Chapter 5

Breaking Linguistic Barriers: Power and Solidarity through Language

In order to reconnect the book with the body and with pleasure, we must disintellectualize writing. . . . And this language, as it develops, will not degenerate and dry up, will not go back to the fleshless academicism, the stereotypical and servile discourses we reject.

. . . Feminine language must, by its very nature work on life passionately, scientifically, poetically, politically in order to make it invulnerable. (Chantal Chawaf, 'la chair linguistique,' New French Feminisms 177 –178)

In the writings by Indian women today, language becomes not only a feminist issue but also a post-colonial one. We see that speech and silence become powerful metaphors in feminist and postcolonial discourses. These help figure the number of ways in which women/the displaced/the exiles are denied the right or the opportunity to express themselves freely. Writing becomes a means that can offer the individual a means for transcending extreme and oppressive circumstances. The post-colonial writer shares the burden of writing in English which though a dominant language is certainly not the writer’s first language. The question, whether the dominant language, literature, culture and philosophy can be turned around
and used for subversive purposes, has been central to post-colonial, 
feminist and other oppositional discourse. Both Meena Alexander and 
Arundhati Roy also face these double binds in their writings. The 
South African writer, Achebe when confronting the multilingual 
nature of most African states as well as the colonially generated 
presence of the English language suggests that in future “the national 
literature of Nigeria and of many other countries of Africa is or will 
be, written in English” (Chinua Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day* 
103). Achebe also invokes the creativity of African writers who have 
appropriated English and rendered it suitable to convey their 
experiences, culture, religion and philosophy in a unique manner 
quite different from the way a writer from the English mainstream 
would have done. He concludes that:

> For me there is no other choice. I have been given this 
language and I intend to use it. . . . I feel that English will 
be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But 
it will have to be a new English, still in full communion 
with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African 
surroundings. (Chinua Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day* 
103)

Meena Alexander too faces the same sort of predicament. In her 
essay “Outcaste Power: Ritual Displacement and Virile Maternity in 
Indian Women Writers”, she writers of Toru Dutt’s unease when she 
becomes conscious of:
The double bind in which she found herself, a woman from the Colonized World -- working in a language, which even as she refined it for poetry, was not truly hers, this sense tormented her. *(Journal of Commonwealth Literature, Vol. 12, 15)*

Alexander too becomes conscious of her writing in English. The way out of this double bind is a very difficult and hazardous task. Alexander in her prose piece entitled “Exiled by a Dead Script” provides both phenomenological and ontological reasons for the daring act of an Indian writing in English. She identifies related terrors “the terror of babble” and “the terror of non-sense” *(Without Place VII)*. These terrors are essentially linguistic and if they are not exorcised through the very language, which creates them, the consequence would certainly be exile:

In order to make poetry in English in India and yet resolutely refuse exile, language must contort itself to become mimetic of muteness -- or their muteness, which is appropriated as the poet's own, under an oppressive order-- so poetically subverting the hidden ideology of our contemporary Indian English (“Exiled by a Dead Script,” *Without Place* IX).

In the same essay she goes on to say that the post-colonial writer writing in English is locked in a ceaseless battle between the
body and the script in which case the writer is left with no other option other than to make the "outworn script of English" (IX) to:

Open its maw and swallow, swallow huge chaoses, the chaoses of uninterpreted actuality. In return language will turn rigid and grow into a veritable barrier between the body of the poet and the objects and others around him. But its very existence as a barrier must be imaged, through its own diction. Then language will turn to flame and threaten in its rage to consume both the self, which utters and the objects, which it invokes. The body of the poet, no longer a phantom, now turns into a burning brand, consuming both itself and all that it touches. (IX)

Alexander's arguments are basically valid for the question that the Indo-English writer faces is one essentially linked with language. She talks of the transformation that took place in her regarding her writing like this:

... when I first started to write ... There was often a slavish kind of imitation, ... of early things I had read. And then I understand ... that to make a poem you have to put in your own experience. So if I write about mango in English, that could be fine ... so I think that what took place was a species of translation of a landscape in to a language, yet it has also become an Indian language.
Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* is highly praised by almost everyone who read it, for its stylistic innovativeness and craftsmanship, her command over the English Language and the poetic quality of her prose. The literary critic Aijaz Ahmad despite his strong criticism of Roy's ideology and political opinions writes:

She is the first Indian writer in English where a marvelous stylistics resource becomes available for provincial vernacular culture without any effect of exoticism or estrangement. ("Reading Arundhati Politically," *Frontline*, August 8, 1997: 103)

Thus we see that both Alexander and Roy know that they must create a new medium, which can carry the burden of their own experience in a manner, which is singular to them to captivate their readers. They agree with Ashcroft et al when they say:

The crucial function of language as a medium of power demands that post-colonial writing define itself by seizing the language of the center and replacing it in discourse fully adapted to the colonized place. (*The Empire Writes Back* 38)

They talk of two distinct processes by which language does this, firstly 'abrogation' or denial of the privilege of 'English'. This involves a rejection of the metropolitan power over the means of...
communication and secondly ‘appropriation’ which calls for a reconstitution of the language of Centre. The language is captured and remoulded and rendered anew. New usages and techniques often change the very texture of the language. This becomes a token of the resistance offered by the writers to the “site of colonial privilege” (The Empire Writes Back 38).

Alexander and Roy exercise abrogation by a refusal of the categories of the imperial culture, its aesthetics, its prescribed standards of correct usage, and its assumption of a traditional and fixed meaning inherent in the words. It is a vital step they take to decolonize the language and give shape to their variety of “English” and appropriation is done through a process by which the language is taken and made to bear the burden of one’s own cultural experiences, or, as Raja Rao puts it, to “convey in a language that is not one’s own the spirit that is one’s own (Kanthapura, Introduction, 1938: VII). Alexander and Roy appropriate the English language by bringing it under the influence of the vernacular. Appropriation also includes their attempts to abrogate the aesthetic assumptions of the centre. They defamiliarize the language by making it carry the burden of the indigenous culture as a devise to destroy the colonial and patriarchal power structures. Untranslated words are knitted into the fabric of the text to convey truth of the Indian culture and myths. Malayalam words embedded in the English text reflect the self-
assertiveness of the oppressed culture, just as the surrounding English words bear the taints of their colonial origin.

Sara Mills in the essay “The Gendered Sentence,” talks of the long standing debate within feminist circles which is concerned with “whether women writers produce texts which are significantly different in terms of language from those of males” (The Feminist Critique of Language 65). Mills is of the opinion that this debate began with Virginia Woolf when she asserted that there was a sentence that women writers had developed which she termed ‘female sentence’ or the ‘sentence of the feminine gender’ -- a type of sentence, which is looser and more accretive than the ‘male sentence’. This is an idea echoed in the writings of Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous (Irigaray, “This Sex Which Is Not One”(1985), and Cixous, ‘Le Sexe ou la tete”(Summer 1976). This kind of ‘female sentence’ or in more recent feminist terminology ‘ecriture feminine’ was defined positively by Woolf for the first time. She states:

It is true that before a woman can write exactly as she wishes to write, she has many difficulties to face. To begin with, there is the technical difficulty -- so simple, apparently: in reality, so baffling -- that the very form of the sentence does not fit her. It is a sentence made by men; it is too loose, too heavy, too pompous for a woman’s use. Yet in a novel, which covers so wide a stretch of ground, an ordinary and usual type of sentence
has to be found to carry the reader on easily and naturally from one end of the book to the other. And this a woman must make for herself, altering and adapting the current sentence until she writes one that takes the natural shape of her thought without crushing or distorting it. (Virginia Woolf, “Women and Fiction,” The Feminist Critique of Language 50)

The question often discussed in feminist deliberations of language is how can women write authentically in such restrictive cultural and social conditions. Most feminists are of the opinion that it is not enough for women to be able to write as men do and if they do write having accepted the traditional, that is, the masculine norms regarding the what and how of literature, then they would be just exchanging one kind of silencing for another. They advocate that women should find ways of writing that acknowledge and attempt to express women’s difference. Shoshana Felman categorically states the radical nature of the linguistic strategies of the French Feminists thus:

The challenge facing the women today is nothing less than to re-invent language . . . to speak not only against but outside of the phallogocentric structure . . . to establish a discourse the status of which would no longer be defined by the phallacy of male meaning. (“Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy,” Diacritics 10)
Perhaps Spender too is of the same opinion when she says that language is literally ‘man-made’, and so somehow women fail to put their ideas and expression into a language, which has been constructed according to the needs of the males. She says:

Males, as the dominant group, have produced language, thought, and reality. Historically it has been the structures, the categories, and the meanings, which have been invented by males -- though not of course by all males -- and they have been validated by reference to other males. In this process women have played little or no part. (Dale Spender, “Man Made Language: Extracts,” The Feminist Critique of Language 97)

In order to overcome this inherent weakness in the very nature of language that women writers use, Spender suggests that:

... in order to live in the world, we must name it. Names are essential for the construction of reality for without a name it is difficult to accept the existence of an object, an event, a feeling. Naming is the means whereby we attempt to order and structure the chaos and flux of existence, which would otherwise be an undifferentiated mass. By assigning names we impose a pattern and a meaning, which allows us to manipulate the world. (“Man Made Language: Extracts,” The Feminist Critique of Language 97)
Both Alexander and Roy realize that it is only they who have the power, to name the world, who are in a position to influence reality, and the only way to undermine patriarchal male dominance is by making available for users of the language more than one set of names. And this is exactly what they do in their writings. They take care to see that meanings are not given but that they are produced and reproduced, negotiated contextually.

Alexander is basically a poet who also writes fiction as well. Her excellence lies in the deft use of symbols so intricately networked into her writing that it becomes artfully evocative and suggestive. At times the images and symbols become very private, and then the readers are teased into guessing and coming to their own meanings. Her fiction is a sort of exercise in the stream-of-consciousness technique, the mind of the protagonist is always moving forward and backward at will as though she were in a dream. The dream like quality of her writing is enhanced by the lack of syntax and the total defiance of the rules of prescriptive grammar. In her poetry and fiction readers are introduced to all kinds of ellipses but her language also displays a strange sort of control and lyrical intensity. Her intention being that in doing so she will be successful not only in building a house for herself but in remoulding the acoustics of the world so as to accommodate the Other too. Her writings often bear a sad, melancholy strain but the warmth of feeling and the intensity of passion in them are remarkable qualities that remind the readers of
the philosophical heights of Eliot's *Four Quartets*. The images employed indicate a clear conception and a firm grasp of the subject. They are vivid and hold images that effectively bring out the grimness of the Indian social scene or the alienation that an exile suffers in a foreign environment. The following passage from *Fault Lines* brings out the strange predicament of a writer/ an exile who is caught between two cultures, between two or more spaces, between two time zones — the past and the present. The rendering is absolutely moving. The readers themselves get caught at the interstices between these opposites, groping their way into the future while rendering the past usable:

> Ever since I can remember, amma and I have been raveled together in net after net of time. What was pulled apart at my birth has tensed and knotted up. Without her, I would not be, not even in someone else's memory. I would be a stitch with no time, cap less, gloveless, sans eyes, sans nose, sans the lot. Lacking her I cannot picture what I might be. It mists over, a mirror with no back, where everything streams in: gooseberry bushes filled with sunlight, glossy branches of the mango tree, sharp blades of the green bamboo where serpents roost. To enter that mist, I put both hands as far as they reach. My right hand reaches through the mirror with no back, into a ghostly past, a ceaseless atmosphere that
shimmers in me even as I live and move. Within it I feel the warmth of the sun in Tiruvella. I smell the fragrance of new mango leaves.

But my left hand stretches into the present. With it I feel out a space for my living body. I touch rough bricks where the pigeon perched just an instant ago, on the wall at the corner of 113th Street and Broadway in Manhattan -- Turtle Island as it once was in a sacred geography. (Fault Lines 6-7)

By a careful choice of words and by the use of unusual, though apt metaphors, Alexander prompts her readers to partake of the alienation, the isolation, the doubts and the othering that an exile faces in a land where one is a migrant. The expatriate writer becomes "a woman cracked by multiple migration, uprooted so many times, she can connect nothing with nothing. Her words are all askew" (3). And for such a person "the house of memory is fragile, made up in the mind's space" (3). The migrant soon realizes that there is not that expected sanctity or refuge in memory for as she says:

... even what I remember best . . . what has flashed up for me in the face of the present danger, at the tail end of the century, where everything is to be elaborated, spelt out, precarious, reconstructed. (Fault Lines 4)

Both Roy and Alexander make a very unconventional use of a conventional language. Their use of language bestows it with an
added virility that forces it to break through all the silences and the margins that are imposed normally on the speech and writing of writers who do not belong to the mainstream. Their choice of language is not just an act of aesthetic or political option loaded with historical meaning; but they write in the only language in which multiple layers of culture in their societies find expression. Their writings often establish that English can become very pliant in the hands of writers from India.

Roy makes a very iconoclastic use of the English language. It is interesting to note what Rosemary Dinnage has written in *The New York Review of Books* regarding this. She says: “Roy stretches the English language in all directions” (as quoted in “The New Deity of Prose,” *India Today*, Oct 27, 1997: 25). The Booker Committee for 1997 also lauds Roy’s language and stylistics. They say:

> With extraordinary linguistic inventiveness Roy funnels the history of South India through the eyes of seven-year-old twins. It is beyond doubt that Roy has an eagle’s eye for the beautiful and the tragic, creating great lines for literature like “dissolute blue bottles hum vacuously in the fruity air.” (As quoted in “The New Deity of Prose,” *India Today*, Oct 27, 1997: 25)

Particularly to be noted in this regard is the tribute paid by Jason Cowley, one of the judges in the 1997 Booker Committee. He says the reason why Arundhati won the Booker Prize for that year was:
Well in a year of leveling mediocrity, *The God of Small Things* had a radical difference: it was quite unlike any other book we read. What the judges most admired was not its Indian setting, its slightly hackneyed reworking of the old duchess-and-the-gamekeeper plot in the story of an inter-caste erotic love between a Paravan and a Syrian Christian, or the admittedly valuable insight Roy offers into the complicated politics of Kerala. It was, rather, her verbal exuberance: almost alone among the 106 entries Roy has her own voice, her own signature.

There is something childish about Roy. She has a heightened capacity for wonder, seeing the world as a child might. This accounts for the defamiliarizing quality of her prose, her metaphorical exactitude and striking similes: a moonlit river falling from a swimmer’s arms like “sleeves of silver;” the smell of shithovering over a village “like a hat.” ("Why We Chose Arundhati," *India Today*, Oct 27, 1997:28)

Roy has an impish humour and an uncanny feel for language, which makes use of irony and pathos too. Roy’s language gives her novel the tragic grandeur and intensity of emotions of a Shakespearian Tragedy while maintaining the innocent inquisitiveness of a ‘Dennis the Menace’ cartoon strip. She also maintains an objective
detachment or what Keats called the ‘aesthetic distance’ from her work. The most tragic incident is narrated by the protagonists or by the central consciousness, the narrator without any sentimental indulgence. She twists the language to suit her own story telling through which she stages Ayemenem and its people for the whole world. It is absolutely delightful to see the incredibly imaginative way she uses language -- specially when she illustrates how children see the world -- ‘nap’ becomes “gnap;” ‘Barn owl’ becomes “Bar Nowl,” and the reading backwards habit of children just to confuse the elders. ‘Be Indian, buy Indian’ is read as “Naidni yub, naidni eb.” The following passage from the text shows how children “accurately misunderstand things, and . . . make concepts out of things that aren’t concepts at all” in the adult world (“For Me Language Is Skin on My Thought,” The Week, Oct 26, 1997: 46). Here Rahel, Estha and Sophie are trying to list out who they love the most:

“Who d’ you love the Most in the World?” Rahel asked Sophie Mol.

“Joe,” Sophie Mol said without hesitation. “My dad. He died two months ago. We’ve come here to Recover from the Shock.”

“But Chacko’s your dad,” Estha said.

“He’s just my real dad,” Sophie Mol said. “Joe’s my dad. He never hits. Hardly ever.”
“How can he hit if he’s dead?” Estha asked reasonably.

“Where’s your dad?” Sophie Mol wanted to know.

“He’s . . .” and Rahel looked at Estha for help.

“. . . not here.” Estha said.

“Shall I tell you my list?” Rahel asked Sophie Mol.

“If you like,” Sophie Mol said.

Rahel’s ‘list’ was an attempt to order chaos. She revised it constantly, torn forever between love and duty. It was by no means a true gauge of her feelings.

“First Ammu and Chacko,” Rahel said. “Then Mammachi ––”

“Our grandmother,” Estha clarified.

“More than your brother?” Sophie Mol asked.

“We don’t count,” Rahel said. “And anyway he might change. Ammu says.”


“Into a Male Chauvinist Pig,” Rahel said.

“Very Unlikely,” Estha said.

“Anyway, after Mammachi, Velutha, and then––”

“Who’s Velutha?” Sophie Mol wanted to know.

“A man we love,” Rahel said. “And after Velutha, you,” Rahel said.
"Me? What d'you love me for?" Sophie Mol said.

"Because we are firstcousins. So I have to," Rahel said piously.

"But you don't even know me," Sophie Mol said. "And anyway, I don't love you."

"But you will, when you come to know me," Rahel said confidently.

"I doubt it," Estha said.

"Why not?" Sophie Mol said.

"Because," Estha said. "And anyway she's most probably going to be a dwarf."

As though loving a dwarf was completely out of the question.

"I'm not," Rahel said.

"You are," Estha said.

"I'm Not."

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"You are. We're twins," Estha explained to Sophie Mol, "and just see how much shorter she is."

Rahel obligingly took a deep breath, threw her chest out and stood back to back with Estha in the airport car park, for Sophie Mol to see just how much shorter she was.
“Maybe you’ll be a midget,” Sophie Mol suggested. That’s taller than a dwarf and shorter than a . . . Human Being.”

The silence was unsure of this compromise. (The God of Small Things 151-152)

Thus we see that Roy builds her writing on the fact that there is a child in every person and it is possible that through this ‘child’ the adult may communicate freely with his childhood. For children like Rahel and Estha who have had rather unprotected childhoods, all the boundaries become blurred and therefore they make their own rules. The God of Small Things evidences Roy’s conscious craftsmanship of her language and the architectonics thereof. In an interview with Alix Wibur she says:

For me the structure of my story, the way it reveals itself was so important. My language is mine, it’s the way I think and the way I write . . . I don’t scrabble around and try and I don’t sweat the language. But I really took a lot of care in designing the structure of the story, because for me the book is not about what happened but about how what happened affected people. So a little thing like a little boy making his Elvis Presley puff or a little girl looking at her plastic watch with the time painted onto it — these things become very precious. ("For Me Language Is Skin on My Thought," The Week, Oct 26, 1997: 46)
Both Alexander and Roy use in their writings a poetic mode which increase the resonance of their texts. This works alongside of a structure, which conforms more to a musical composition than a conventional linear plot and sequence. Roy’s *The God of Small Things* and Alexander’s *The Shock of Arrival* is like a polyphonic composition constructed on a number of short subjects and themes, which are harmonized according to the laws of counterpoint and introduced by various voices in succession with contrapuntal devices in order to present a harmonic whole. The sensuous imagery of the opening passages of *The God of Small Things* is almost Keatsian in its lushness and in its synesthetic effect:

It was raining. . . . Slanting silver ropes slammed into loose earth, ploughing it up like gunfire. The old house on the hill wore its steep, gabled roof pulled over its ears like a low hat. The walls, streaked with moss had grown soft, and bulged a little with dampness that seeped up from the ground. The wild, overgrown garden was full of the whisper and scurry of small lives. In the undergrowth a rat snake rubbed itself against a glistening stone. Hopeful yellow bullfrogs cruised the scummy ponds for mates. A drenched mongoose flashed across the leaf-strewn driveway. (1-2)

Another speciality with Roy’s language is that it is highly emotive and original. Poetic suggestiveness is reinforced by the
imaginative richness of the child’s gaze. Many of the episodes are mediated through the gazes of Rahel and Estha. This, together with the use of absolutely freshly-minted words, explains the defamiliarized nature of Roy’s ‘world’. The readers feel as though they are looking at the world for the first time. They also experience a rendezvous into their own childhood. The following passage from the text illustrates the mirthful creativity of childhood when children are left to devise games and acts for their own amusement. Rahel remembers:

*Nictitating membrane*, she remembered she and Estha once spent a whole day saying. She and Estha and Sophie Mol.

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They were all three of them wearing saris (old ones, torn in half) that day, Estha was the draping expert. He pleated Sophie Mol’s pleats. Organized Rahel’s pallu and settled his own. They had red bindis on their foreheads. In the process of trying to wash out Ammu’s forbidden
Kohl, they had smudged it all over their eyes, and on the whole looked like three raccoons trying to pass off as Hindu ladies. . . . Estha and Rahel took her with them to visit Velutha.

They visited him in saris, clumping gracelessly through red mud and long grass (Nictitating, ictitating, tating, ating, ting, ing) and introduced themselves as Mrs. Pillai, Mrs. Eapen and Mrs. Rajagopalan. Velutha introduced himself and his paralysed brother Kuttappan. . . . He greeted them with the utmost courtesy. He addressed them all as Kochamma and gave them fresh coconut water to drink. (188-190)

The readers may also catch a glimpse of how alongside all this gleeful description Roy very artfully slips in a narratorial comment which not only reminds Rahel but also the readers of the extraordinary gentleness and decency that Velutha was capable of exhibiting. The passage also effectively brings out the sharp contrast between the caring Velutha and the other adults who lived and ruled in perpetual hypocrisy. Rahel’s memory of that long gone incident is her tribute to that heroic figure who, unlike the other adults in The God of Small Things, took care not to destroy the dreams of little children, instead he nurtured them with his support and a ‘willing suspension of disbelief.’
It is only now, these years later, that Rahel with adult hindsight recognized the sweetness of that gesture. A grown man entertaining three raccoons, treating them like real ladies. Instinctively colluding in the conspiracy of their fiction, taking care not to decimate it with adult carelessness. Or affection.

It is, after all, so easy to shatter a story, to break a chain of thought. To ruin a fragment of a dream being carried around carefully like a piece of porcelain.

To let it be, to travel with it, as Velutha did, is much the harder thing to do. (190)

The above passage illustrates the kind of unusual use of language, which in fact accounts for the strangely evocative quality of the novel.

Meena Alexander, as substantiated by Nampally Road, Fault Lines, Manhattan Music and The Shock of Arrival, is a skilled, imaginative writer. She displays unusual skill in “the evocation of scenes and characters, and more delicate self-observation especially in respect to obscure inner urges, imaginings, to modes of perception and apprehension.” (Roy Pascal, Design and Truth in Autobiography 133).

In Fault Lines, Alexander reviews herself in the colonial background. The experience of having to ‘learn and relearn English’ in Khartoum and the biased attitude of the western academicians against the writers who do not belong to the imperial culture have a
tangible effect on her urge to decolonize linguistically. In Khartoum, she experienced the harshness of the colonial set-up as “the first non-white child” at Clergy House School in Khartoum, and felt most miserable in that school for two years. She poignantly states: “My blackness stuck out as a stiff halo around me”(113). Her move towards linguistic decolonization is curiously combined with an unexpressed sense of her ‘femaleness’. All these together shape her personality. Here she attempts at breaking through the restrictive shell of an imposed language, thereby making it fluid enough for her purposes. She not only transgresses linguistic rules, uses sharp heavy words, almost like missiles that are right on target, but also imbues her language with lyrical sonority.

In *Fault Lines* and in *Manhattan Music* the image of the ‘barbed wires’ appear as leitmotif. The technique of repetition being fused into the body of the narratives gives the author the means to focus on, and vivify an experience, that is loaded with meaning and must convey a message both for herself and her readers. All enactment in later life becomes essentially an unfolding of her “first intuition of the world”. What one would know of her writings may not be necessarily the inside story but the evolution of her “mode of vision” and her “successive engagement with the world” (Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* 135).

Alexander uses profuse verbal expression loaded with the richness of experience and perception. It is through the medium of
words that she gives tangible experience of her apprehension of the world. In an article "Journey through Time: Meena Alexander's Fault Lines", Manjushree S. Kumar says:

In Fault Lines there is a marked and conspicuous focus on identity. The numerous situations the author encounters, the people she meets, the events she steps into, are brought round as indicators to what she is, has been, and becomes, . . . all become singularly stark as objects of contemplation and reflection. This in its entirety is recorded almost as a communication between herself and herself -- i.e. Herself as part of her in association with people, her connections and her relationships even though at times she felt she was sticking out like a "sore black thumb, a grotesque thing" (Fault Lines 168), herself as part of a locale and varied experience, and the 'herself' which desperately tries to grasp who she is -- reaching out for the core of herself, her beliefs and responses -- to Tiruvella and Kozhencheri, her anguish at certain occasions in New York, the distance in time and space. Collectively this sketches the contours of her inner self . . . . (Indian Women Novelists, Vol.3, 220)

Thus we see that meaningful images in the narrative fit into each other as a solved picture puzzle and it acquires in the words of
Roy Pascal a “dream-like flow, yet is concrete and precise, it combines delicate suggestion with a robust wholeness” (Design and Truth in Autobiography 139). In all Alexander’s writings, the protagonists tell us stories of grandmothers, mothers, grandfathers, men and women from History, of friends, of prejudiced academicians, of great writers, of world news -- part fiction and part truth. The boundaries are very blurred. It becomes difficult to tell where truth ends and fiction takes over and vice versa. The narratives though interesting in themselves are not as striking and gripping as the images present in them. These images are highly complex and have a terrible beauty and power about them. The ideas and emotions aroused by the narrative voices are highly effective in conveying Alexander’s central concerns with power and the abuses of power. Alexander uses her explorations of language in true poetic style to universalize individual character and specific incidents to convey the very core of feelings of the marginalized and the downtrodden. Questions like: “... how did she turn from the rough pupa cocooned by the colonial ideologies into a full-blown winged thing, dreaming of national liberty?” (Fault Lines 12), or “what would it be like to be in boarding school where you could never see your face?”(13), punctuate the narratives at regular intervals. These questions prompt the readers to revise their own postcolonial standings. Alexander moves from the personal to the universal. The feeling of alienation and rejection suffered by the protagonist as expressed in the following
passage is true of almost every migrant. These images catch the poignancy of perpetual dislocation:

My own soul seemed to me, then, a cabbage-like thing, closed tight in a plastic cover. My two worlds, the present and the past, were torn apart, and I was the fault line, the crack that marked the dislocation. (Fault Lines 15)

Here is another passage that illustrates beautifully the intense longing for speech in a foreign land in a foreign tongue:

How would I be free to speak? Far, far from Tiruvella and Kozhencheri, . . . the words I had carried around for so long echoed in my inner ear. I wanted to be more than tympanum, a pale, vibrating thing, enter my own flesh, that marked out the boundaries between worlds. More than a mere line in the dry earth, I wanted to give voice to my flesh, to learn, to live as a woman. To do that, I had to spit out the stones that were in my mouth. I had to become a ghost, enter my own flesh. (16)

In Nampally Road, Mira's voice is powerfully suggestive. The language both caresses and shocks. The words are rich and sensual, capturing a range of emotions from the basic instinct for survival to almost ethereal celebration of love. The narrative abounds in untranslated Indian words like Sona Niwas, dosham, gully, guru, chela, Ganapathy, neem, peepal etc. The use of these words does not in any way interfere with the readability of the novel. On the contrary
they lend an exotic air to the whole story. This sort of blending of languages is certainly Mira's way of abrogating and appropriating English as 'english' for herself and her students at Sona Nivas. We agree with P. Kiranmai Dutt when she says:

**Nampally Road** with the sights and sounds indigenous to India: the colourful landscape is characterized by lotus ponds, neem and peepal trees, magnolias, street vendors, and women adorned in saris.

The city of Hyderabad is presented in all its hues to the readers. Nampally Road, the nerve-centre of the city is immortalized, with a vivid description of it: Sona Nivas (The Golden Threshold), the CLS Book-shop on the opposite side, the flower seller squatted on the stone steps leading to the book shop, the Mysore Café with the marble-topped tables and thronging crowds, the Super Bazar, The Sagar Talkies, (once the premier theatre of Hyderabad), the river Musi etc.

The environs of **Nampally Road** are also depicted in the novel, thus intensifying the feeling of reality. Further we have Gowliguda, the Public gardens, King Koti and so on. The novel thus takes the reader on a journey into the city of Hyderabad and portrays it as an image of reality. ("A Reader's Odyssey into Meena Alexander's **Nampally Road,**" *Indian Women Novelists.* Vol.3; 221).
Once again coming back to Arundhati Roy, the readers can easily perceive that her genius lies in the use of poetical language with highly compressed energy. She is forever exploiting the ever-shifting possibilities of signification and invokes multiple levels of meaning. In fact her language is so full of "verbal wizardry" (Beth Yahp, "Larger than Life," *The Australian Review of Books*, May 1997: 5) that even as the readers are engaged in the reading of the text, it starts dancing, sometimes with the slow steps of a contemplative dance, and at other times with the quick, vigorous movements of brisk folk dances. A brilliant example of this kind of language is seen when the 'Welcome Play' for Sophie Mol’s and Margaret Kochamma’s homecoming was being staged by all the adults at the Ayemenem House, we find Velutha, Rahel and Estha indulging in a game of their own. Rahel and Estha feel that they were unwanted at the scene. Everybody was making much of Sophie Mol. The twins felt that their presence did not matter at all to the adults of the household. Finding themselves outside the 'Welcome Home Sophie Mol Play' Rahel said to Velutha: "We're not here, are we? We're not even Playing"(182). Velutha agreed with what Rahel said:

"That is Exactly Right," Velutha said. "We're not even Playing. But what I would like to know is, where is our Esthppyxhachen Kuttappen Peter Mon?"(182)

And we are told that:
That became a delighted, breathless, Rumplestiltskin-like dance among the rubber trees."

Oh Esthappappachachen Kuttappen Peter Mon,

Where, oh where have you gon?’

And from Rumplestiltskin it graduated to the Scarlet Pimpernel.

_We seek him here, we seek him there,_

_Those Frenchies seek him everywhere._

_Is he in heaven? Is he in hell?_

_That demmedel-usive Estha – Pen? (The God of Small Things 182-183)_

The use of language in the passage quoted below is specially noteworthy for it provides the readers a feel of the Indian extended family as well as the most-difficult-to-pronounce names of some typical Kerala cities: It tickles the Indian sensibility trying to imagine how on earth the fastidious Western Readers might have managed to mouth these names:

The Arrival Lounge was a press of live and eagerness, because the Bombay-Cochin flight was the flight that all the Foreign Returnees came home on. Their families had come to meet them. From all over Kerala. On long bus journeys. From Ranni, from Kumili, from Vizhinjam, from Uzhavoor. Some of them had camped at the airport
overnight, and had brought their food with them. And tapioca chips and chakka velaichathu for the way back. They were all there — the deaf ammoomas, the cantankerous, arthritic appopans, the pining wives, scheming uncles, children with the runs. The fiancées to be reassessed. The teacher's husband’s sisters waiting for their dowries. The wire-bender’s pregnant wife. (The God of Small Things 138)

Roy’s eclectic use of words referring to typical Kerala cuisine, like chakka velaichathu, tapioca chips, fresh coconut water, vevicha meen. Iddiappams, kanji, stoo, and pineapple slices provide a gourmet’s delight for gastronomers. Another interesting use of language can be seen in the way Kuttappen, the paralyzed brother of Velutha describes the Meenachal River. He tells the children to be cautious of the river for she could be quite dangerously different from what she pretended to be. The description bears strong regional overtones, while conjuring up a synesthetic experience for the readers:

“You must be careful,” Kuttappen said. “This river of ours — she isn’t always what she pretends to be.”

“What does she pretend to be?” Rahel asked.

“Oh . . . a little old church-going ammooma, quiet and clean . . . idiappams for breakfast, kanji and meen for lunch. Minding her own business. Not looking right or left.”
"And she's really . . . ?"

"Really a wild thing . . . I can hear her at night -- rushing past in the moonlight, always in a hurry. You must be careful of her."

"And what does she really eat?"

"Really eat? Oh . . . Stoo . . . and . . ." He cast about for something English for the evil river to eat.

"Pineapple slices . . ." Rahel suggested.

"That's right! Pineapple slices and Stoo. And she drinks. Whisky."

"And brandy."

"And brandy, True."

"And looks right and left."

"True."

"And minds other people's business . . ." (The God of Small Things 210-211)

It is fascinating to note that the central theme of the novel is the underlying tragic vulnerability of children (specially "full wogs"), women (specially the inter-caste married and divorced ones), and the low castes. But these subalterns manage, through the play of language, to exercise some sort of control over the action even though it is only for a short while. The children not only thrive on but also enjoy a kind of power through their play with language. Their reading backwards is a powerful subversion of the established
patriarchal order; their ‘word view’ and their world view are always in
the oppositional mode to that of the powerful adult world. When
confronted by the “Backwards Reading” of the Twins, Miss Mitten
intuitively sees “Satan in their eyes” (60). However “a few months
later Miss Mitten was killed by a milk van in Hobart, across the road
from a cricket oval” (60). And this made the twins feel vindicated for
“there was hidden justice, in the fact that the milk van had been
reversing” (60).

Roy also makes skilful use of what T.S. Eliot calls the ‘objective
correlative’. Whenever something went terribly wrong with the people
in the story or whenever someone in the text was angry, then
‘Pappachi’s strange moth’ could be seen descending on them. It
became a foreboding presence signifying evil. This moth played its
‘elusive game’ first of all with Pappachi and left him forever an
embittered man and then:

In the years to come, even though he had been ill-
humoured long before he discovered the moth, Pappachi’s
Moth was held responsible for his black moods and
sudden bouts of temper. Its pernicious ghost -- grey,
furry and with unusually dense dorsal tufts -- haunted
every house that he ever lived in. It tormented him and
his children and his children’s children. (49)

This sounds so much like the Biblical curse of Jehovah God on
the erring Israelites who disobeyed His holy Commandments. God’s
curse would follow such as these to the third and fourth generations. Another use of the objective co-relative is the ‘Orange drink – Lemon drink Man’ who could walk in any minute to add misery and trouble to the already troubled lives of Estha, Rahel and Ammu. The text abounds in such use of the objective co-relatives. Thus it can be seen that Roy’s ingenuity with metaphors, similes, objective co-relatives and the coining of words, allow the central consciousness to express grief and sorrow, in a very oblique and impersonal way. An old object is redressed in new language, the visionary skill of Roy which makes sorrow more human and pure, the craft of turning the small things of everyday life into poetry invests the ordinary with a Wordsworthian sublimity. This is a very high achievement of Roy as a result of which we get new and crunchy expressions crisply delicious to the ear. The mind of Murlidharan, the lunatic, becomes “a cupboard cluttered with secret pleasures” (63). In the toilet at Abhilash Talkies “Baby Kochamma balanced like a big bird over a public pot.” And “Blue veins like lumpy knitting running up her translucent shins. Fat knees dimpled”(95), reveal the texture and colouring of Baby Kochamma’s fat, varicose-veined legs. To Rahel Baby Kochamma’s bosom appeared like “melons in a blousen”(95). An old neon-green hula-hoop becomes “a huge saint’s discarded halo” (155). The movement of some black ants is described in a strikingly vivid manner:
A column of shining black ants walked across a windowsill, their bottoms tilted upwards, like a line of mincing chorus girls in a Busby Berkley musical. Silhouetted against the sun. Buffed and beautiful. (155)

Estha’s “Fear” of the lecherous Orange drink -- Lemon drink Man temporarily “sank and settled at the bottom of the deep water. Sleeping a dog’s sleep. Ready to rise and murk things at a moment’s notice” (212). This reminds the readers of Cereberus, the monstrously ferocious dog, who though pretending to be asleep, was forever vigilantly ready to pounce upon anyone and tear him/her to pieces if he/she tried to enter Hades without having obtained prior permission from Pluto, the King of Hades. Velutha’s “ridges of muscle on (his) stomach rose like divisions on a slab of chocolate” (215).

Thus it can be seen that language has always been an immensely controversial issue for Indian writers, the colonial trappings of English, when raised to consciousness, becomes impossible to evade. But both Alexander and Roy are able to use it with élan and great suave. They do this by using a number of technical devices, which are synonymous with devices of ‘abrogation and appropriation’ through which postcolonial writers attempt to take over the language of the colonizer, by which they are enabled to express the common, everyday stuff in new and exhilarating ways. The words and phrases used are so fresh and uniquely different from the usual ones that the readers are just carried away by the
unfamiliar but apt descriptions provided in the narrative. And sometimes, with deliberate intention, the authors also leave the readers with a sense of *déjà vu*. The ultimate effect is that the readers experience a sense of belonging, a sense of identification, with the world of the texts. It is the language that carries the readers from one end of the text to the other as though engaged in a discovery journey.