukherjee's West provides freedom and sanctuary. Here, finally, they can be liberated from third world traditions and poverty. Once in the United States, Jasmine sheds her village mentality, burns her husband's clothes in a trash can (instead of sacrificing herself as "sati") and almost overnight, metamorphosizes into an American. Like Roy, Grewal argues that in trying so hard to realize the American dream, Mukherjee does exactly what the colonizers had done: whitewash over the Indian experience, stereotype them ruthlessly, and thus, do great injustice to the Indian image.

Of course, the reading public loves a starry-eyed immigrant who is "a believer in the American dream," Roy asserts (133). But in providing so obediently, he argues, Mukherjee becomes a vehicle for their patriarchy.

Then he takes this line of argument still further:

In view of these possibilities, one can assert that the novel Jasmine is not the work of a single author, but is the product of what Foucault refers to as the "author function" (Language 124-26). This function is made possible by the collusion of the institutionized forces of postcoloniality and the West, and the immigrant author, who with her portable imagination can easily suppress her own authorizing position and fabricate the new immigrant's epic of freedom. (133)

Roy implies that Mukherjee completely de-individualizes herself, becoming, really, a mouthpiece for the INS. Instead of Mukherjee, an individual author, or, as Foucault would say, a "unified consciousness," the voice in the novel represents "several, socially determined roles, or 'author functions'" (263). Mukherjee's words reflect a number of forces acting upon her: among them, the hegemonic ideas about post-colonialism, the immigrant culture of the United States, even the residual philosophies of colonialism. Her works reflect not what Mukherjee thinks, but rather, what her times think. Roy tries to use Foucault's theory to argue that Jasmine is merely a reflection of the *stereotypical* immigration experience, and that Mukherjee fails to stand alone, away from the run-of-the-mill American biases. She adapts Orientalism, makes it her own.

We should remember, though, that Foucault has something much larger in mind than Roy assumes. Foucault poses a whole new set of questions for analyzing the persona of the "author":

How, under what conditions, and in what form can something like a subject appear in the order of discourse? What place can it

occupy in each type of discourse, what functions can it assume, and by obeying what rules? In short, it is a matter of depriving the subject (or its substitute) of its role as originator, and of analyzing the subject as a variable and complex function. (274)

And indeed, Foucault defines authorship in almost Marxist terms:

We are accustomed . . . to saying that the author is the genial creator of a work in which he deposits, with infinite wealth and generosity, an inexhaustible world of significations. We are used to thinking that the author is so different from all other men, and so transcendent with regard to all languages that as soon as he speaks, meaning begins to proliferate, to proliferate indefinitely.

The Truth is quite the contrary. . . . One can say that the author is an ideological product. . . . (274)

Foucault demotes authors to the position of "products," mere "objects." By the forces around them, they are being *created* as much as they are *creating* their characters. He shifts the focus from author being the creator of all signifiers, to his or her conditions being the author's creators. One might say, the creator's creator. In the world of fiction, the environment, not the author would be prime mover. Foucault would say that Mukherjee does not produce wholly independent ideas--no one does, he would argue. Rather, she serves as a vehicle for the ideas of her times. For Foucault, the question would be, not "What kind of person created these fictional works," but rather, "What kind of times and situations created this author?" Foucault would argue that yes, Mukherjee has internalized some Orientalism, but he would continue that she has also internalized her experience of living in India, of immigrating, and of adapting to the United States. Hers is a blend of all these

different perspectives, all these different lives. When she thinks of arranged marriage, for instance, she cannot possibly think of it in a way unbiased by Western thought. Her views on Indian issues are far more complex and multi-layered than the critics would have it. In Wife, for example, note the depiction of arranged marriages as elaborate business deals. In this passage, the Dasguptas, Dimple's father and mother, wheel and deal with Mrs. Basu's, the would-be's mother, and Mrs. Ghose, his sister:

Mr. Dasgupta took a month's leave from work to complete the negotiations and pull off the wedding. There were two early hitches: Mrs. Basu objected to the name Dimple, which she considered too frivolous and unBengali, and the candidate's sister, Mrs. Ghose, felt that Dimple was a little darker than the photograph had suggested. With the Basus, Mr. Dasgupta flattered and pleaded, smiling at Dimple and saying, "She is so sweet and docile, I tell you. She will never give a moment's headache." At home, he advised his wife to try more whitening creams and homemade bleaching pastes. After two weeks, Mrs. Basu and Mrs. Ghose conceded it was a satisfactory match. (15)

In another instance, the consummation of an arranged marriage becomes rape:

And after a fire has been lit, and the gods appealed to, and the bridal couples' clothes joined in a knot amidst applause from witnesses, when the guests have been fed, and the servants tipped and scolded, when the children have fallen asleep in their party dresses, then the groom takes his bride, a total stranger, and rapes her on a brand new, flower-decked bed. (The Tiger's Daughter 150)

Clearly, Mukherjee writes under the shadow of the West's take on arranged marriages. Upon the original, Indian meaning of "marriage" (which was assumed to be arranged--neither good nor bad, just arranged, the only type

possible) she has piled centuries of Eastern-Western discourse as well as her own experiences with it. Through her experiences, she has lost both the "purely Indian" (the existence of which is dubious in itself) and the "purely American." She has become a hybrid. She could be a spokesperson for the Indian farmer only as much as she could be one for the Iowan. Since Mukherjee is not herself the object of any sole culture, she cannot objectify any culture solely. This is what the critics fault.

While it is understandable that Indian blood can boil at such writing, asking an author to return to a previous mind-set, or a previous "life," as Mukherjee would call it, is futile. Just as words accumulate meaning after meaning and thus become carriers of their own history, so it is with traditions. Each "life" that the author leads, adds layer upon permanent layer of perspective and interpretation. Thus, its significance is forever transformed. In an essay addressing this issue, Gyan Prakash has wondered if the concept of Sati—the practice of burning the widow on her husband's funeral pyre—can ever be excavated wholly to its original meaning:

The accumulated sources on sati—whether or not the burning of widows was sanctioned by Hindu codes, did women go willingly or not to the funeral pyre, on what grounds could the immolation of women be abolished—come to us marked by early nineteenth-century colonial and indigenous-patriarchal discourses. And just as the early nineteenth-century encounter between colonial and indigenous elites and textual sources was resonant with colonial-patriarchal voices, the historian's confrontation today with sources on sati cannot escape the echo of that previous rendezvous. In repeating that encounter, how does the historian today not replicate the early nineteenth-century

staging of sati as a contest between tradition and modernity, between the slavery of women and efforts towards their emancipation, between barbaric Hindu practices and the British civilizing mission? (Prakash 110)

Similarly, how can Mukherjee allude to arranged marriages *independently* of the repression-independence dichotomy? To condemn arranged marriages, as she does in her works, is apparently to utter the Western view. And to defend the practice would also be to respond to the dialogue initiated by the colonizers. To engage in the dialogue in any way at all, in fact, would be to concede the obvious: that she cannot escape the very atmosphere she lives in and has been brought up on. It would be to admit influence of colonialism and of the West.

At first glance, it seems that Markandaya, with her unassuming treatment of such issues, escapes this Catch 22. In Nectar in a Sieve, for instance, Rukhmani finds as much love in her arranged marriage as one could hope to find in any relationship. In fact, at times, this marriage remains the only source of stability in her life. When she looks back at her early marriage, we hear some of the negotiations associated with arranged marriages, but none of the emotional scarring:

[My parents] . . . married me to a tenant farmer who was poor in everything but in love and care for me, his wife, whom he took at the age of twelve. Our relatives, I know, murmured that the match was below me; my mother herself was not happy, but I was without beauty and without dowry and it was the best she could do. "A poor match," they said, and not always quietly. How little they knew, any of them!" (8)

As a newly married woman, she rejoices over her good fortune:

While the sun shines on you and the fields are green and beautiful to the eye, and your husband sees beauty in you which no one has seen before, and you have a good store of grain laid away for hard times, a roof over you and a sweet stirring in your body, what more can a woman ask for? (12)

But even Markandaya, a devotee of things Indian, succumbs to the established paradigm. She provides prime evidence for Edward Said's argument that the concept of the Orient is laden with presumptions of backwardness. The subsistence farmers she portrays in Nectar in a Sieve are xenophobic, superstitious, and fatalistic. They live at the mercy of the rains, the crops, and herbal medicine. Into this setting comes Kenny, the American doctor who rages against the stubborn traditions, and what he sees as the natives' "passivity." Here, as he tries to convince Rukhmani to take an aggressive stand against poverty, the contrast between their old mentality and his aggressive, self-empowering one is stark:

"Times are better, times are better," he shouts. "Times will not be better for many months. Meanwhile, you will suffer and die, you meek suffering fools. Why do you keep this ghastly silence? Why do you not demand—cry out for help—do something? There is nothing in this country, oh god, there is nothing!" (Nectar in a Sieve 48)

Rukhmani, on the other hand, seems to foresee only defeat in taking arms against nature, and thus, declines the fight:

People will never learn! Kenny had said it, and I had not understood. Now here were my own sons saying the same thing, and still I did not understand. What was it we had to learn? To fight against tremendous odds? What was the use?

One only lost the little one had. Of what use to fight when the conclusion is known? I asked myself, and got no answer. I went to my husband and he was perplexed twice over. (Nectar in a Sieve 69-70)

Despite such orientalism in her works, Markandaya is rarely faulted for being unfair to Indians. Just as one does with Mukherjee, one could easily argue, for example, that by making these stereotypical portrayals of Indians, Markandaya is perpetuating the Oriental myth. One could say that India still struggles to free herself of the notions of backwardness and passivity that she presents in Nectar. But Markandaya encounters none of these criticisms. In fact, she is usually *praised*. Just by creating a sympathetic and dignified Indian character, she is breaking the English/Imperial tradition, argues Yasmine Gooneratne in her critique. Gooneratne concedes that Markandaya misrepresents certain details of the village life, citing as example Markandaya's implication that the farmers actually had balanced diets, but she still maintains that Markandaya does what many an author before her had failed to do: present the native Indian life in a complex, sensitive portrayal that attempts to "set the record straight, at establishing a truer perspective than had so far existed, on the nature of the Indian character and society" (Gooneratne 123).

Ultimately, all criticism, whether negative or positive, seems to converge at the point that Gooneratne uses as the implicit premise of her argument: the value of a work, at least from the post-colonial perspective,

lies solely in an author's success at representing the people who think she speaks for them. When Mukherjee is lambasted, it is because she fails to make a balanced representation. Either she orientalizes or she demonizes, or she does both. When Markandaya is praised, it is because she shows India "as it truly is." (After considering the damage that colonialism has done to the image and psyche of the colonist, Kamala Markandaya herself called for a "clean-out of the entire clutter of distorted and distorting imagery with which we have lumbered ourselves." This cleanout, she said, "will come most fruitfully . . . from the literature of concern" [Shimer 358].) Clearly, even some authors are convinced that literature ought to serve a utilitarian purpose. For post-colonial literature, the purpose is to clean out the clutter, as Markandaya says, and see for oneself, and show to others, one's true self.

The problem with this attitude, as we saw earlier, is multilayered. After having lived so many lives, after having been born in one world and then uprooted to live in another, which "self" does one recreate? The village self or the city self? The superstitious self or the scientific self? Can the two even be untangled? In her essay, "Toward an Investigation of the Subaltern," Alpana Sharma Knippling argues that Mukherjee fails to do precisely that. In a way, she presents both sides at the same time. Knippling asserts that Mukherjee projects her own, privileged position of influence, power, and wealth upon her marginalized, subaltern subjects. Much like Roy and Grewal, she maintains that a poor person like Jasmine, who has had minimal

contact with the world outside Punjab, would not be able to assimilate so naturally, and come out unscathed from the atrocities of her initial experiences in the United States. Knippling argues that under the guise of representing the subaltern, Mukherjee really only represents her own, privileged self. "As a Punjabi member of the Indian peasantry, Jasmine is positioned as subaltern," she writes, "but her subalternity is lost when she becomes a self-willing subject of the West" (Knippling 150).

To sum up: Mukherjee is a product of British imperialism (herself the West's Other). It is in this already Western context that we can discern her problematic making the Other accessible to representation by turning the Other into a Self. In the process of doing so, she disguises...her own particular position of privilege instead of accounting for it and systematically exploiting it. (Knippling 148)

There is certainly some merit to Knippling's complaint that Mukherjee homogenizes the immigrant experience. It is also true that the immigration for an upper-class Calcuttan will be different from that for a Punjabi villager. After all, the Calcuttan will be familiar already with some of the western/modern things the new country has to offer. Presumably, she'll have lived in the fast lane, used the modern amenities, known the disconnectedness of big cities. If from a wealthy family, she will have attended better schools, learned foreign languages, and seen the culture of the upper crust. For her, the transition from the native culture to the host will be, presumably, easier. But the difference is only in degrees, not in kind. Ultimately, all immigrants, everyone on the edges of mainstream society, face

discrimination and endure a sense of loss and homelessness. Everyone who finds him/herself at the intersection of two cultures must deal with this transition. Asians immigrating to the United States; country folks going to the city; even Californians moving to New York—all must recreate their worlds. All must redefine their culture.

When Knippling, and to a degree, Roy and Grewal, argue that Mukherjee fails to represent the real subaltern, it is reasonable to suspect that their definition of "subaltern" may be a bit too limiting. In its own way, it may stereotype its subjects as much as "orientalism" does. Knippling claims that for her, "subaltern" has two meanings:

the first derives from Gramsci, who calls the "masses" the subaltern classes and who opposes those to the dominant, hegemonic class in society; the second . . . means also an enormous, heterogeneous range of rural groups, including even "the lowest strata of the rural gentry, impoverished landlords, rich peasants, and upper middle peasants." (Knippling 149)

This definition of the subaltern neglects a pertinent aspect of center/periphery discussion—fluidity. There is constant movement from periphery to center, and from center to periphery. At one time on the very fringes of society, entire groups and cultures work their ways toward the center, ultimately to alienate other groups as they had once been alienated. Given the right conditions, cultural phenomena that once seemed alien can at the next moment seem perfectly familiar. European immigrants, such as Germans and Italians, once as scrutinized for their "foreign ways" as Asian

communities are today, are now perceived as the builders of America. On a more frivolous note, salsa, once an "ethnic" food item, now outsells the all-American ketchup (which itself is originally a Malay word). Similarly, borders of cities--especially growing cities--eventually merge into the expanding metropolis, pushing the borders out. This pattern of movement does not escape Mukherjee. She describes Calcutta as a great leviathan that swallows all who come close enough--and then waits for more:

There is, of course, no escape from Calcutta. Even an angel concedes that when pressed. Family after family moves from the provinces to its brutish center, and the center quivers a little, absorbs the bodies, digests them, and waits. (The Tiger's Daughter 4)

One can argue that the movement of all centers and peripheries works in the same way. All peripheries are in some stage of assimilation. All city borders will eventually be absorbed into the big city. Similarly, all immigrants are in some stage of integration. As Mukherjee writes in The Tiger's Daughter, one does not know when the foreign spirit sneaks in on one. Feeling uncomfortable and out-of-place among her friends after just a few years abroad, the Tiger's daughter also wonders when and how she became a stranger to her own childhood:

How does the foreignness of the spirit begin, Tara wondered. Does it begin right in the center of Calcutta, with forty ruddy Belgian women, fat foreheads swelling under starched white headaddresses, long black habits intensifying the hostility of the Indian sun? . . .

Did the foreignness drift inward with the winter chill at Vassar, as she watched the New York snow settle over new

architecture, blond girls, Protestant matrons, and Johnny Mathis? Or was it not till Madison that she first suspected the faltering of the heart? (The Tiger's Daughter 45-6)

Later, she realizes, that "there was to be no major drama, no sensational excitement No big crisis that she could later point to and say: that was when I became a totally different person" (The Tiger's Daughter 142). And this is true for all things and all people, not just immigrants. Modernization infiltrates Indian villages one city-person at a time. City folk drink in the spirit one latté at a time. They continue to modernize, while our memories of them remain stagnant. Or worse, the places of the past mutate in our memories—into idyllic, never never lands, which resemble neither the modern nor the past. Homi. K. Bhabha calls this idealism "the fatality of thinking of 'local' cultures as uncontaminated or self-contained" (Bhabha 167). Instead of being pristine and unadulterated, they are, as Mukherjee's and Markandaya's novels show, in constant state of flux. They are *always* being adulterated.

Immigration accelerates this process of change. Bhabha writes, "The people have taken with them only a part of the total culture. . . . The culture which develops on the new soil must therefore be bafflingly alike and different from the parent culture" (167). These authors write about this new culture, from their new perspective. Their views can be held to be neither Indian, nor British or American. They represent, if anything, the internal dialogue in which the individual author engages, about the duality of the

lives she has known. Bhabha quotes Mikhail Bakhtin:

The . . . hybrid is not only double-voiced and double-accented . . . but is also double-languaged; for in it there are not only (and not even so much) two individual consciousnesses, two voices, two accents, as there are [doublings of] socio-linguistic consciousnesses, two epochs . . . that come together and consciously fight it out on the territory of the utterance . . . It is the collision between differing points of view on the world that are embedded in these forms . . . such unconscious hybrids have been at the same time profoundly productive historically: they are pregnant with potential for new world views, with "internal forms" for perceiving the world in words. (qtd. in Bhabha 212)

Instead of bemoaning an untraditional viewpoint, Bakhtin celebrates the envisioning of new worlds. He sees these worlds in not only the writers' views, but also in their words—as we will discuss in the next chapter. He provides the post-colonial reader with a new way to view and appreciate this outlook. His is a vision where there is a place for tiger/lion, White/Black, pauper/landlord hybrids. There is also a place for Indian/Americans.

Chapter 3

Between Belonging and Uprooting: the Postcolonial Play with Language

"The . . . hybrid is not only double-voice and double-accented," writes Mikhail Bakhtin, "but also double languaged" (qtd. in Bhabha 212). Bakhtin's "hybrids" include writers like Mukherjee, Markandaya, and their characters like Rukhmani, Jasmine and Dimple, the protagonist of Wife. Each is a product of two cultures. In them two languages, accompanied by two worlds and two consciousnesses, collide and evolve into something unique. In this case, neither Hindi nor English remains the familiar tongue. As we see in the novels of Markandaya and Mukherjee, both languages acquire new words, new expressions, and with them, entirely new ideas. Iowans get a taste of curried potatoes; village women in India encounter western clothing; America meets Bombay actors. And everyone's world expands. But we need not consult literature merely to witness this phenomenon. We can see it in our streets. Cultures collide in our neighborhoods and our vocabulary shifts its boundary. Words like "Ginseng," "ninja," "raj," and "guru" slip in from non-Western languages into Western, and we barely notice their arrival, because for most of us, the change occurs one word at a time. For those in the business of using words for their potency, however, few mergers could be more powerful. Every word can bring with it a history, a philosophy. With

adequate strength in number, this infiltration can transform the mass psyche. But there is irony in its dual play. Much as these words serve as tools for authors in the construction of powerful images and ideas, they also betray a great deal about those authors. They reveal their relations with the language, and thus, the culture it encodes. Not surprisingly, the authors' language, to a large extent, also reflects their own response to the integration experience, as well as their place in this process.

For any writer—be it a newspaper journalist or a cookbook author—the choice of language and terminology is crucial. The journalist knows that as a writer for the lay person, she should minimize technical verbiage from any field. The cookbook author tries to use local names for food items. Her readers may know exactly what to add when the recipe calls for “turmeric,” but be at a complete loss when they encounter “haldi,” the Hindi equivalent. Even for these genres, where the motives are single-fold and where generally, the interpretive efforts kept at a minimum, choosing words can be torturous. Can the journalist really do justice to complex issues with deliberately simple terminology? Can the cookbook author really create the ambiance of an Indian, Vietnamese, or an Italian kitchen without using the native names of the ingredients? “Small, tubular pasta” sounds positively clinical compared to “penne.” And one cannot even begin to translate “masala” without first giving a paragraph-long explanation, which itself introduces “untranslatables.”

For fiction writers, these problems are complicated several times over. Not only must they meet the challenges all other authors face, but instead of recipes, they must translate emotional responses to events and social phenomena. They hope to capture the fine nuances of feeling whose expression, even in the native tongue, presents a colossal challenge. For postcolonial authors, that work is further laden with social, political, and anthropological concerns. By choosing English as her medium, is Markandaya essentially precluding the true depiction of the Indian experience? After all, she will encounter far more Hindi in this attempt than will the author of a curry cookbook. Her characters will walk down Indian streets in Indian villages; they will sing in Hindi; they will curse their neighbor in dialect. Every aspect of their lives, in fact, would seem more conducive to description in the native tongue. Specifically, for example, the image engendered by "hut" may be considerably different from a "jhompadi," the huts that sprinkle the Indian countryside. A public water fountain may evoke completely different connotations than does "nalakaa;" and a "cow" may elicit different emotions than does "gai." The latter, especially, brings with it such a long and complex history of associations, that it stands little chance of being carried through in any explanation. ("Gai-mata" sounds—at least to an Indian—reverential, whereas "mother-cow" simply sounds comical. While the Hindi version assumes the sanctity of the cow, "holy cow," alas, conveys none of that faith.) As if anticipating this very example,

Bakhtin writes, "Another's sacred word, uttered in a foreign language, is degraded by the accents of vulgar folk languages, re-evaluated and reinterpreted against the backdrop of these languages, and congeals to the point where it becomes a ridiculous image" (298).

Bakhtin well summarizes the complications of the postcolonial writer's task. The audience of these writers expect to be represented--and that, too, honestly, sincerely, without mockery or disfigurement. They expect the authors to speak on their behalf, to say anew what has been mis-said or misunderstood. That, some would presume, would be done best in the same language that defined the original experience. Bakhtin argues,

One who creates a direct word--whether epic, tragic or lyric--deals only with the subject whose praises he sings, or represents, or expresses, and he does so in his own language that is perceived as the sole and fully adequate tool for realizing the word's direct, objectivized meaning. This meaning and the objects and themes that compose it are inseparable from the straightforward language of the person who creates it: the objects and themes are born and grow to maturity in this language, and in the national myth and national tradition that permeate this language. (295)

The person, the experience, and its expression conjoin and become, as it were, a single entity. To change any of these elements is to change the very nature of that entity. Bakhtin clearly recognizes the untranslatable aspect of languages. In the same essay, however, Bakhtin argues that to really know a language, one must know another, and thus view it from a separate vantage point. Only then can one appreciate the uniqueness of any expression, the untranslatableness of language. Only the multi-lingual speaker can truly

understand the relation of the word to the culture it inhabits. For immigrant writers and their readers, this comes as no revelation. In immigrant homes, parents grow frustrated when their American children fail to understand the cultural nuances of their expression. Equally common, they take offense at seemingly innocuous statements because they brought with them, unforeseen, hurtful connotations. One realizes, then, that few words provide exact translation from one language to another; like a poor heat-conducting metal, most manage to lose the essential goods in transit. English, for instance, lacks a distinction between a formal and a familiar "you," while Hindi relies on such distinctions to convey myriad relations. One would never dream of addressing one's dog and one's teacher by the same, lowly "tu," but children often call their mothers "tu," as the mother-child bond is considered too close for formalities. In fact, God ("Bhagwan") itself gets the "tu." Thus, the same "tu" that is, on the one hand, reserved for younger or inferior relations, can, on the other, denote a higher, more intimate, one. The nondescript, all-purpose "you" of English denotes neither the intimacy of "tu," nor the respect of "aap" ("usted" in Spanish). One of the most oft-used Hindi words, "aap," remains untranslated in English. It is understandable, then, that my own parents stood aghast one day, when, completely unaware, I called them "you guys." How coldly she treats us, they cried, as if we were strangers, or worse, intruders in her life.

For Markandaya and Mukherjee, the challenge is to use English without making a stranger, an "other," of India and things Indian. This, in fact, is one of the assumed ideals of any literature: to remove the "otherness" from its subject, to let us into its home, to let us become intimate with it. For postcolonial writers, the ideal is to speak to the other--in the other's language--while still asserting their own character. But how do they distinguish themselves in a foreign medium, in another's language? To an extent, that depends on the author's own relation to the new language. If they are old acquaintances with it, and feel a sense of ownership over it, they allow themselves much more freedom in dealing with it. They play with it. They create *it* as they create *with* it. If, on the other hand, they still feel a need to secure their place in the English-speaking world, they tend to handle it much more cautiously and formally. Markandaya belongs to this latter group. As we will see, she gives English the white glove treatment, compared to Mukherjee's bold, commanding attitude. Markandaya seems to treat the language as if she were borrowing it--she makes good, sensible use of it while she holds it, but returns it unmarred, intact. She leaves it unchanged. In the balancing act between ensuring belonging and ensuring self-identity, she errs toward the former.

In Markandaya's works, in fact, can be found some illustrious examples of the Queen's English. From the beginning, she makes little effort to conceal her primary influences: the British Romantics. As noted above, she even

begins Nectar in a Sieve with a quote from Coleridge, "Work without hope draws nectar in a sieve / And hope without an object cannot live." Although it is a relevant quotation, for a novel about subsistence farmers in the tropics of India, Markandaya might have evoked a more local talent. Instead, British Romantic permeates the novel. In the following passage, Rukhmani's memories of gardening seem to bring with them the perspective of someone new to this work:

Now that I did not work in the fields I spent most of my time tending my small garden: the beans, the brinjals, the chilies and the pumpkin vine which had been the first to grow under my hand. And their growth to me was constant wonder—from the time the seed split and the first green shoots broke through, to the time when the young buds and fruit began to form. I was young and fanciful then and it seemed to me not that they grew as I did, unconsciously, but that each of the dry, hard pellets I held in my palm had within it the very secret of life itself...With each tender seedling that unfurled its small green leaf to my eager gaze, my excitement would rise and mount; winged, wondrous. (Nectar in a Sieve 17)

The winged wonderment of nature, the fancy of childhood—all hint at garden-variety romanticism. Wordsworth himself might have envisioned this imaginative child who peers into the nature of the seeds. The seedlings and the child are united in the dual perspective of this passage. As a growing child, Rukhmani revels in the growth of her plants. In the midst of describing the child's youthful awe at the buds unfurling, she betrays an adult wonderment of her own innocence ("... it seemed to me not that they grew as I did, unconsciously . . ."). They grow together, in the same nursery. The

young Rukhmani takes a romantic stance on the garden, and the adult takes the same view of the child in the garden. Knowing the influence of the British Romantics on Markandaya, however, one wonders about the authenticity of such a response.

A farmer who relies upon her green thumb for survival may react to budding plants the same way as an Englishman who happens upon them in excursion. But it is equally possible that she has an altogether different response. Perhaps, as a subsistence farmer, she would have no time for romantic introspections about the plants. Perhaps, as American children take color television and microwave ovens for granted, a young woman raised in a farming community would take the budding of plants for granted. After all, such unexpected associations do creep up even among things commonly considered to be archetypes. In the cold climes of the Western world, for example, where the sun pays a polite visit and does not overstay its welcome, it is associated with bright, happy things. Cheerful people have "sunny" personalities. Children and lovers are the "sunshine" of our lives. Not so in most of India. Here, where the sun beats down until the roads melt, and thousands die of heat-related illnesses, songs pray for escape from its cruelty. One popular song expresses a woman's wishes for her beloved (in translation): "wherever the sun may go, may sunshine never reach you." Thus, as does the sun, it is possible that gardens incite a different response among South Indian villagers than they do among the British literati. The

challenge for post-colonial authors is to refresh these symbols. They must force the reader to reassess their stock interpretation of these signs. These cultural differences in signs and meanings, then, not only require the writers to use the master's own vocabulary to subvert his hegemony, but also invite them to play in the intersecting line between the two meanings.

Bakhtin well summarizes the work that beckons the colonized writer:

[L]anguage, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!) but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own. (Bakhtin quoted in Gates 1)

Most writers recognize this phenomenon. Langston Hughes laces his poetry with the sounds of jazz and the blues, thus capturing the sentiments of the people through their music. The rhythms of jazz serve not only as a vehicle for distinguishing the African-American community from the majority, but also for undermining the majority's dictate over the direction of the language. These rhythms place his poetry in *his* context--and in the *African-American* context. They allow him to establish ownership over the language, and thus, give him the liberty to leave his mark on it. We can only alter the house we own, after all, not the one we rent.

The degree to which the authors thus alter the language—the degree to which they “populate it with their own intention”—is what marks the difference between Markandaya and Mukherjee. As a newcomer to the postcolonial mind-set, Markandaya has yet to forge the Indian identity into the culture of literature written in English. As we have seen, this is especially apparent in her first novel, Nectar in a Sieve. Draped in an Indian setting and peopled almost entirely with Indian people, the novel still manages to evoke the British romantics. Not that Markandaya adopts the British method wholesale. She does, in fact, incorporate Indian words and concepts in her works. But she does so almost timidly and self-consciously. Perhaps, much as it is for the first generation of immigrants, for writers of the diaspora, integration into the host culture is the highest priority. Before they can return to their own cultures, to hold tightly what threatens to slip away, immigrants focus on belonging to their new homes. Without first developing a strong understanding of, and acceptance from, the environment, one can hardly offer amendments to it. Knowing this, if only subconsciously at times, first generation immigrants and writers set out to prove themselves. “We, too, can play on this field,” they seem to say. “In fact, we can play as well as anyone born and bred on these grounds.”

The above tendency manifests itself, for instance, in characters that appear to be customizing their expression for the Western reader. In Nectar in a Sieve, Rukhmani bids good-bye to a friend in a most unlikely way: “May

you prosper too," she says, "May the Gods give you their blessing" (81). The reference to plural "Gods" betrays a divided consciousness. While the world sees the lineup of idols in an Indian temple and concludes that Hinduism is a polytheistic religion, Hindus know better. One of the strongest tenets of the Hindu philosophy is that ultimately there is only one God. All the other members of the pantheon are merely incarnations of the One. It would be safe to venture, in fact, that one is very unlikely to hear such an expression from an Indian. This passage reveals an effort to connect with the Western audience, an impulse to give them what they expect, even if at the risk of misrepresenting oneself. But as discussed earlier, these situations are not limited to literature. It is reminiscent of another, similar instance: In a "Miss Universe" contest some years ago, the hostess, a native of Thailand, greeted the audience with "Welcome to our exotic Thailand." If she spoke from a purely Thai perspective, she could not call her own homeland "exotic." Chances are slim that this place, in which she has been born and raised, would have seemed to her, "strikingly, excitingly, or mysteriously different or unusual" (Merriam Webster's Tenth Collegiate Dictionary). As does Rukhmani, the hostess of this show reveals an inclination to adapt the expression of her audience, for it clearly bridges the gap between the speaker and the listener. Perhaps neither foresees the accompanying sacrifice of personal perspective.

While "Nectar" conforms most obediently to the English ideal of language, even the later novels do little to stretch English expression. In her fourth novel, Possession, Markandaya again had the opportunity to infuse the language with accents of the native tongue. Some of the story takes place in rural India, where Valmiki, an illiterate shepherd, spends his days making traditional paintings on rocks on the hillside. His dabbling goes unnoticed and unappreciated until, one day, Caroline, a rich English patron discovers his art, finds it charmingly native, and decides to import it, along with the artist, to the United Kingdom. Thus, the novel follows the patron lady's efforts to market Valmiki, and Valmiki's efforts to integrate into the English culture without losing the last shreds of his dignity. The story presents, as is quite typical of Markandaya's works, a clear confrontation between two cultures. One place the reader would actually expect such local flavor, for example, is in the conversation of the boy's guru, an ancient swami who dwells in a remote cave. Instead, we find the old man speaking flawless English with confident, fluid, expression. Although Markandaya describes his speech as "slow, careful English," his actual words carry no trace of the awkwardness over which Mukherjee's characters trip. The swami's language maintains dramatic context of the setting—country living clearly informs his metaphors—but his grammar or syntax do not change. When Valmiki approaches him for advice on whether he should go with Caroline to England, the old man asks in return, "Go and ask a donkey. He is the only

one who can tell you that." When Valmiki responds that the donkey was silent on the matter, the guru suggests that he ask the wise bearded monkey. Upon exhausting all potential advisors, the old man finally says,

If you want to, then you must. Because if you did not you would have no peace yourself and you would take it from whomever you met, for the sound of chafing is like the croaking of bullfrogs, it has little charm. And once you have gone and looked and found in yourself the answer, then you will know whether to stay or return. (Possession 32-3)

As we will see, this bit of local character is far more subtle than the accents that muddle the speech of Mukherjee's characters. One wonders, then, why an author would choose not to capitalize on such an easy mode of textual color.

In this novel lie not only several missed chances to Indianize English, but also possible explanations of why Markandaya treats the language so conservatively. The first is an explanation that can apply to any master-servant language comparison. Why would the slave-owner's speech resemble that of the slave? Why would an Indian's speech contain echoes of his colonizer's accents? Because they spent their days (and sometimes nights!) with each other, and despite all efforts to lead separate lives, managed to infuse each other with their own languages. After all, the British provided Indians with their primary role-models for English. Many an educated Indian can ramble in perfect BBC English. Thus, to always expect "Indian

speak" from Indians reveals our own biases more than it does the real breadth of linguistic capabilities in India.

But another explanation for the swami's fluid English expression may lie in the political play so finely executed in this novel. In this thinly-veiled parable of imperialism, Valmiki stands for the abused, exploited colony that Markandaya sees as India. When he starts painting in England, his artwork fills galleries in London and the exhibits attract hordes of converts to this new curiosity, Asian art. Unfortunately, that is also what becomes of Valmiki: he becomes an object of amusement and curiosity. Worse, adoring him gives the hordes the illusion--and thus the intellectual satisfaction--of knowing and appreciating an inter-cultural figure. In fact, what they adore is a carefully constructed, adequately diluted, English-Asian figure. The English embrace Valmiki, but from the beginning, the caveat for that love is that first, he be made more tolerable, more English. That conversion starts with his name. Valmiki, the name he shares with the Indian poet who wrote the most authoritative and beloved rendition of the Ramayana, gets abridged to a tidy, manageable "Val." Thus, this Indian persona begins evolving into a more familiar--and, for the English, a more likable--European cousin. Once his accent has been polished from heathen to fashionably foreign, and clothes refined from hideously uncivilized to artistically Asian, "Val" becomes more marketable in the West. Markandaya has strong opinions on this, and when

a fiction writer's tools of plot development and scene settings fail her, she declares directly:

His English was good, the accent cultivated—Caroline clearly made him work at it. Most of the uncouthness was gone, and some of the honesty. Did it make him more acceptable? In this polished Western world, obviously yes. The East was too strident, too dissonant, too austere, too raw; it had to be muted, toned down, tarted up—its music larded with familiar rhythms, its literature wrenched into shapes recognized by Western tradition, its dances made palatable by an infusion of known idioms, its people taught to genuflect before understatement—before a measure of acceptance came. Undiluted East had always been too much for the West; and soulful East always came lapdog fashion to the West, mutely asking to be not too little and not too much, but just right. (*Possession* 116)

Upon this muted, white-washed canvas are painted hazy images of the Orient. Instead of the clothes in which he would have really wandered the Indian hillsides, Valmiki is garbed in clothes with a vaguely Indian feel:

His clothes seemed designed for floating—pants that ballooned prettily about his legs, gauzy white draperies only remotely related to anything worn in India, the ensemble highly reminiscent of ballet with an Oriental theme. (*Possession* 116)

Perhaps this is what Markandaya resists doing to her subjects, the Indian people. Perhaps she fears parading them around in an accent that would further peg them as objects of amusement. Language, after all, is the garb by which we are judged. Accents point to our neighborhoods and betray our histories; our vocabularies reveal our stations in life. In most parts of the world, the right inflections can be a huge asset to personal success. The intonations in our pronunciations can mean the difference between

belonging to a club and being jeered by it. Business people know this and flood evening classes to rid themselves of the “wrong” types of foreign accents (Silicon Valley TechWeek 4). Markandaya knows this, too, and apparently tries to protect her subjects from the known repercussions of having a strange mode of speech. If she saddles her characters with Indian accents, they will wear them as Valmiki wears his billowing pants--awkwardly, conspicuously--and be easily tagged as the foreign “other,” And “other” people, as we also see in The Nowhere Man, never attain true acceptance from their new country. Once they join the ranks of the exotic, the “mysteriously different or unusual,” they come one step closer to sealing their fate as pariahs. From there, the majority can forgive itself for not opening the club doors for these people. After all, they will never quite be one of us, as the neighborhood women reason in The Nowhere Man. Some members do embrace the strange creatures, but only after they find a way to package the foreign oddities into a manageable bundle.

In Possession, Valmiki’s raw ethnicity gets tidily cropped and packaged in the hands of a similar group. With his newly tailored accent and appearance, he becomes a mere token of ethnicity. Similarly, in the sixties, hippies thought they loved Indian culture, where, in fact, they merely loved their own, selective interpretation of it. In their communes, they reduced the complex, often contradictory Hindu philosophy to amusing rites and rituals: incense burning, meaningless chanting, pot-smoking, and for the talented,

sitar sessions. A real study of India, meanwhile, may befuddle, alienate, even disgust those professed lovers of Krishna. Markandaya loathes to reduce her characters to the same, convenient packages of stereotypes and amusing idiosyncrasies. In the post-colonial evolution, she is still at a stage where she tries to prove the Indian subjects respectable, intelligent human beings, rather than the caricatures formed from centuries of objectification. Thus, Markandaya's questions of identity are posed in a considerably different manner than those that Mukherjee asks. This difference stems, in part, from their separate places in the postcolonial continuum. Hena Ahmed writes:

Though Markandaya is technically a postcolonial writer, there is a marked difference in her diasporic sensibility from that found in some of the more recent writers. The reasons for this difference are related to the relatively recent emergence of the politics of a postcolonial identity. That she is a generation removed from many postcolonial writers now making history, like Salman Rushdie or Hanif Kureishi, is therefore significant. Markandaya's fictional concerns are different from those of these writers, in terms of their postcolonial consciousness. (Ahmed 112)

For Mukherjee, the immigrant experience has matured at least twenty five to thirty years since Markandaya's writing. She writes in an era in which a heightened awareness of cultural separation between groups has brought about a reassessment of national identity. She and her contemporaries, like Morrison and Charles Johnson, no longer focus only on asking "What is an Indian/African/Asian-American?" Instead, they ask the broader question, "What is an American?" The answer, they find, is constantly evolving.

American identity changes every day, as new waves of immigrants renew the mixture and alter the ratio of races within the United States. These newcomers bring with them their food, music, language, religion. But for a while, these imports remain confined to their closets. Their owners wear jeans and jackets in public, and only at home do they change into the familiar "salwar-kameez." The more confident adults take the smelly curries for lunch to work, but the children refuse, knowing that their mates in elementary and middle school will mock them. The first generation, especially its youngest contingent, tries its mightiest to integrate into the new culture. Often, that integration comes at the cost of their native language and tradition. Only after they achieve some understanding of and a sense of comfort with their host culture do they attempt to question it. Mukherjee and her contemporaries are at this further stage of reassessment. At this juncture, the immigrant populace, for so long apologetic for its conspicuous looks and habits, now becomes defensive of them. After all, they are only following the path carved out by the Irish, Italians and others who first re-defined "American." The Indian immigrants challenge the definition of "Americans" the same way the earlier immigrants did. Samir Dayal writes:

James Snead has suggested that hybridity is a challenge to notions of "universality." Similarly, Homi Bhabha, in a discussion of hybridity of colonial Indians as a form of resistance to colonial discourse, observes that "[w]hen they make . . . intercultural, hybrid demands, the natives are both challenging the boundaries of discourse and subtly changing its terms and

setting up another specifically colonial space of power/knowledge." (Dayal 77)

These authors' hybrid demands come in the form of a challenge to expand what are considered the hegemonic boundaries. It is their right--perhaps their duty--to continue that work of defining and redefining "traditional" America. That work includes within its parameters the language and expression of the people. Writers like Mukherjee not only record this change, but add energy to its momentum.

This confidence in hybridized language makes itself apparent in Mukherjee's novels. Here, her language serves as both the means and the end, the medium and the message of this two-way integration of the cultures. Unlike Markandaya, Mukherjee makes liberal use of Hindi words in her novels. For her, it seems as natural as Mark Twain using the Southern accent. In The Tiger's Daughter an Indian aunty expresses her horror at the prospect of her upper-class niece traveling in the same car as two men: "Not only are they men, but on top of that, they're non-Bengalis! *Arre baba!*" (author's italics, Mukherjee, The Tiger's Daughter 24) Indians who speak Hindi will recognize that expression (it is somewhat equivalent to "oh, God"), but Mukherjee writes in the United States, for an audience largely of non-Hindi speakers. So she sets out to teach them some Hindi. She sprinkles her books with Hindi words, many of which she could have translated into

English, but chooses not to:

They'd not even mention their kirtans or pujahs in their letters to her and David. . . . The paharis they sent us carried the two women. . . . Seeing a giant memsahib in their party, the coolies lingered in front of the stalls. . . (The Tiger's Daughter 204-5)

Of all these Hindi words, "memsahib" would have been the most difficult to replace, for it contains within it a peculiarly Indian perspective—the perspective that the Indians of lower class, coolies, for example, are assumed to hold on a variety of imposing, often professional, always well-to-do, Westernized women. This single word allows for a recognition of "otherness," an acknowledgment of class distinction, a slight reverence of, and sometimes amusement at the subject. Mukherjee would have struggled to find a more appropriate word for this situation. She also could have called the kirtans and pujahs, "prayers," or "worships," and paharis "mountain people," but she chooses, instead, the original Hindi version. Although these words are arguably not vital to the meaning of the passage, she still elects to preserve the Hindi context of "kirtan," "pujah," and "pahari." A closer look at the words reveals a far more important, indispensable context. A kirtan is, after all, a specific type of worship, where the faithful sit on the floor, outfit themselves with real and makeshift instruments, and sing familiar devotional songs for hours on end. "Pujah" evokes images of idols of deities and oil lamps and plates heaping with flowers and fruits. Mukherjee must have recognized that "worship," alone, captures none of that ritual. Nor does

"mountain man" necessarily suggest the exact culture and class distinction of a "pahari." It is understandable, then, that she saw it in the best interest of the meaning to use these Hindi words.

But Mukherjee does not stop with Hindi words. She parades before her hapless audience a galaxy of Bombay stars, apparently secure that whatever hint of Indian flavor the readers detect will suffice. Here, in The Tiger's Daughter, the narrator describes the scene near a Calcutta movie theater:

Above the squatting movie goers were giant posters of Hindi film stars Raj Kapoor and Waheeda Rehman. She slid out of her car and saw a very black man . . . throwing kisses at a gigantic picture of Saira Banu in a miniskirt. (The Tiger's Daughter 138).

Only a small fraction of her readers will recognize these references to "Raj Kapoor," or "Waheeda Rehman" or "Saira Banu," stars of the Indian silver screen twenty years ago. The prospect of alienating her readers, however, does not inhibit Mukherjee. Bhabha would say, again, that she is simply "challenging the boundaries of discourse and subtly changing its terms." Here, she parts company with Markandaya. Mukherjee is no longer in the wave of immigrants who try to assimilate by suppressing their own identities. No longer afraid of ostracism and philosophically justified in redefining "American," she charges forth with the contexts most suitable for her stories. Whereas Markandaya focuses more on integrating into the British-English

literary scene, Mukherjee recognizes the bi-directional movement of this integration and relies upon English to integrate the Hindi words.

This ownership over English manifests itself in ways beyond just Mukherjee's infusion of it with Hindi. It comes across in Mukherjee's light-hearted playfulness with the entire integration process. Rather than holding her cards to her chest, as Markandaya does, Mukherjee makes castles out of them. She has fun with them. She thinks out loud as her characters struggle with their own acculturation process. Among her observations: an understanding among some immigrants that in order to really inhabit the new world, they must learn its language. In Wife, the husband, recently arrived from Calcutta, takes a very systematic and aggressive approach to Americanization. He begins teaching himself the "important" American words:

The job came through on the next to last Wednesday in August. Though Amit kept muttering, "It's not challenging enough." . . . Challenging seemed to be a recently acquired word for Amit, a replacement for secure employment. . . . She realized that he was full of new words in his conversation: even the Bengali sentences were peppered with American words. Once, when emptying the pockets of his pants, Dimple had come across a scrap of paper with words like frontier justice, crisis management, relationship, challenging, constructive and confirmation listed neatly in columns. (Wife 104)

Amit moves from the primary immigrant mission, "secure employment," to "challenging," a first-world, yuppie ideal. The rest of the list might also have been leeches from the mission statement of a management consulting firm.

In Markandaya's Nectar in a Sieve, Kenny, the English doctor, had lashed out in frustration at the Indian farmers' passiveness. This fatalism is a well-known stereotype for Indians. Amit seems determined to change that, starting with acquiring a new set of self-empowering vocabulary. With the words will come the attitude.

Mukherjee reports on these moments of vulnerability as the new arrivals find their footing, without either defending her subjects or being embarrassed on their behalf. In fact, at times we catch her mimicking, even mocking, the way Indians speak. In Jasmine, the main character rests her bags for a few months with a Punjabi family who lives in a little India of their own making. Her hosts huddled safely in their cloisters, away from the demands of mainstream American life. They speak only Hindi in their sanctuary, and thus, manage to acquire English only very slowly. In the following passage, a grandmother complains of life in the United States. In her laments, she reveals both an Indianized English, and through it, an Indianized mentality: "All the time, this rush-rush. What to do? There are no grandchildren for us to play with. This country has drained my son of his dum . . ." (Jasmine 131). The "rush-rush" comes from a direct translation of Hindi expression, where words are repeated for emphasis. Perfectly good Hindi, when translated literally, sounds comical. The grandma does not even attempt to translate "Dum" (rhymes with "come"). It would not have been easy: "Dum" is the strength that one needs to carry an argument, to win a

fight—it is the verve in one's spirit. All of us have heard and been amused at foreign accents; so, Mukherjee goes beyond using only these easy targets. She also lassos the educated Indians in India. Their bookish, bureaucratic expression serves her well. Here, a father writes his daughter about the prospective husband he has sought out for her:

I met one Mr. Chakrovorty [wrote the Bengal Tiger] at yesterday's meeting of chamber of commerce. He is brother-in-law of one Mr. Mukherjee who has one son, Manik (Mota), who has been aforementioned. We had whiskey together (prices have gone up), and frank chat. He told me this boy is very, very brilliant and everyone loves him. (The Tiger's Daughter 15-16)

Mukherjee homes in on the Indian tendency to omit the definite article (as one would expect, these articles do not exist in Hindi). At the same time, she pokes fun at his pompous tone. These instances of self-deprecating humor appear far less often in Markandaya's works. More importantly still, the reader rarely gets the feeling that Markandaya is actually mocking her subjects. If she does transliterate the Indian accent, she does so in an effort to represent their speech more genuinely. Even then, as witnessed in her later novels like The Two Virgins, she expresses an affectionate, almost maternal, amusement at it. Never does she associate the accent with laughable characters, as does Mukherjee. Markandaya never lets Indians lose face in front of *them*, the English. For her, the Indian integrity is at stake.

For Mukherjee, there is no *us*, and no *them*. There is no Indian integrity. Or, for that matter, American integrity. Both languages, like both

cultures, are completely fluid, always colliding, merging, renewing. The author writes in the introduction to her short-story collection,

[I]nstead of seeing my Indianness as a fragile identity to be preserved against obliteration (or worse, a "visible" disfigurement to be hidden), I see it now as a set of fluid identities to be celebrated. I see myself as an American writer in the tradition of other American writers whose parents or grandparents had passed through Ellis Island. Indianness is now a metaphor, a particular way of partially comprehending the world. Though the characters in these stories are, or were, "Indian," I see most of these stories of broken identities and discarded languages, and the will to bond oneself to a new community, against the ever-present fear of failure and betrayal. (Darkness 3)

Without being starry-eyed about the fate of immigrants in the United States-- passages in Mukherjee's stories often point to the racism they encounter-- Mukherjee is still willing to relinquish the identity tied with the homeland. Even while confronted only with "broken identities" and "discarded languages," her characters brave this ill-explored space between the two cultures. And because they have been willing to discard old attachments, they can move forward in forging new identities. Those new identities are characterized, in part, by a renewed language. No longer attached to the idea of a pure, unadulterated Hindi or English, she freely infuses one with the other, producing new, lively concoctions.

To be sure, Mukherjee is not solely responsible for this "newfound" perspective. Unlike Markandaya, she inherits the paradigm of the Ellis Island immigrants in which to place herself and her fellow expatriates. That

vantage not only lets her treat India with realism—albeit a realism that sometimes borders on cruelty—but, ironically, it also allows her more freedom in terms of language usage. Even while apparently mocking her Indian subjects, she manages to carve out a new niche for them. Even while bearing criticism for bringing too westernized a mind-set to her Indian subjects, Mukherjee manages to introduce more Hindi words into the English lexicon than does Markandaya. For anyone who treads the border between two cultures, this can mean the freedom to create a new language to suit the needs of a new cultural space.

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