Chapter 5

APPROPRIATION OF LANGUAGE

“There should be a ban on English address in Parliament. Countries which use their mother tongue are more developed. It's a need of the hour to promote Hindi.”

(Mulayam Singh Yadav, qtd. in The Times of India)

Postcolonial literature because of its congenital condition of being born out of colonial experience is bound to be obsessed with the questions of power and resistance. Whether it be Marxist ideas of the expansion of economic power through means of political coercion and ideologically grounded suppression of the proletariat classes or Foucauldian ideas of systematic circulation of discourses for acquisition of power; or, whether it is the endless contest of power and resistance in the colonial context or the postcolonial and neo-colonial ones almost all postcolonial writers have betrayed a very strong propensity to unravel and dissect, within the larger social fabric, the complexities around which political, economic and cultural dominance is made possible. Even very young writers like Kiran Desai in works like *The Inheritance of Loss* have shown great maturity in trying to fix reasons for insurgent tendencies in national spaces and how these are neutralized through political stratagems and strategies. Dealing with the violence and political implications of Indian–Nepali insurgency in the foothills of Mount Kanchenjunga and its effect on the life of common people, the novel tries to address the very topical questions of the conflicts engendered by religion and race in the context of nationalist aspirations. It becomes clear from this that even after several decades of the formal inauguration of Postcolonial Studies Discourse after the publication of *Orientalism* the contests of different formations of power and resistance continue to be the abiding theme of fiction. Yet, it has to be conceded, and, as Bill Ashcroft *et al* have tried to show in
their monumental *The Empire Writes Back*, we cannot ignore the questions of language and idiom when we are considering postcolonial literature or even postcolonial discourse as a category.

There have been various and contending opinions about the reliance of Postcolonial Literature on English language. In one mode of thinking, the choice of appropriated/unappropriated English for writing the postcolonial experience is an effective counter strategy whereas for others it is to be treated as pathological anglophilia as evidenced in writers like Nirad C. Chaudhary or as a continued attitude of servile inferiority. Ashcroft *et al* in the *Post-Colonial Studies Reader* give expression to this dilemma in the following words:

There are several responses to this dominance of the imperial language but two present themselves immediately in the decolonizing process – rejection and subversion. The process of radical decolonization proposed by Ngugi wa Thion’o is a good demonstration of the first alternative. Ngugi’s programme of restoring an ethnic or national identity embedded in the mother tongue involves a rejection of English, a refusal to use it for his name, a refusal to submit to the political dominance its use implies...However, many more writers have felt that this appeal to some essential cultural identity is doomed to failure, indeed, misunderstands the heterogeneous nature of human experience. (283)

In Ngugi’s understanding the English language is the instrument of colonisation which was “the most important vehicle through which that power fascinated and held the soul prisoner. The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation”(9). Ngugi further
offers a rather essentialized understanding of the linguistic basis of culture by believing that it is a sum total of:

...moves, rhythms, habits, attitudes, experiences and knowledge...Those experiences are handed over to the next generation and become the inherited basis of their further actions on nature and on themselves. There is a gradual accumulation of values which in time become self-evident truths governing their conception of what is good and bad, beautiful and ugly, courageous and cowardly, generous and mean in their internal and external relations. Over a time this becomes a way of life distinguishable from other ways of life. (14)

It is evident that Ngugi’s views like those of Fanon grow out of a harrowing experience of colonial rule. It is also interesting to note that Ngugi, in the essay “The Language of African Literature” quoted above after theorizing the centrality of language in economic relations as if suddenly and arbitrarily explains away culture as a way of life of the indigenous people. This is akin to cultural and linguistic nationalisms that came into existence as a direct consequence of colonial rule and involve a serious peril of founding fractious societies. The politics of Shiv Sena in the novels of Mistry, is a politically more evolved and militant form of such essentialized views of language and culture. Such views about both culture and language cannot be held as tenable particularly in the present times when there is a greater realization that these categories have historical bases. There are other writers and thinkers with whom using the English language as a subversive tool has enjoyed greater favour.

It is, however, clear that the question of language has remained a seminal question in Postcolonial literatures and in the colonial aftermath it has always been
felt that in order to interpret a postcolonial writer accurately one has to resolve the issue of the medium of literary expression. Writers like Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and Chinua Achebe are early examples of those who believed that the imperial language needed to be transformed so as to re-contextualize it and make it bear the burden of the native experience. They constitute the first few writers who put their faith in what is described as the appropriation and nativization of the English language. Raja Rao’s oft quoted dictum cited below at one time translated into a basic postcolonial position on the question of language but, as can be seen in the case of writers like Mistry, this position has undergone innumerable transformations since:

One had to convey in a language that is not one’s own the spirit that is one’s own…We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the larger world as part of us. (Kanthapura vii)

This view finds corroboration in Ashcroft et al:

The study of national traditions is the first and most vital stage of the process of rejecting the claims of the centre to exclusivity. It is the beginning of what Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka has characterized as the ‘process of self-apprehension’ (Soyinka qtd. in Empire, 16).

Ashcroft et al also note in The Empire Writes Back that in the early works of postcolonial literature “theme of the celebration of the struggle towards independence in community and individual emerges in the novels as diverse as Rao’s Kanthapura (India), Ngugi’s A Grain of Wheat (Kenya), and Reid’s New Day (Jamaica). They further argue that the “theme of the dominating influence of a foreign culture on the life of contemporary post-colonial societies is present in works as diverse in origin
and style as Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease* (Nigeria), Lamming’s *In the Castle of my Skin* (Barbados), and the poems of Honi Tuwhare (New Zealand)” (27). It can be said that in these works, the question of language gets linked to cultural self-assertion and to subversion of European epistemology. Through his statement quoted above, Rao inaugurates an important theme in Postcolonial Studies Discourse. Although Raja Rao does stretch the notion of being Indian to introduce into it a hint of cosmopolitanism, yet it seems as if he tackles the question through absolutes. The dichotomy between the indigenous spirit and an alien language can be resolved through an appropriation or nativization of English. The logic of Rao’s dictum is grounded in a belief in the homogeneity of the indigenous culture; geographical, cultural and political fixity of the indigenous identity and the desire to give expression to the “spirit that is one’s own” in the aftermath of colonial rule. That Rao’s views about the English language in the essay “The Caste of English” are very different from those held in the present times is also made clear by his association of the use of English with the dissemination of Indian philosophical thought, “Truth can use any language, and the more universal, the better it is. If metaphysics is India’s primary contribution to world civilization, as we believe it is, then must she use the most universal language for her to be universal ... And so long as the English is universal, it will always remain Indian” (qtd. in Kachru, 62)

Chinua Achebe in his *Things Fall Apart* consciously introduces a copiousness of Nigerian/Igbo expressions and cadences that a recognizable strategy of adjusting an alien language to cultural and political needs strikes one with an unmistakable immediacy. However, in this also the primary objective remains cultural self assertion and epistemological correction. Achebe spins his yarn not through a mechanical
superimposition of an alien language on local experience but structures his narrative through a very rich incorporation of Igbo proverbs, legends and myths. This literary enterprise synchronizes with his artistic objective of representing the reality of his culture through the perspective of a participant/insider rather than that of an outsider. This desire of his finds forceful articulation in his objections to Conrad’s racism in his essay, “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s Heart of Darkness”. He thus does not limit himself to altering an existing idiom but creates a new one which is his own as according to him “much more has to be at stake than stylistic felicity” (3). As he aims to breach the Eurocentric representations of Africa and Africans “which are purveyor[s] of comforting myths” about Africa circulating in Europe, his enterprise is more radical in nature (3). Rather than a superficial make over through incidental and minor adjustments, he makes English undergo a cultural transformation.

Something akin to this had already been successfully tried by Saul Bellow, within the Western academy, before him in texts like Herzog. Bellow’s project - at the time of high modernist experimentation - was to produce a discourse that was oppositional in nature to Christain-centric descriptions of language and literature in Europe and America.

Pramod K. Nayar tries to resolve his discussion on language in the postcolonial context with the following words which are suggestive of the fact that English language despite the contradictions of the postcolonial situation remains a natural choice for the writers ranging from Derek Walcott to Kamala Das and Keki Daruwalla. He writes:
In each case the postcolonial writer asserts her identity not in an abandonment of the former European master’s language, but in its appropriation. A postcolonial identity is forged, in many cases, not in a return to a pre-colonial language or a ‘pure’ form, but in a hybridization where political independence means that the postcolonial is empowered through the colonial past to fashion a new identity. While it is possible to argue that this makes postcolonialism a derivative discourse and form, it is also clear that hybridization is an act of agency and freedom where the writer creatively uses English…in order to show how the crucial weapon of colonization can become a weapon of the postcolonial as well. (85)

Contemporary postcolonial theorist Gauri Viswanathan hints that there is greater complexity in the question when she observes that postcolonial literature in English is stuck without any possibility of redemption in the contradictions on the one hand of its dependence on institutionalized and ideologically loaded colonial pedagogy and on the other hand of subverting it. Vishwanathan in her book *Masks of Conquest: English Literary Studies and India*, looks at colonial pedagogy as an important component of the imperialist programme and stresses the need to contest it while also asserting that it cannot be understood as a simple process of putting English at the service of a new predefined culture. Partha Chaterjee in his essay “Nationalism as a Problem” also refers to the essential bilingualism of postcolonial nations of the Third World. Such opinions go beyond the position of Rao or even Achebe and problematize the question in more complex terms.
This goes on to prove that the choice of medium especially in postcolonial literature is less an aesthetic and more a political choice. To this may be added that, rather than possessing the ease of generalized and broad resolutions, the question demands specific and rigorous study as the reasons for the use of English for different writers may be different. Naipaul’s rise to glory through narration of the Caribbean and the Indian experience in English; Rudhdie’s intensely postmodernist deconstruction of postcolonial nationalisms - once again through a highly experimental use of English which seems to maintain an equal distance both from classical and modernist uses as well as from Achebe’s indigenized yet realist narratives; or the specificities of Mistry’s embracing a realist mode of writing as a diasporic Parsi, all demand individual attention.

Appropriation of English for narrating native experience has taken many forms and has been informed by different needs. Particularly in the present times the meaning and need of appropriation of English have undergone a change. Achcroft et al in *Empire Writes Back* list a number of features that they feel recur in works of postcolonial literature. While there are several thematic parallels like, as mentioned above, the celebration of political and cultural independence, the reflection of the problem of home in the “construction and demolition” of houses and the theme of journey and exile; there are also several conspicuous similarities in narrative and linguistic features (27-28). These include sustained use of allegory and irony and use of techniques like magic realism and non-linear narratives.

Two developments that make it imperative to reformulate the questions discussed above are, one, the rise in postcolonial nation-states of what referring to Nayar in chapter two was described as the literature of disillusionment and, two, the
fact that the socio-political world is overcast with a climate of neo-liberalism where migrations are almost normative. The disillusionment with the postcolonial nation-states is particularly pronounced when it is voiced by marginalized and subaltern classes and sections. The issue is of particular importance in considering contemporary postcolonial writers like Misty. Moreover, as has been seen above, in the present day context, there are critics like Ahmad and Orsini who from their own distinct positions, view with suspicion the rise of writers who write in English. For them it is a direct consequence of globalization of capital and of the publishing industry. It is not for nothing, as noted in the earlier chapters, through views of such critics as Pranav Jani, Orsini and Tabish Khair that with writers like Rushdie, Kiran Desai and Mistry focus once again shifts to the cosmopolitan location of both the literary artist and his language.

As has been said above, Ashcroft et al find the original basis of postcolonial writings in the desire for a national literature and as discussed in the previous chapter most postcolonial works of literature have been actually understood as national allegories. Mistry, it is true, does deal with the national experience. Yet, for a writer of ethnic and religious minority writing from Canada, the narration of nation in English language gives rise to several important questions. Although, there are similarities in works of postcolonial literature in English at the levels of theme and narrative, yet the concerns of writers writing from settler colonies and invaded colonies or from the peculiar situation of South Africa and the Caribbean cannot be equated. While for Naipaul the theme of exile may be very important, for a writer like Mistry, with his consciousness of marginality in the postcolonial space and his diasporic status, the priorities are different.
The nativization of English, in more intense forms, continues to be an important literary strategy in contemporary writers also. But, particularly in the context of present day writers like Mistry, an important question that needs to be asked is whether the appropriated English of Raja Rao and R.K.Narayan from being a marginal and peripheral mode of writing has not now been imported through further appropriations to the centre enjoying the accoutrements of a privileged form of literature. Is there not a reversal in the status of English and englishes?

The present study has tried to establish that for Mistry – a writer of Parsi lineage and diasporic credentials – choice of English as a medium of writing comes naturally. The general advantages of English use have been discussed in detail by Braj B. Kachru who speaking about the relevance of the English language in the present times writes:

The English language is a tool of power, domination and elitist identity, and of communication across continents. Although the era of the ‘White man’s burden’ has practically ended in a political sense, and the Raj has retreated to native shores, the linguistic and cultural consequences of imperialism have changed the global scene. The linguistic ecology of, for example, Africa and Asia is not the same. English has become an integral part of this new complex sociolinguistic setting. (291)

After accepting this as a pragmatic view of linguistic landscape, one has to look for more reasons that are behind Mistry’s choice of English. As has been shown above, Parsis despite their reluctant assimilation in the general Indian and particularly Gujarati culture and language became an anglicized community during the colonial
times. English and Gujarati remained their preferred medium of communication. Again, as discussed in chapter two, Parsis had been writing in English right from the early period of the appearance of Parsi literature in India. In the postcolonial times with migrations to the West becoming common, for a writer like Mistry, the indispensability of English acquires an even more natural aspect. However, it remains to be seen in what ways and through which aesthetic and linguistic adjustments does Mistry develop his idiom. The second and more important question of audience in neo-liberal times also needs to be studied in order to form an estimate of Mistry’s choice of English as a medium of narration.

Taking up the question of Parsis as an anglicized community first, one can find ample pieces of evidence to suggest that Parsis have retained several traits of the English way of life. Gustad in Such a Long Journey is popular for his renditions of Sir Harry Lauder’s “Roamin’ in the Glaomin’” and “I Love a Lassie” in the canteen sessions (71). In domestic life also it is quite natural for them to show a fondness for English songs and verses. On the occasion of Roshan’s birthday merriment is linked to the recital of a comic verse of a Victorian nature titled “Donkey’s Serenade” and there is a formal singing of “I wish you health” (44-46). Such examples occur at regular intervals in the portraiture of the domestic life of the Parsis.

Thus, while there is a clear endeavour to foreground the religious elements of Parsi identity in all the three texts, the presence of English traits in their ethnic identity also find adequate representation making English the natural medium of expression of Parsi narratives. While choosing the realistic mode of narration, Mistry’s novels involve visible adjustments in narration and language while
describing different socio-cultural experiences. It is obvious that Mistry’s English is appropriated and indigenized. Yet, this indigenization is not simplistic or limited to the authorial persona. As Mistry traverses across several worlds in a heterogeneous society, the words he selects become the markers of cultural traits of the juxtaposed cultural and religious groups. As the novels move in and out of Parsi enclosures for the dual narration of Parsi life and life in urban and rural India there are changes both in the narrative voice and in the quality of dialogue as well as the tone of the narrative. It is the objective of the present chapter to read these shifts so as to understand the nature of appropriation of English in the novels of Mistry.

It is important to note that these tonal shifts are often linked with approval and disapproval. It is interesting to note the different ways in which indigenized cadences overlap with vernacular expressions of both Hindi and Marathi and how the essential Parsi love for English gets articulated through characters like Nariman Vakeel who is a retired professor of English and has a fondness of punning or through freely mixed Hindi/English in the ribaldry of Dinshawji. As the novels are also a medium of Parsi cultural, ethic and religious self assertion, the incorporation of Parsi expressions drawn from religious and ethnic vocabulary are also made integral to the narrative. Parsis’ disapproval of social and political world of postcolonial India is most strongly expressed through the liberal use of almost conventional denotations of third world ugliness, expletives and scatological descriptions. The dominant Maratha character of the social world of Bombay is also brought out through the articulations of the taxi operators, market vendors, fellow passengers and public officers.
Indigenized cadences of the dialogue between members of the family accord with the desire in postcolonial writings for an altered language adjusted to the need of delineating the reality of cultures and societies outside the Western world. In Mistry’s case this technique coheres with his artistic objective to project an obscure and gangrenous form of life in social, economic, linguistic and cultural senses in postcolonial India. The appropriation and indigenization of the English language theorized in great detail in *Empire Writes Back* as an important tool against the hegemonic colonial discourse is re-appropriated by Mistry for the dual objective of placing it – at least at an overt level – in opposition of the West but more importantly to employ it to write a minor discourse from the perspective of a community which has retained its elitism but also has lately gained a consciousness of marginality. Gyan Parkash in his *Postcolonial Criticism and Indian Historiography* tries to provide the lineaments of such a historiography. These accounts of history in the postcolonial paradigm according to him.

…seek to undo the Eurocentrism produced by the institution of the west’s trajectory, its appropriation of the other as History. It does so, however, with the acute realization that postcoloniality is not born and nurtured in a panoptic distance from history. The postcolonial exists as an after – after being worked over by colonialism. Criticism occupies a space that is neither inside nor outside the history of western domination but in a tangential relation to it” (8).

The first noticeable feature of Mistry’s narrative is his clear attempt at cultural self preservation. Gustad, the protagonist of *Such a Long Journey*, sets the tone for
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this theme by musing about the loss of tradition. He is clearly apprehensive about the prospect of breaking away from the past. He says, “If tradition was lost, then the loss of respect for those who respected and loved tradition always followed” (61). It is in line with the desire for asserting and preserving Parsi cultural and religious identity that Gujarati and Hindi expressions of Parsi dialect and terms related with Parsi religion and rituals are liberally used. Gustad’s family in Such a Long Journey follows a Parsi way of life and Gustad is a practising Parsi. This is reflected in the early morning rituals, the kusti and the prayer to Ahura Mazda and the loban thurible after the evening prayer. Parsi rituals particularly in Such a Long Journey are interwoven in the narrative. The novel opens with an elaborate presentation of Gustad performing his morning rituals: “Gustad Noble while he softly murmured his prayers ... recited the appropriate sections and unknotted the kusti from around his waist. When he had unwound all nine folds of its slim, sacred, hand-woven length, he cracked it, whip-like: once, twice, thrice. And thus was Ahriman, the evil one, driven away – with that expert flip of the wrist, possessed only by those who performed their kusti regularly” (4, italics in original). Even Coomy, the unkindly step daughter of Nariman is shown praying the Aiwisruthrem Geh (Family Matters190). There is an unambiguous attempt at educating the reader about the terms and meanings connected with Parsi religious practice. Dilnavaz performs Owaaryoo – god forbid – to ward off evil every time something unpleasant is said. Casual expressions and household language are also sprinkled with words connected with Parsi religion. The stench that rises while burning the nails of Tehmul on burning pieces of coal seems to Dilnavaz like “the smell of devil himself, from the depths of dojukh” (153, italics in original). The reference to the well practiced wrist of Nariman quoted above evokes an almost
obvious comparison with satirical references to Raza Hyder’s *gatta* bruise in Rushdie’s *Shame*. The description of the religious figure Maulana Dawood’s senile dementia in *Shame* would almost read as blasphemous:

...the Maulana took to tottering around town ... intoning verses from the Quran in an Arabic which the loss of his reason led him to adulterate with other, coarser dialects; and in the grip of that senility which made him imagine that he saw the peaks of faraway Abu Qubais, Thabir and Hira behind the town, and which led him to mistake a bicycle factory for the cemetery in which the Prophet’s wife lay buried ... He was a mad old man asking the way to Kaaba, a bearded fool in his second childhood who prostrated himself outside fish-shops as if they were the holy places of Mecca and yelled ‘Ya Allah.’ In the end his body was brought back to Hyder residence on a donkey-cart, whose puzzled owner said that the old fellow had expired with the words, ‘There it is – And they are covering it with shit.’(205-6)

The instances from Mistry and the passage quoted above are examples of appropriation of English. Mistry’s objective in using religious expressions, in contrast with Rushdie, is preservation of a threatened way of life and a valorization of Parsi religious identity. Yezad, in *Family Matters*, is not a religious person and turns to religion as a way of resolving his economic and personal problems. However, even he is deeply conscious of the family religion. He remembers how his father used to say at the end of the stories he told him, “*Remember your kusti prayers: manashni, gavashni, kunashni – good thoughts, good words, good deeds...*” (375, italics in original). Nariman and his daughter Roxanna in *Family Matters* carry on the tradition of telling stories and introducing the children to Parsi religion and mythology. Telling
about Parsi figures from Parsi mythology and folklore they tell them stories from the *Shah-Nama*; stories of King Jamsheed, Rustam and Sohrab, King Gustasp and Prophet Zarathustra as also of Zuhaak the Evil One.

The tenacity of consciousness of religious and ethnic difference is also borne out by the fact that none of the Parsi characters in any of the novels have a Hindu or Maharashtrian friend. Whereas Nariman’s amorous relation with a Goan Christian becomes the cause of his unhappy life, Gustad’s friendship with Malcolm Saldanha rests on their common interest in music and preference for beef. However, Gustad does not take his friend Malcolm’s attempt at introducing him to Catholicism as something innocuous.

But he was on his guard, conditioned as he had been from childhood to resist the call of other faiths. All religions were equal, he was taught; nevertheless, one had to remain true to one’s own because religions were not like garment styles that could be changed at whim or to follow fashion. His parents had been painstaking on this point, conversation and apostasy being as rife as it was, and rooted in the very history of the land. (24)

When Malcolm says that Apostle Thomas landed on the coast of India long before the Parsis, he replies quoting Parsi History.

> but our prophet Zarathustra lived more than fifteen hundred years before your Son of God was even born; a thousand years before the Buddha; two hundred years before Moses. And do you know how much Zoroastrianism influenced Judaism, Christianity, and Islam? (*Such a Long Journey* 24)

Yezad’s children, Jehangir and Murad, celebrate Christmas less as a matter of faith and more as a form of entertainment and make believe. “In a way, thought
Jehangir, the Santa clans story was like the Famous Five books. You knew none of it was real, but it let you imagine there was a better world somewhere” (373).

Although there are instances of humour at the expense of the stereotype of the Parsi Bawa as when Dinshawji jokes about his famous proboscis, there is in the narrative a sustained effort to valorise Parsi identity. In more general terms Parsis are shown to be good humoured and upright. Humour too is seen as integral to Parsi outlook. Nariman has a special fondness for puns and his conversations are interspersed with an intelligent play with language. A fine example of his habit of punning could be when in a rather serious mood Yezad is discussing his desertion by his step children, Jal and Coomy, and his recalcitrant fracture in the leg:

“I wonder what would happen if you demanded to go back,” said Yezad. “It’s your home, after all. You should put your foot down, chief, just to see what they do.” “If I could put my foot down, everything would be fine” Said Nariman with a wry smile.” (121)

As a retired professor of English he is more than able to exploit the dual meanings associated with certain expressions. Although, Family Matters is a tragic novel Nariman’s punning is like a continual trickling of humour. In Such a Long Journey, Dinshawji acts as the personification of Parsi love for humour. At Roshan’s birthday party and in the office, particularly in his flirtations with the typist at his office, Laurie Cautino, he gives ample proof of his humour. His sexual innuendos with Laurie also exemplify Parsi love for them. Even when Dinshawji is on his deathbed in the hospital and Gustad comes to visit him they do no let their conversations become morbid. They even joke about Dinshawji’s interest in the nurse on night duty.
He describes the nurse on duty in the following words: “Have you seen her? Real futaakro. My Lady with the Lamp. She can borrow by candle any time her lamp is out of order” (238). The examples above, whether related to religion or to the ethnic or cultural traits, have an invariable sprinkling of the Parsi dialect. The appropriation, as mentioned above, is far removed from the generalized idea of appropriation promulgated by writers like Raja Rao. In a way, the use of such expressions and words is done to breach the homogenization imposed by the category of Indian literature.

Another aspect of Parsi identity which is clearly brought out is their patriotism which is also shown to be integral to their personality. Mention has already been made in chapter three of the feeling of patriotism which drives Gustad and Dinshawji to the reckless enterprise of helping Bilimoria is the surreptitious game of depositing and withdrawing the siphoned off money. Dinshawji’s reaction when Gustad confides in him his plan to help the Major is described in these words, “At the end, Dinshawji was so inspired, he would have agreed to join a bayonet charge against Pakistani soldiers. ‘Absolutely, yaar. One hundred percent we will help the Major. Somebody has to do something about those bastard butchers’” (Such a Long Journey 144-5). The same patriotism is demonstrated by a minor character like Inspector Bamji when the war with Pakistan breaks out. Yet here again the expression of patriotism is couched in what can be understood as Parsi dialect of English. After a flurry of abuses in reaction to Pakistan’s bombing of Indian airfields, he ends up showing faith in Indian retaliation, “Now they will be clean bowled – off stump, middle stump, leg stump – nothing left standing” (Such a Long Journey 295). Dr. Paymaster also betrays a
similar sense of patriotism. When Gustad goes to him to give him the good tiding that
the condition of his sick daughter, Roshan, is improving, they share their happiness
over the Indians inching close to victory in Bangladesh. Dr. Paymaster’s comments
are a good example of all the Parsi traits - humour, patriotism and fondness for
figurative speech:

“Wonderful news, wonderful,” said Dr. Paymaster. ‘And the other
patient is also recovering Wonderful.

‘Other Patient?’

‘Bangladesh.’ The waiting room was empty; he had time on his hands.

‘Correct diagnosis is half the battle. Proper prescription, the other half.

Injection of the Indian Army, I said. And so the critical moment is past. Road
to recovery.” (305)

Again, Dinshawji on being jocularly called a poet laureate corrects in a
rejoinder says, “Laureate-Baureate nothing, I am a son of Mother India.”(47) Chapter
three of this study refers to Kanaganayakam to say that Mistry’s characters are types
that show very limited capacity to evolve. Her argument seems to be justified by the
averments of Parsi characters discussed above. Mistry’s astute appropriation of
English creates the stereotype of the Parsi which in equal measure can be understood
as renewal, redemption and assertion of the collective Parsi identity.

Whereas, the valorization of Parsi religious and ethnic identity is one of the
objectives of Mistry’s texts; the critique of the political and social world is equally
important. Mistry’s texts are built around a tension between the world of the Parsis
and the outside social and political world. A few examples from the texts under study
can be taken as examples of the general disapproval of the social landscape and the political climate. The different worlds of “Sakarams and Dattarams and Tukarams” and the “Parsi crow-eaters” although not marked by ferocious acrimony are nevertheless characterized by reciprocal unease (Such a Long Journey 39-40).

Gustad’s disapproval of the social world of Bombay/Mumbai is evident in his reluctance to venture out of his home. The set of passages cited below demonstrate the shifts in the use of language and the nature of appropriations with the shift in focus towards the socio-political world of Bombay/Mumbai. The description of the Crawford market where Gustad has to sometimes unwillingly go is an example of the disapproval of the society. Gustad has a general fear of Crawford Market. It was a place “he despised at the best of times. Unlike his father before him, who used to relish the trip and looked at it as a challenge: to venture boldly into the den of scoundrels, as he called it; then to badger and bargain with the shopkeepers, tease and mock them, their produce, their habits, but always preserving the correct tone that trod the narrow line between badinage and belligerence; and finally, to emerge unscathed and triumphant, banner held high, having got the better of the rogues. Unlike his father, who enjoyed this game, Gustad felt intimidated by Crawford Market” (Such a Long Journey 20).

Yet, the gaping distance between the present and the past becomes apparent to Gustad as he broods over the changed circumstances:

Perhaps it was due to their different circumstances: his father accompanied by at least one servant, arriving and leaving by taxi; Gustad alone, with his meager wallet and worn basket lined with newspaper to soak
up meat juices that could start dripping in the bus, causing embarrassment or, worse still, angry protests from vegetarian passengers. Through out the trip he felt anxious and guilty – felt that in his basket was something deadlier than a bomb. For was he not carrying the potential source of Hindu-Muslim riots? (21)

The mention of riots in the context of the simple act of carrying a packet of meat home almost immediately exposes the link between personal and social insecurities. The adulation for the good Parsi appears to make a clear contrast with the people and the world of Bombay/Mumbai. The narrative reserves the bitterest tone for the description of the squalid surroundings, the corrupt political classes and the cultural policing of the Shiv Sena at the local level. The topic of Shiv Sena comes up in almost all the confabulations in family gatherings. In Family Matters when the family gathers for Nariman’s birthday, there is a satirical reference to hypocrisy in the Shiv Sena’s cultural agenda which after objecting to everything perceived to be alien to Maratha culture does not see anything wrong in having a Michael Jackson concert in Bombay/Mumbai.

“Well,” said Yezad. “Michael Jackson’s crotch-clutching and his shiny codpiece must be vital to the nation. I’m surprised the Senapati doesn’t find him anti-anything, not even anti-good taste. Otherwise, the crackpot accuses people left and right of being anti-this and anti-that. South Indians are anti-Bombay, Valentine’s Day is anti-Hindustan, film stars born before 1947 in the Pakistani part of Punjab are traitors to the country.” (32)
At yet another place there is a rueful mention of the name policing when a
usually comic Dinshawji laments the change of names of famous places in
Bombay/Mumbai

“No, Gustad,” Dinshawji was very serious. ‘You are wrong. Names are
so important. I grew up on Lamington Road. But is has disappeared, in its
place is Dadasaheb Bhadkhamkar Marg. My school was on Carnac Road.
Now suddenly it’s on Lokmanya Marg...So what happens to the life I have
lived? Was I living the wrong life, with all the wrong names?’ (Such a Long
Journey 74)

As the need to assert Parsi identity recedes to the background language gets
adjusted to communicate the experience of the socio-political world from the
perspective of a minority. However, the severest expressions are used when the
mention of Indira Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru are made. Sohrab’s and Dinshawji’s
denunciation of the dynastic rule of father and daughter quoted in chapter three can
also be taken as examples of adjustments in narration and language. As these passages
suggest, the liberal incorporation of expletives in family badinage is very common
when the subject is political corruption and misrule.

Sohrab’s remarks on Mrs Indira Gandhi’s regime, made during casual family
discussions, are particularly bitter and acerbic. After coming to know of the letter
from Major Billimoria asking Gustad’s help in a secret mission against Pakistan, he
reminds his father that the same Major used to say that India had just two ways of
saving itself: “communism or military dictatorship, if you want to get rid of these...
crooks. Forget democracy for a few years, not meant for a starving country” (Such a
Long Journey 68).
In a rather sarcastic manner Sohrab narrates how the Prime Minister’s son was favoured with a car manufacturing license. Referring to the Prime Minister’s son he says, “He said Mummy, I want to make motorcars. And right away he got the licence. He has already made a fortune from it, without producing a single Maruti. Hidden in Swiss bank accounts” (66). Young and rebellious Sohrab, regularly, through his comments on the political regime expresses his disgruntlement with the rampant corruption and nepotism. On another occasion when Dinshawji and Gustad are ruminating on what to do with the money sent by Billimoria, Sohrab proposes that since, “Jimmy Uncle says it is government money … let’s spend it on all the things government is supposed to do. Wouldn’t it be nice to fix the sewers in this area, install water tanks for everyone, repair …” (121). When the Major in his letter reveals that he is an agent of RAW, an intelligence agency, Sohrab immediately debunks it as the handmaiden of the Prime Minister. Sohrab is unrelenting in his criticism, “Our wonderful Prime Minister uses RAW like a private police force, to do all her dirty work” (93).

Sohrab also makes a mention of the “chemical elections” in which chemically treated ballots were used to influence the outcome. At one point in the narrative there is an account of the Lal Bahadur Shastri’s mysterious death at Tashkent. It is alleged that his death was the result of a conspiracy either by the Pakistanis, Russians or by the supporters of Mrs Indira Gandhi with the aim of continuing the “dynastic-democratic dream” of Jawaharlal Nehru (Such a Long Journey 114). At a later point it is even insinuated that Indira Gandhi’s husband Feroze Gandhi’s death was linked to Nehru’s dislike of him. This comes from the mouth of Dilnavaz, “And before that,
when her father was still alive, there was poor Feroze Gandhi. Nehru never liked him from the beginning.” Dinshawji corroborates her suspicion, “Even today, people say Feroze’s heart attack was not really a heart attack” (197). Such remarks by the characters are reflective of the disenchantment of the characters with the political classes that are perceived to be corrupt and self-serving. Moreover, they breed a sense of alienation in the consciousness of the two generations of Parsi characters.

By his employment of simple transparent language, Mistry indulges in a Naipaul-like debunking of the civic sense of the citizens of post-colonial societies and their inability to self-regulate their conduct in the broader context of health and hygiene of the society. General and pervading neglect of civic amenities in Mumbai due to the callousness of the public as much as of the authorities gets clearly highlighted in his texts. In Such a Long Journey the contours of the outside world also materialize gradually in pointed references to the inefficient government office of food supplies, the slums of Bombay and the rising prices. The common people whose incivility receives an essentialized depiction in their compulsive habit of urinating and defecating in the open near the wall of Khodadad building show abysmal standards of civic etiquette. The area where Dr. Paymaster’s clinic is situated is a place which has changed from an unassuming and poor neighbourhood to a hub of commerce. Unplanned progress and commercial activity has changed the face of the place where a barefooted person has to “skip and hop over grease slicks, oil puddles, razor-sharp fins of broken cooling coils, and long, twisting snakes of vulcanized rubber disgorged by tyre retreaders” (155). The last are often mistaken for snakes during naagpanchmi
time. The political leaders on their part merely offer “wordy anodynes which mitigated no one’s suffering” (155).

This attitude is also typified, more that anything else, in the descriptions of the Bombay/Mumbai roads. These read like a typical West oriented representation of the Indian society which is selective in its focus. The writer, at one point in the narrative, describes the movement of traffic through a flurry of adjectives as “buzzing, humming, honking, complaining, screeching, rattling, banging, screaming, throbbing, rumbling, grumbling, sighing, never-ending” one (Such a Long Journey, 73). The noisome descriptions of the petrol and diesel fumes mixed with rain, throbbing traffic which lay like “a soporous monster on the shiny wet surface…” precedes the accident in which Gustad injures his leg while saving Sohrab (Such a Long Journey 57).

Thus, in terms of appropriation of language, the medium of expression of all the three texts is subjected to strategic adjustments. While indigenization through the induction of expressions connected with Parsi life form one form of appropriation, the narrative takes a diametrically opposite direction by adopting an almost Orientalist tone when dealing with life outside the Parsis enclosures. This aspect is most prominently visible in A Fine Balance a major part of which deals with life of lower caste rural India and the slums.

In A Fine Balance one of the slum dwellers Rajaram sounding a note of pessimism and hopelessness informs the new comers Ishwar and Om that such a world offers no possibility of escape. The description of what can be described as the underbelly of Bombay/Mumbai assumes even more dark shades as compared to the
other two texts. He regards his surroundings, “taking in the squalid hutments, the ragged field, the huge slum across the road wearing its malodorous crown of cooking smoke and industrial effluvium” and explains, “who wants to live like this? … But sometimes people have no choice. Sometimes the city grabs you, sinks its claws into you, and refuses to let go” (A Fine Balance 172). The mandatory and stock expressions which have by now become a discourse in themselves consisting of words denoting ugliness and squalor are optimally utilized. Ishwar and Om accompany the experienced Raja Ram through “foul-smelling stream, greyish yellow trickle through the mounds, carrying a variety of floating waste in its torpid flux” where “the left side is for ladies only” in search for “a suitable spot” in the “communal toilet”(168-169). The ritual of open air defecation, as if it is the most glorious aspect of the narrative, is described in three pages.

The part of the narrative which deals with the life of rural India has been a subject of much criticism. Mistry’s lack of familiarity and intimacy with such a setting can be easily understood through a contrast with the narrative dealing with Parsi life and Bombay/Mumbai.

The news of a second son created envy in upper-caste homes where marriages had also taken place around the time Dukhi and Roopa were wed ... The remedy, the Pandits advised, was to be more vigilant in the observance of the dharmic order ... After this consensus was reached, the village saw a sharp increase in the number of floggings meted out to members of the untouchable castes ... The crimes were varied and imaginative; a Bhungi had dared to let
his unclean eyes meet Brahmin eyes; a Chamaar had walked on the wrong side
of the temple road and defiled it ... (100-101)

The excessive burden of showing the darker aspects of a caste-ridden rural
India makes the narrative different from less simplistic and less one dimensional ones
like that of writers like Arundhati Roy. Unlike a specific and concretely located
account of Bombay/Mumbai where the historical lineaments are clearly defined, the
picture of rural India is undifferentiated and abstract as an account of any place as
every place. Mistry also uses dialogue to make his socio-political critique explicit.
The dialogue is exactly in line with the one dimensional picture of rural life that
Mistry paints. The conversation that takes place in the volatile times before the
partition between Dukhi and is friends is illuminating:

‘The zamindars have always treated us like animals.’

‘Worse than animals.’

‘But what if it’s true? What if the Mussulman horde sweeps down
upon our village, like the khaki pants told us?’

‘They have never bothered us before. Why would they do it now? Why
should we hurt them because some outsiders come with stories?’

‘Yes, it’s strange that suddenly we have all become Hindu brothers.’

‘The Muslims have behaved more like our brothers than the bastard
Brahmins and Thakurs’. (123)

Moreover, the narratives seem to vacillate between particularist and
universalist positions. Interspersed with the accounts of Parsi life, socio-political life
of Bombay/Mumbai, a rather abstracted account of rural India is a kind of
universalism. The narrative voice shows a fondness for sacrificing and overcoming the historical detail created by itself in favour of a traditional and liberal humanist universalism. The metaphor of the quilt in *A Fine Balance* is an attempt to surpass the story of the different forms of suffering due to varied social and political causes and to create a bond of a higher level which unites the various characters as human beings subjected to struggle for existence and to a life which is a mixture of joy and sorrow. Just before Om and Ishwar depart to meet the prospective brides, the entire household sits like a family and links the various swatches to the episodes in their lives when that part of the quilt was added to the total scheme. The counterpane, at one level, becomes a symbol of life where one is bound to accept joy and pain:

Ishwar leaned over to indicate a cambric square. ‘See this? Our house was destroyed by the government, the day we started on this cloth. Makes me feel sad whenever I look at it.’

‘Get me the scissors,’ she joked. ‘I’ll cut it out and throw it away.’

‘No no, Dinabai, let it be, it looks very nice there.’ His fingers stroked the cambric texture, recapturing the time. ‘Calling one piece sad is meaningless. See, it is connected with a happy piece – sleeping on the verandah.’ … He stepped back, pleased with himself, as though he had elucidated an intricate theorem. ‘So that’s the rule to remember, the whole quilt is much more important than any single square.’” (490)

Another passage from *Family Matters* which is symptomatic of this attitude articulated this time through Mr. Kapur can be cited here:
Everyone underestimates their own life. Funny thing is, in the end, all our stories – your life, my life, old Hussain’s life, they’re the same. In fact, no matter where you go in the world, there is only one important story: of youth, and loss, and yearning for redemption. So we tell the same story, over and over. Just the details are different. (228)

It is apparent that Mistry is writing in an advanced age when the opinions about the possibilities of appropriation have to be revised. His texts are burdened with the responsibility of redefining the relationship of language to the representation of native experience under a set of new compulsions and imperatives brought into existence by the new political and economic imperial centres. Although, his texts carry projections of subversiveness but as has been said before the question of resistance and subversion cannot be dealt with unidimensionally. One of Mistry’s main objectives is to expose the imperfections and the political excesses of moral, economic and social nature that become possible in postcolonial nation-states. For ethnic and religious minorities the nation remains one of the new imperial centres as it replicates with greater ruthlessness the homogenizing and oppressive character of the colonial regime. In this Mistry succeeds to a considerable degree.

Ngugi’s radical rejection of English as a result of his anti-colonial consciousness and of the complicity of language and pedagogy with colonialism obviously would have little relevance for a writer like Mistry. Ngugi’s desire for decolonization through abolition of colonial language and as a means of cultural reclamation and political freedom is one of the stances in postcolonial discourse from which Mistry’s writings would have to be differentiated. Mistry’s novels can be more
open to the charge of orientalizing postcolonial indigenous reality than being an outcome of a cultural enterprise imbued with a sense of regional and national consciousness. The engagement of contemporary novel with the colonial experience is negligible. In Mistry the obliteration of colonial experience is in fact disturbing.

In the sense of writing back to the Empire his novels can be seen as writing not purely with the oppositional consciousness of anti-colonial nature or with a desire for native self-assertion. Mistry creates an ecriture that aims to delineate indigenous social and political reality from the perspective of an ethnic and religious minority. It is however also true that Mistry claims the privileges of the elitism associated with postcolonial literature being produced from the West. As has been discussed above, his texts show conspicuous signs of making themselves suitable for cosmopolitan consumption, both through ideological positioning and choice of language.

The distinction between English as the colonial language and english/es of the postcolonial novel as proposed by Ashcroft can be understood to have some relevance to Mistry’s writings although with a few improvisations. Ashcroft’s thesis involves finding common traces in the linguistic features of the englishes that are produced from the peripheries and that assert difference with the English of the imperial centre. With the postcolonial novel attaining rapid ascendency in the globalized world, however, this thesis can be doubted. The postcolonial novel, in the present times occupies too central a place in the global publishing industry and with the massive business possibilities it engenders it cannot simplistically be accorded the status of literature from the peripheries. The political function of such novel transcends a simplistic binary of the imperial centre and the postcolonial periphery and demands deeper critical scrutiny. D.E.S Maxwell’s thesis about the relocation of the colonized through the postcolonial text is expressed by Ashcroft et al in the following word,
A valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by *dislocation*, resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation, or ‘voluntary’ removal for indentured labour. Or it may have been destroyed by *cultural denigration*, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model. The dialectic of place and displacement is always a feature of post-colonial societies whether these have been created by a process of settlement, intervention, or a mixture of the two. Beyond their historical and cultural differences, place, displacement, and a pervasive concern with the myths of identity and authenticity are a feature common of all post-colonial literatures in English. (cited in *Empire* 9)

The orthodoxy of understanding postcolonial literature built around an opposition of the colonizer and the colonized and the recovery of a lost self, although an important feature of all postcolonial literature and integral to the creation of English, has to be transcended in order to accurately construe and absorb recent postcolonial literature. The engagement of recent postcolonial writings is more with what can be described as nationalist concerns and it can be subsumed under that larger rubric, racist and communalist orthodoxies. But, as has been seen in the case of Mistry, these articulations are almost invariably contingent on the kind of location from where they are made. The relevance of the use of English thus can be arrived at after making several adjustments. The credentials of the works of Mistry, Rushdie and Naipaul may be superficially national but they accompany the centre-staging of Englishes on the global scale.
Ashcroft et al too hint at the difficulty of delimiting postcolonial writings to a nationalist discourse when they write in *Empire Writes Back*:

Nationalism has usually included a healthy repudiation of British and US hegemony observable in publishing, education, and the public sponsorship of writing. Yet all too often nationalist criticism, by failing to alter the terms of the discourse within which it operates, has participated implicitly or even explicitly in a discourse ultimately controlled by the very imperial power its nationalist assertion is designed to exclude. Emphasis may have been transferred to the national literature, but the theoretical assumptions, critical perspectives, and value judgements made have often replicated those of the British establishment. (17)
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