A writer enjoys wide choices in manner of expression by arranging the shape of his linguistic surface. The choices he makes, powerfully affect perspective upon meaning by directing our attention to the context and the structure of the depicted world of his fiction. By transforming his deep structures into surface structures, into a particular mode, he radically modifies the reader's apprehension of the meaning of the text. The compositional structure of a text can be realized in and studied in the narrative and speech events of the discourse of the text.

A writer's choice of lexis and patterns of language encode his socio-linguistic backgrounds. Linguistic choices in the text correlate with systems of experience and values that the writer shares with his readers.

By analyzing exchange frames it is possible to observe how fictional characters are clusters of semes drawn from various codes; that they are a construction of roles acquired, through the process of socialization. The cumulative and consistent options of a writer, present his mode of perceiving the world and give rise to an impression of a world view. The writer's habitual perspective on
"reality" are a consequence of his place in the socio-economic structure and the influence of social structure also operates to encode these cognitive habits in typical patterns of language usage. Social forces not only form the "context" of the text but are directly involved in its ultimate shaping and functioning.

In adopting the fictional mode, Mukherjee, Rushdie, Dhondy and Kanga operate within the structural framework of speech events and narrative. The proportion of narrative to speech events varies from author to author, text to text. It may be assumed that the organisation of narrative vis a vis speech event is governed by concerns structural rather than thematic.

A random sampling of every 15th page in each of the texts reveals that the incidence of speech events is at a maximum in Kanga (235 pages) and at a minimum in Rushdie. Out of the 15 tabulated instances in the former, thirteen are speech event frames each running into the entire page, sometimes one is an instance of narrative and only, one incorporate narrative in a partial way. In the Satanic Verses, out of thirty three instances (the text is 547 pages in all) thirty are instances of narrative, three instances incorporate both narrative and dialogue and none which is an instance of speech-event by itself.
On the other hand the range in Mukherjee (240 pages) and Dhondy (316) is not so wide. In the former, out of 16 instances, eleven are narratives and only three are speech events while two incorporate both narrative and dialogue. In the latter out of 21 instances twelve are narrative and seven speech events while two incorporate both.

Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, the longest of the four novels selected for scrutiny—runs into 550 pages—has a minimum of verbal exchange frames and a maximum of narrative. Kanga's *Trying to Grow*, on the other hand has the highest incidence of speech exchanges and a minimum of narrative. Mukherji's *Jasminè* and Dhondy's *Bombay Duck* fall roughly halfway between the two polarities: each exhibits a more or less equal proportion of speech exchange and narrative.

Thus in all four novels the ideational content is realized, and carried forward chronologically or in flash back, either through the spoken mode—i.e. speech exchange frames between characters or by means of narrative acts or the written mode. This distinction is drawn from Halliday's frame work where in his *Introduction to Functional Grammar*—1985 (Edward, Arnold) he asserts that the written mode implies a maximum of lexical density and a minimum of grammatical density.
In the spoken mode the ideational content is loosely scattered, and is distributed and thinned out across complex grammatical structures. Since the ideational content is not tightly packed, decoding the text is comparatively easier in the case of speech exchange frames, than in the case of narrative where the lexical density is more complex, partly because a great deal of lexical condensation also involves the use of metaphor. And, as Halliday maintains, since metaphor is to a great extent incongruent use of language, decoding an incongruent or oblique expression is far more challenging and therefore more demanding than the congruent.

The reason why The Satanic Verses is often termed "difficult" "obscure" or even "boring" is because the narrative makes special demands on the reader to decode the dense network of metaphors that span the orient and the occident to create complex patterns - social and linguistic. The infinitely varied encounters are artistically woven into the lexical, metaphorical content of the text.

On the other hand, Kanga's "Trying to Grow" is far more easily accessible, more "readable" because of the sparse quality of narrative. Because the narrator is confined to a wheelchair and his movement restricted to a circumspect locale of a few kilometers - the cross-cultural encounters and experiences are less varied than that in the Satanic
Verses. Because the narrator exists within the cultural ghetto of his island-like Parsee Community, he shares almost a phatic, if not esoteric exchange with the other members of the community with whom he comes into contact and confrontation. Because of physical immobility, the linguistic, verbal interpersonal of the narrator is more heightened and far more acute and this is reflected in the high incidence of speech exchange frames that are almost elliptical in nature. Thus in the case of this novel the grammatical complexity and variety is higher and more demanding on the reader in terms of decoding the context, for a lot is left "unsaid" by the characters. A large amount of socio-cultural loading is taken for granted or assumed and this thesis seeks therefore to explicate the illocutionary force as well as the perlocutionary force of the exchanges.

In "Jasmine" the narrator/protagonist having migrated to a foreign culture in the United States, finds herself to be handicapped, in linguistic, not in physical terms. Verbal exchange or linguistic encounters are few and far between, partly because she is an illegal alien who should not be seen, much less heard. Moreover she has yet to acquire the linguistic and culture codes of the new country. While circumstances force her to take physical action or be at the receiving end of others' actions, she is less required to
interact verbally. Jasmine's socio-cultural predicament enforces a linguistically near-mute existence on her. While the narrative assumes a high incidence of physical mobility, this is adequately reflected in the creative structures of the novel, where the incidence of verbal exchange is found to be nominal and narrative at a premium, while in Kanga the pattern is found to be in reverse, partly because for the protagonist, linguistic dexterity is the only mode of mobility: his verbal exchanges are a mode of progression in life. His linguistic mobility is a sure sign of his "growth" - emotional and intellectual.

Speech events constitute two thirds of the text Trying To Grow" by F. Kanga. The fiction, in fact, begins on a note of exchange. Physically confined to a wheel chair, the author more than makes up for the lack of mobility by linguistic agility. His choice of medium turns a pathetic, tragic situation into a comic, ironic comment on life.

"His teeth are like windows," said Father to the old Parsee with the droopy white mustache, sitting next to us on the bus. "You can look through them - see?" Father tried to hold open my mouth. I pretended my lips were sealed with lashings of Stick-Fast. "A rather stubborn four year old you've got there," snorted the old man.

"Four year old? Guess again!"

"Three?"
'Father shook his head. 'He's eight,' he said. The doctor had forgotten to tell us I was going to be a dwarf. I mean, I didn't look like Sneezy or Grumpy or someone - I just forgot to grow.

'Where are you taking him?' asked the old man, a total stranger. Father liked talking on buses; it helped him forget his itch to walk it out.

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Kanga's *Trying to Grow* opens with the above speech event, a casual, but unusual exchange on a bus, between Mr. Kotwal, the protagonist/narrators' father and a total stranger, belonging to the same parsee community. Referring to his little son's osteo condition, the father draws an unusual analogy: he compares the transparent, calcium-deprived teeth to 'windows'. If not exactly a metaphysical conceit, the simile does startle the reader momentarily, and the use of the pronoun 'His' at the very beginning of the conversation heightens the reader's curiosity: does 'His' refer to human or animal? Compounded with the profuse use of lexical items like mouth lips, teeth, the discourse could well be about a little creature. For all we know father could be inviting the stranger on the bus to peer into his lap-dog's mouth, "Father tried to hold open my mouth", and the text could very well be the autobiography of Bonzo in the tradition of 'Black Beauty'. By starting the first sentence with a 'pronoun' Kanga establishes successfully his distance from the protagonist, Brit. The use of the 3rd
person singular also enables the protagonist to distance himself from his physical disability. By dramatically objectifying the osteo-condition in this exchange frame, which is not without its amusing moments, Kanga sets the tone of the text as well as the pace at which events move. Father's follow-up to the first statement is an interesting linguistic act, "you can look through them, see?" While the sentence is in the present tense, the hyphen lends a surprising sense of the now and the immediate. By beginning the speech event in the present tense and building it up like wise in the same tense, Kanga creates a theatrical effect by involving the reader, instead of merely telling him about the osteo-problem. In fact the narrative past tense is sparingly used by Kanga, all through the text. The reader is action-oriented from the word go, a foreshadowing of the linguistic trapeze act by which the protagonist/narrator flings himself and takes the reader along too.

The exchange frame also seeks to highlight the interactions of the father and son. Neither complaining nor apologetic about his son's handicap, the father is, on the contrary, aggressively on the defensive: Wanting to talk about the problem, showing-off the handicap in detail by prising open his son's mouth. An unmistakable pride in his son's predicament, is very obvious and very parsee in its
perspective. Betraying an almost Jewish pugnacity in the face of adversity and irreverence towards God and prayer; tricked into a corner by fate, he does not hesitate to fight back with grit and humor. It appears to be this grotesque quality of humor, which keeps the protagonist and his family, if not his entire Parsi community, from sinking and from losing their racial identity in the multicultural milieu of India. Kanga is conscious of this fact from his persistent use of the word Parsi as adjective: a qualifying perception to the problem of being 'different' from others in more ways than one.

'How strange you are looking ', like you are big in brain'

'But small in body', I said helpfully.

'Brittle bones but ............ ', "Stout English heart", she said. 'Your accent, your name, your profession - all are English. I attended English medium School in Davier........ Santa Claus", she finished triumphantly.

"What an interesting education you must have had", I said.

"And I married a palestine", she said mournfully.

"How did you meet him?" I asked.

'In Davier. He would come and go. You understand?"

"Oh yes!.

"He was a palestine but my father gave me to him "

'For?"

'For? For what does man give woman to man?"
"I don't know - business?"

"Funny boy. Security, children, sickness, food."

"And after you were given ....... You went to .........?"

"Where?" She asked ominously.

"You know what I mean ....... Haifa, Nablus, Jerusalem." I screamed like only Osteo Man can.

"Are you OK? Are you fine? Are you getting a fit?" She asked, holding my head back like a dentist.

"Yes, I am sorry I talked of those places."

"What places?"

"You know, "P".

"I can't understand you. My poor Daryus used to say, the more brains a man has, the less sense he makes".

"Who was your poor Daryus? that is my real name too".

"Daryus was my mister'

"Your?" mister could only mean the male counterpart of mistress.

"My mister -late Daryus Davierwalla of lamentable memory".

Spouse-Shocked as I was I couldn't smile at that, "But you said ......... he was a palestinian".

"Yes, "She said 'he was'.

"But his name is as parsee as mine".

"Yes he was a parsee palestine. You know what a palestine is, Don't you? A palestine, She said patiently, "Is a man who does not appreciate English Culture"

"Oh, of Course' I breathed,"a Philistine".
In the above speech event the breakdown of communication occurs between two people who belong to a claustrophobic, close-knit community, who are supposed to share the same culture codes:

Mrs. Davier, whom the protagonist, Daryus, visits, resides in the interior in a coastal town with a rural agricultural base, distinctly and disadvantageously different from Bombay - the Mecca of the Parsee community. Placed on the periphery as it were, and not anywhere at the centre of 'the Bombay westernized, anglicized culture, Mrs. Davier's roots and ancestry are mercilessly exposed and made fun of. Referring to Mrs. Davier, Mrs. Kotwal (the protagonist's mother) cautions her son before he sets out on the visit, "Don't go too much with these people, they don't seem very civilized. Singularly lacking in social finesse, ill-equipped with the Bombay metropolitan cultural codes, Mrs. Davier strikes Darayus with a writers' sensibility, as uncouth and loud. The linguist in him is fascinated and wishes "to catch the particular rhythm of her speech, record her strange idiom in my brain to use someday in a story I would write". Overwhelming and familiar, Mrs. Davier crashes through the English language and Darayus' sensibility, to make him wince and cringe with the onslaught of malapropisms.
Floundering in the waters of her superficial knowledge of English history and literature, she invites Darayus' shy but subtle understatement "what an interesting education you must have had". Missing the irony, she interprets the observation as compliment and laments the fact that she married a philistine, "palestine" as she puts it. The intracultural linguistic divide that yawns between the guest and host, assumes hilarious proportions threatening a total breakdown of communication and fellow-feeling. The fact that both the interlocutors choose to use the English language instead of Gujarati, which is the mother tongue, is indicative of the snobbery prevailing in the community. Moreover Mrs. Davier does not easily get access to airing her culture in Davier, so easily and therefore readily pounces on Darayus when the opportunity arises.

Playing within the circumscribed ambience of a close-knit, parochial culture-context, Kanga cleverly exposes the politics of languages and culture through the clever creation of verbal exchanges like the one cited above. Another very graphic instance of a similar kind is the incident of "the Breathing generator". Nick-named thus for her ability to cure osteo patients with electric currents, 'personally generated', Rutty Regina is made the butt of ridicule by the superior, aristocratic Kotwals, who despise her, while they fall for her manipulations.
"As for that generator! She has the least electric presence I've seen in my life".

"I think, murmured Dolly, "She's a dead current. Hey Auntie! Do you think you could generate some power - just enough for our flat"?

"What a pity! this is the first time I have seen the sparks flying from you." "That really extinguished her."

By layering literal meanings with utterance meaning, the author exhausts the semantic and metaphorical connotations of the word 'electric', thereby generating humor and derision. The mimetic mode of the verbal exchange reflects the mannerisms and peccadilloes of the parsee community: the immediate context of culture in which the protagonist, like the author, is imprisoned and survives.

Because three fourths of Trying To Grow is created in the form of verbal exchanges, instead of authorial narrative, as is the Satanic Verses, the metaphors frequent the dialogues as clever word play, elliptical duels, that characters engage in for cultural and linguistic imperatives and empowerment of the self.

The widening disparity between literal meaning and utterance meaning in the exchange frame cited above proves Searle's point that the hearer requires something more than his knowledge of the language, his awareness of the
conditions of the utterance, and the background assumptions that he shares with the speakers (Expression And Meaning Studies In The Theory Of Speech Acts, J.R. Searle P. 95 Ch. IV).

Apart from serving the needs of characterization and explication of themes, verbal exchanges in the novel serve a structural, formal purpose: A constant quick-change wordplay creates a sense of immediacy, of movement and progression. The process of growing up is externalized and can be visible through the linguistic medium, since the physical growth of the principal character is severely restricted, stunted, due to osteo. The verbal exchanges effectively recreate this rapid movement "on wheels", the rapid growth of a precocious, gifted boy, who is not brain-dead, as most people would like to believe. Kanga chooses the exchange frame as a predominant form of writing because it enables him to exhibit his linguistic dexterity and his "growth"-which also constitutes his sole mode of defense against a majority of heterosexual, whole, not-handicapped and non-parshee populations. The Satanic Verses, and Jasmine on the other hand, are weighted down by a maximum of lexical density as if to structurally weigh down the constant motion, movement and "In flight" existence of the characters who are eternally on the go - within the country and across countries. "Scattered as seeds from a pod", 147
these characters have to be anchored and brought down to earth to send roots into new soil - to be rerooted in different cultures. Thus the thematic, contextual demands of the texts dictate the mode or the form and we find the two components, inversely proportionate to one another.

"You left a bus in the middle of Oxford street yesterday, thereby immobilizing the service and the route and half of London's traffic".

I say, "Yeah, the guy called me nigger".

"That's bad but, you are black, aren't you?"

"Sure".

"You ought to adjust the punishment to the offense. You should have turned him off the bus".

"He was the size of a gorilla".

"You should have called for assistance".

"Listen man, I been calling for assistance for the past three hundred years. Nobody came".

-x-x-x-x-x-x-

The immediate context of situation is a bus transport station in London. The officer in charge has been pulling up Gerald, the young defaulter, conductor for having abandoned his post and caused a traffic jam. The interchange is a keen insight into the social scene which is the background reality of the novel. The officer's counter
charge "You are black, aren't you?" is indicative of the fact that he is himself a white Anglo-Saxon, perhaps it is but natural that to him, the insult is not a grave one; He undermines the gravity of it when he says, "You ought to adjust the punishment to the offense". Perhaps the verbal violence is not as serious an offense as, if the assistant had fought physical violence.

The encounter is realized in the text through verbal exchange to shape the reader's sensibility to the background of apartheid and discrimination which forms a continuous back-drop to the theme of multiple cultures and polydialectical voices in the enactment of the Ramayan with an international cast. The individual, personal voice of the aggrieved bus conductor assumes the garb of "History": "I had been calling for assistance for the past three hundred years". The illocutionary force of the sentence turns the locution into a performative act: The conductor is immediately, instantly exonerated: By turning a personal grievance into a generalized racial one, the defaulter has made his point succinctly, graphically. Lexically, the black's use of the word gorilla to describe a large size white, is an interesting unconscious linguistic instance of verbal revenge, because generally it is a qualifying abuse used by whites to describe blacks.
Another underlying cultural state that surfaces is the unstated code of work ethics that are dissimilar to the two cultures: of the white Anglo-Saxon and that of the West-Indian. To the former, a personal grievance should not interfere with one's professional life and if unavoidable, the reaction should be conditioned to the immediate demand of the work in hand. It is inconceivable that a verbal insult should be allowed to disrupt public modes of transport.

On the other hand, the West-Indian prizes personal dignity above professional commitments and takes the action of holding up the bus in Oxford street in keeping with the culture codes of his race and background. A score that should have been settled (according to his employer) outside his professional time, was turned into a public issue, worthy of justice, instantly.

"Raincoat Brigade?"
"Do you know Naipaul on India?"
"Yes" he says as though I have hit him with a cricket bat.
"Look, I'll pay for those".
"Be my guest", I say.
"For someone so smart that's a really stupid thing to do. They have electronic alarms going off if you take the books out of the store".
"Haven't done this for a long time".

"I thought your trade was babies, not books". "What are they for?"

"Just interested. I'm sort of broke at present".

"Silly stunt to pull".

"Great, you saved my life, I can't even buy you a drink".

-x-x-x-x-x-x-

This verbal encounter between Xerxes and Sara is an insight into the typical British understatement: the smooth and suave way of dealing with recalcitrant behaviour. Disapproval of a social aberration is so strategically dealt with, linguistically and pragmatically, that the author recreates a life-like picture of the same in this cross-cultural encounter.

Xerxes, an Indian, true to the prototype is caught shoplifting books, by Sara an acquaintance of his. Sara conceals her surprise and displeasure in the neutral statement "Raincoat Brigade". The two words tell Xerxes that she knows what he is up to, her locuting act is really an illocutionary force. Her innocuous statement protects the stealer from the shop and yet pins him down.

Her next question, both seeks information on Naipaul (She has come to Foyles to look for information on him) but it is also a gentle rebuke to remind Xerxes of Naipaul's
stricture on fellow Indians about their basic dishonesty and singular lack of decency or hygiene. "Do you know Naipaul", is a manner of confronting Xerxes and his lack of ethics. Her disapproval, so subtle, but tellingly conveyed, forces him to be ashamed of his act, and he instantly offers to pay for what he has stolen, when Sara undertakes to foot the bill herself.

Sara does not hesitate to rap him on the knuckles when later she has a dig at his other profession i.e. smuggling babies for adoption. "I thought your trade was babies, not books". She does not allow him to forget the saying, once a thief always a thief.

Past-master in the art of euphemism, Sara, in keeping with the British tradition, manages to uncover the theft, convey her views on the issue, rescue the acquaintance from a tight corner, and still manage not to antagonize him while keeping his self respect intact, all, merely by making a few oblique statements rich in ambiguities and innuendo.

"Why is it called Pooh, if its a bear?"

"Just a funny name, to reverberate in the child's consciousness. I think, the writer got it from his son".

"But pooh is word for shit, isn't it?"

"Not necessarily, that's without an "h".
"So you'd rather be Winnie the Pooh even though you think the kids who come to see it may think you're Winnie the shit".

-x-x-x-x-x-x-

This is a comic interlude that interrupts the serious business of putting up the marathon epic Ramayana with an international cast. The exchange takes place between S.Patel - an Asian, immigrant, Indian in London and Sara Stewart - the white, Scottish chronicler of the novel. The former is a bit-part player in the epic but wishes to opt out because he "don't think its Ramayana the real way". He would rather play Alladin in a christmas pantomime full of characters of an English story childhood.

Sara's attempt to give S. Patel an instant, imitation - English childhood comes up against a peculiar cultural density which neither of the interlocutors are able to overcome, resulting in a hilarious breakdown of communication. In S. Patel's south asian culture there is seldom promotion of Alladin, Winnie the Pooh, Snow white.

Entwined in the linguistic net of his own making S. Patel is unable to overcome the cultural constraints of the word Pooh. Lacking an imaginative dimension, S. Patel is unable to linguistically stretch to make room for yet another connotation of the word Pooh. The verbal exchange,
in addition to realizing the cultural divide is also creating a heightened ironical situation. Being an Asian Indian, he should have felt completely at ease, as a part of the Indian epic Ramayana, from which he would rather opt out! On the contrary he would rather align himself with a culture whose codes he is unsure of and thereby betray a singular lack of comprehension and understanding. Perhaps the colonial constraint on his mind forces him to be pulled in the direction of the British rather than the Indian.

In this verbal exchange, the author very perspicaciously positions the multicultural experience to evince a rare quality of humor. S. Patel prefers to view himself as Winnie the Shit, rather than an Indian mythological figure in an Indian epic. His reluctance to be associated with his homeland also partly rises from the fact that he has not been culturally created in India, but in East Africa, which was once again a British strong-hold in the days of imperialism. The only bond, that somehow held Patel together and prevented him from disintegrating, is the English language which was common to India, Africa and now, Britain. Culturally diffused, S. Patel has not really sent his roots deep down anywhere, and is therefore a confused consciousness, ridiculous in his choices, and tragic in their outcome. Dhondy's choice of the spoken mode (dialogue) rather than narrative, lends the confusion a
certain pace, a process, that is ongoing and unresolved, rather than judgmental.

Unable to comprehend a 'foreign' Ramayana or unlearn native connotations of English phonetic sounds, Patel is portrayed in a pitiable light. Perched, precariously between two cultures he does not really belong to either. Surprisingly his woes are rooted in language and a large part of his grief is language oriented. Once again this verbal exchange proves India-born writer's preoccupations with issues of race, gender, culture as realized through the learning and unlearning of languages and codes and cues.

I tell Anjali I think I fancy duck and she says that's cool.

"How come they selling it so cheap, man?".

"It's your patch, you should know".

When the guy comes I say I'll have this Bombay Duck and the man says, "How many?"

"Just one, Captain, how many you think I want?"

"Your Bombay Duck" and he plops it on the table.

"I said duck, man, not shriveled in-soles".

"We Indians call that duck. Bombay duck".

"Smell like salt fish gone bad".

"That's what it is. Try it".

-x-x-x-x-x-x-
Gerry the West Indian and Anjali from India are looking at a menu in an Indian restaurant in London. When Gerry places an order for Bombay Duck, even Anjali is unaware that the duck is really the name of a fish. Anjali must have consumed it under its regional name Bombil but is ignorant of the English lexis, hence her query about the price: a duck would definitely have incurred a lot more. When Gerry places the order and the waiter asks for the quantity, the gaps in communication begin to show. It is obvious that they are not talking the same language: Gerry takes offense at the waiter’s rather “dumb” inquiring, and shows his annoyance, “how many you think I want?” His impatience turns to exasperation when he sees “Shriveled Soles” instead of a plump bird, “Smells like salt fish gone bad”. The confusion is finally cleared when the waiter asserts the fact that this dried salt fish is called, of all things, a duck. Which is actually, a corruption of the word ‘Dak’ meaning ‘post’ in Hindi. As the author explicates the title of his novel, towards the end, the fish was so called because it was sent out from Bombay on Cargo trains carrying mail. The author uses this name Bombay Duck as a metaphor to expose the role of a single language—English, in a multicultural set up like London. It is also a metaphor for the international production of David Stream’s Ramayana. As S. Patel, a minor character of the cast of the play
complains, it is neither the real Ramayana, nor Indian as Bombay Duck is neither a bird, nor from Bombay.

In the restaurant the waiter and the two customers - Gerry and Anjali, communicate in English, but talk at cross purposes. The incongruity of the situation gives rise to unconscious humor and the verbal exchange realizes very graphically the cross-cultural encounter. Intelligibility breaks down because Gerry is ill-equipped with the cultural semantic code and his impatience could have been interpreted as typical Black aggressiveness by the Asian Indian waiter. Though Anjali is Indian by birth, neither she nor Gerry, who is an outsider, share the common culture codes specific to India and therefore find it difficult to decode the menu, embedded in the language. As a strategy, the writer utilizes this verbal exchange between immigrant minority groups in London to progressively build on the theme of globalization of culture: the predicament of modern man. What surfaces is that communication can be so fragile, it may fracture at the slightest pressure of misunderstanding. Language, and the English language in particular, happens to be the single most common thread stringing people of many nationalities, in metropolises like London or Bombay, together. And since successful communication come to be the key factor of survival in the global context, modern man's happiness or grief rests on acquisition of linguistic and
cross-cultural competence. India born writers, themselves protagonists, actors of this global drama are extremely perceptive about this linguistic phenomena and have voiced it repeatedly in their fictions. That is why, increasingly their thematics too deal with language issues and problems, linguistic. Their acute sensitivity to socio-cultural contexts in the functional use of languages within the global context, differentiates them sharply from writers of a couple of decades earlier. Their distinctness surfaces in their themes as well as in the rendering of these themes.

"What's she want to dress like that for? Why doesn't she wear frocks. She's some kind of memsaheb, isn't She?"

"She's half Indian and she has an Indian man somewhere in Madhya Pradesh. She came to tell me about it".

"Yes, but you go back to England and she goes back to England and then you're alone there, aren't you?"

"There are six crores of people there, Kamala"

She replies in Urdu,"When there can be no evil from any God, then what purpose is there in hiding love from mere humans?"

"You've been memorizing the videos".

"I could be your servant in England".

"Don't talk rubbish and stop being annoyed". I smile.

"I am thinking".

"Tell me what you have thought for tomorrow morning".

"Eggs for breakfast for memsahib, scrambled, fried or haap bwoil and garam garam toast?".

-x-x-x-x-x-x-
In this exchange, Kamala, the live-in maid is jealously possessive of Xerxes, the narrator of the 2nd half of the novel.

Xerxes, the narrator of the 2nd half of the novel, has been amusing himself, whiling away loneliness, in a friend's vacant home, with a brief but heady interlude with the live-in-maid who acts as caretaker in his friend's absence. In a short time Kamala has grown to be possessive and turns jealous when Sonia, Xerxes' ex-girlfriend from U.K. unexpectedly surprises them. Sonia, attired in ethnic chic cannot cast off her accent or intonation as fast as she has her "Frocks". Kamala views her alien presence as a threat to her new found relationship with Xerxes, on two counts, (1) Sonia's half Indian orientation, competes with her Indian self, so that she cannot be dismissed as foreign and therefore morally and culturally to be tolerated as trash. However, much as she may like to dismiss her off as "memsahib" she cannot overcome the fact that the newcomer does not wear frocks. Culturally, Sonia's Indian orientation is a greater threat to Kamala than the fact that she has had an affair with the master in U.K.

Xerxes' placating rejoinder that she had an Indian man in Madhya Pradesh fails to pacify the disconcerted Kamala. Her verbal retaliation is a classic instance of a locuting
act that is actually an illocutious statement, a shrewd but euphemistic stricture passed on the questionable morals of the west. To this Xerxes can voice his annoyance and accuse her of being not original. "You've been memorizing the video". But it is for Kamala to deliver the final Coup de gras as she expresses her thought for tomorrow, not unhumorously, but implied that she will go back to her original position of the Indian servant who takes orders from the "foreign Sahib". Xerxes may not like the idea of taking her to England with him but that does not stop her from flinging English lexis in his face "scrambled, fried or 'haap bwoil!'"

Her clever response is not without wit and her ironic perspective helps her to know her place in the home and in Xerxes' heart but also this illocuting gesture gives her a certain dignity and strength. She may be only a servant and a maid, but in other ways she is his equal and 'hers' too.

Another very revealing, telling context of situation that surfaces through this exchange frame is the fact that Xerxes an Indian male is not really Indian because he chooses to enter into a democratic interchange with the maid that he has seduced. The fact that Kamala could voice her disapproval, is indicative of the liberal attitude to servants on the part of Xerxes. It betrays his western -
oriented humanism and the fact that his training and upbringing have been different. Within a similar situation, a typical Indian male would have used the maid and still treated her as dirt. The very fact that Xerxes in his interpersonal, permits Kamala's reaction and angry verbal rash, is indicative of the temperament of the easy going, generous non-Indian man. Incidentally, he does not forget to mention his gratitude to the woman by gifting her a gold chain which he impressively buys off Sonia to present to Kamala in a very restrained manner in a white, sealed envelope "A flirtation with a gold necklace to pay for it, borrowed from someone I understand better".

"They don't expect envelopes, for Christ's sake". "I have turned English to that extent, I'm afraid".

Though born and brought up in India, Xerxes' training has been western, alien, different. That's why when he learns about Kamala's past, towards the end of the book he cannot help his view "I am a tourist in my own country ".

Ullah says, "You want to be a good muslim. The food is on the house today".

"No, I don't want to be a good muslim, I just want to change my name and if the stars are right, well then, the name is fine with me".

"But muslims, you know, have to go through certain things".
"Ullah, take it easy. Don't dig nothing, right."

"Ali Abdul Rahman, I am digging nothing," he says, "God will not recognize the name".

"That's easy", I say, "Don't bother your little head. When I was a child in Jah, they had to do something to me. The damn thing swelled up and they had to cut something off, so I suppose its in line with the dealings".

"Properly cut?"

"Don't know" I said, "Have a look, tell me if its a deal".

"That'll be all, Ullah" I said and I put it away, "Thanks for the meal".

"Rahman means full of mercy and love" he said and his voice was choking.

"Have a drink and open the bloody door........I said.

-x-x-x-x-x-x-

The above exchange between Ullah the restaurant owner and Gerald the protagonist is an ideal instance of the oblique and the tangential in dialogue.

The interlocutors are of two very diverse cultures: Ullah is a Bangladeshi (south-east Asia) and Gerald is a Jamaican (west Indian) - but share a common bond of religion - Islam, and also, both belong to the post colonial minority in England.

Devious and desirous, Ullah very subtly surfaces with his homosexual intentions towards Gerry. Initially enticing the victim with free food, the spider in him begins to weave
a web of religion and ritual to ensnare the seemingly foolish black. Ullah's dishonorable intentions prevent him from coming out outright and mentioning circumcision. His guilt and hesitancy force him to refer to the fact as "go through certain things". His desperation even prompts him to seek divine intervention for his desire: "God will not recognize the name, thereby implying that a circumcised member is a more potent proof of Gerry's change of faith, though Ullah's tangential reference to the necessity of circumcision, as a prerequisite to change of identity, is a linguistic feeler, a tentative testing of the ground before he makes his intentions towards Gerald explicit, as well as a typical Asian reluctance to use lexis referring to sexual organs.

On the other hand, Gerald, as a theatre artist, is more sensitive to verbal expression. He enters into a description of his circumcision, carried out years ago, without naming the act at all, "They had to do something to me. Straight in more ways than one, Gerry falls into Ullah's trap, "Properly cut?" in the most naive manner possible. He of course retrieves himself in time. "That'll be all, Ullah."

A noticeable pattern in this exchange that surfaces is that of the tangential and the straight. Ullah's
locutionary acts are all illocutionary and perlocuting and are a verbal reflection of his devious manner of tripping Gerry. Since the functional need of the hour is to feel and groove around his victim before ensnaring him, Ullah cannot afford to be direct and literal. Since he has to alternately persuade, cajole and threaten, he must couch his intentions in statements that would say one thing and mean another.

Gerry, on the other hand, says what he means, clear cut and straight. Frank and friendly in his dealings with people Gerry does not need to be incongruent in expression. Ullah, on the other hand does not hesitate to supplicate and plead and simultaneously ask for forgiveness for his dishonorable desires. "Rahman means full of mercy & love". By translating Gerry's new name for him, Ullah is as if trying to kill two birds with one stone. Thus verbal exchange in Dhondy allows the reader to recreate character. Had the narrator merely told us of Ullah's sexual leanings, the author would have undermined the literary competence of the reader in his ability to read into the text. Part of the artistic pleasure of reading a novel rests in the reader's ability to find out. Reading the novel is as much an adventure for the reader as writing it, is, for the author. On reading a text, the reader decodes or releases knowledge through
response to the patterns which the author has deployed in encoding his message.

Ullah's presentation of himself is coded and Gerry's stock of socio-cultural knowledge allows him to read the codes in the behavior of Ullah. Since the author has recreated existing socio-cultural codes, the reader takes delight in extending his experience of the potentialities of exploring the system upon which the author draws.

"What the hell you start a fight for?" says S. Patel, "Look where it's got you and me. We didn't fucking pick on you".

"Why do you do your hair like that, and all these chains and cheapo shit. Haven't you got any shame? What does your mum think".

The punk looks amused, "You really want to know"?

"If you want to tell me. I'm a student of human nature".

"Well, we're all different, right.........To the Gods we must look alike, so I want to help them along............Geddit Stupid!?".

"You're not really a punk, are you?" he says.

"What puzzles me, mate, is the theory of evolution.......it opens up a belief in God, dunnit?"

"So that's why you dress like this?"

"Nah, not really. I just like putting the fear of God into the Pakis".

-x-x-x-x-x-x-
S. Patel, an East-African, Indian immigrant in London gets into a scuffle with a white, native punk and is put in the lock up to cool off. The verbal encounter that ensues is a hilarious instance of confrontation of distinctly diverse cultures.

Brought up on traditional values, S. Patel is a law-abiding, conservative Indian who is unable to comprehend the Punk's decision to opt out of society, unable to understand his personal protest flaunted as a weird hair style: "Chains and cheapo stuff". S. Patel's naivete can only be matched by the Punk's disillusion and worldliness. Cocooned by a strong family culture, S. Patel fails to realize that the punk perhaps does not have a proper, "mum" and a so-called 'family', who would disapprove of his life style, or his social aberrations. Immensely gullible, Patel succumbs to the punk's leg-pulling and swallows the God-talk dished out by his assailant. He goes so far as to mistake the punk for an armchair-philosopher, "You're not really a punk, are you?" The punk's subversive psychology and life style is camouflaged by his pseudo talk on God and evolution. "I just like putting the fear of God into the Pakis".

To the peace loving, oriental, Patel, the punk's resort to physical violence as an extension of the accident's need for action, is totally unintelligible. To the man who
reveares civilization and who himself is the descendent of a 5000 year old culture, the Punk's mode of regressing into the primitive, is incomprehensible to S. Patel. Their lack of culture codes is further confounded by conversational implicature, where the Punk deliberately flouts the cooperative principle to mock and subvert the interpersonal between himself and his interlocuter.

S. Patel's inter-action betrays his typical racial characteristic of excessive interrogation, sermonizing and inadvertently turning familiar, encroaching, on what the Punk would term, his "Personal Space". Momentarily overwhelmed by the verbal onslaught of S. Patel, the Punk retaliates typically in the occidental way, mocking the man. His amusement shows through his use of language, "How did my genes know that I was going to cut my hair?"

In this interethnic communication situation, the pre-existing difference in cultures and values create not only confusion in the production of contextualization cues but gives rise to humor too.

"We might have to move if Duff wants an ostrich or something", said Taylor. Duff giggled kate prompted me to smile. Silence fell. I nibbled a biscuit.

"I hope $95 a week is satisfactory", said Wylie. "I've checked around, and that's a little low, but there really shouldn't be any other expenses.--."
I had not imagined money, dollars, for sleeping with a child. "that is very good", I said. Wylie said that Duff was adopted.


"I can tell you are a refined person." Wylie continued. "We ask only for affection and intelligence in dealing with Duff. A child raised by affectionate, intelligent people with a good sense of humor will grow up all right."

"That, and getting into Brearly," Taylor remarked.

"I don't think I have much humor," I said ......... the one's I'd met in person were not too funny. Humor, the hardest thing to translate.

"You're probably tired of Americans assuming that if you are from India or China or the Caribbean you must be good with children," said Wylie.

"Thank you", I replied, what else could I say? I had never heard such a thing .......... my experience of Caribbeans was a mixture of fear and pity.

"Ancient American custom, dark skinned mammies. Don't be flattered by it" said Taylor.

"In fact", said Wylie, "We assume there'll be times when you absolutely hate her and want to using her neck".

"We suggest counting to ten first," said Taylor.

Wylie rested fingertips on the start up panel of a sleek microwave. "If you have a thing about radiation, you don't have to use it," She said.

"I don't have a thing about radiation" I said. I didn't have the slightest understanding of anything they said, and they didn't bother explaining. I liked that, the assumption behind it.

"We'll give you Taylor's study," Wylie said ............. You'll have your own room that way."

"For you, Jasmine, I'll be homeless. For you, Japanese research will widen the meson gap. We'll have your room ready by next sunday".

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Then where will Duff sleep?"

"Her room of course."

"not with me?" I could not imagine a small child sleeping alone ........... I had imagined myself in a narrow bed with a baby, and the thought had brought me comfort. "Who will I sleep with"? I asked.

"What you do on your own time is your business," said Wylie.

"But show discretion, for Duff's sake. I hope you understand". "Let us check him out first, is what she means," said Taylor.

"Who?" I asked. Kate came over. "Can we start again?" She suggested.

-x-x-x-x-x-x-

The above exchange is actually an interview, an informal one - rather, a first meeting between Jasmine, the immigrant who seeks a baby-sitting assignment and her would-be employers - a young, upwardly mobile couple on the campus of Colombia University. Jasmine, a newly-converted "Jasmine from Jyoti, from rural, feudal India, has been in the States for a few months as an illegal, hunted alien who can speak the English language but who has no idea about the linguistic culture codes of the new country. Since her exposure to the immediate content of situation is minimal, it leaves much to be desired. The above-cited verbal exchange seeks to highlight the hiatus that yawns between the natives and the immigrant. Without the requisite codes, Jasmine is unable to comprehend the light-hearted
exaggerations or the hyperbolic statements made by Taylor, who is conversationally making an effort to keep the atmosphere friendly and informal. Both husband and wife are normal, intelligent people, looking for a dependable, intelligent baby-sitter with a sense of humor. Because of lack of shared knowledge, Jasmine is unable to respond: "Kate prompted me to smile". In the context of her native cultural situation she is seeking employment and therefore looks upon herself as a servant and a maid who is supposed to keep a serious demeanor and not try to over-step the distinction that would otherwise exist between employer and employee. Beyond the formal required responses to their inquiry about her character and expected pay packet and hours of employment, an employee in this category would at once be dubbed "forward" or "fast" if she tried to be familiar or friendly. Jasmine is awe-struck, if not appalled by "a professor who served biscuits to a servant, smiled at her, and admitted her to the broad democracy of his joking, even when she didn't understand it".

Jasmine arrives with expectations conditioned by the codes of her native culture and therefore continues to be bewildered by the strange offers made, "I had not imagined money, dollars, for sleeping with a child." Another concept or word that she stumbles over is 'humor'. Because her idea of the word is limited to a single connotation of joke or
funny, she is unable to conceive of humor as a perspective or a stance which people adopt: to cope with unforeseen and difficult situations. The fact that a sense of humor implies a certain maturity with which to tackle life's little ironies, is way beyond Jasmine's comprehension. "The decent Americans I'd seen on television seemed a whimsical people, always making jokes ......... the one's I'd met in person were not too funny. Humor's the hardest thing to translate." (Ch.23-Jasmine). The Hayes are sophisticated and have their own refined polished manner of conveying their requirements "I'm not going to ask you for references, Jasmine," She went on. "You will be part of the family. Families don't go around requiring references." or a little later when she says "I can tell you are a refined person." or "you're probably tired of Americans assuming that if you are from India ........ you must be good with children," said Wylie. By expressing herself thus, Wylie is enforcing and ensuring a certain expected standard from the would-be child-minder. Jasmine who does not possess knowledge of this code, gives all the wrong responses, or responds when she is not required to. She tends to take the locutionary act at its face or literal value and fails to perceive the illocutionary import or the performative force of the utterance. For instance when Wylie says, 'if you have a thing about - radiation, you don't have to use it (micro
wave)," Jasmine like a trained parrot gives it right back to her "I don't have a thing about radiation," In her anxiety to appear proper and dignified as well as her desire to please, prompts her to interact in a self-conscious and 'trained' manner, which, coupled with her lack of culture codes, in turn, gives rise to a lot of humor, sometime, bordering on the risque - specially towards the end when the word "sleeps" is bandied about in ignorance by the interlocutors. While "sleeping with" has very specific connotations in the occident, it has nothing to do with catching up on one's nocturnal rest or as antidote to fatigue, as it is interpreted in the east - where the sexual connotation is entirely absent. When Jasmine, in all innocence, inquires "with whom shall I sleep with"? She only implies that she is reluctant to be on her own in a large room and would welcome the warmth and company of the child. After all, back home in India, in the village of Hasnapur, she was used to sleeping in a room along with parents and other siblings. Moreover the concept of privacy and solitariness does not, cannot exist, in a country of friendly, garrulous millions with a weak economy. As Jasmine confides in the reader, "I could not imagine a small child sleeping alone ....... I had imagined myself in a narrow bed with a baby; and the thought had brought me comfort." Thus Jasmine's "who will I sleep with?
completely floored the Hayeses - they are momentarily 'thrown out of gear and even their liberal sensibilities are shaken by the third degree boldness from Jasmine. The ensuing responses go completely hay-wire and they are found talking entirely at cross purposes which in turn generates a hilarious situation, until Kate has to interwean "can we start again". Obviously they had tried to play a game with two sets of norms, and each unintelligible to the other party.

Thus the dialogues in "Jasmine" not only reinforce the theme of alienation by depicting or recreating the linguistic and cultural hiatus between natives and immigrants, but also allow the reader to recreate the humor and therefore the perspective from which to view the story. In addition to the utterances being an index to the character of Jasmine and Hayes, is also a telling comment on the context of situations of the interlocutors. The backdrop of the novel is very charmingly recreated.

This was the "Ladies' Hour." Sober women became crude, lusty, raucous.

"Oh, snake, snake, I see a snake!"

"You saw a very skinny little snake last night. Areee you wake up the same snake in my house!"

We knew each other's secrets. I laughed as hard as the housewives. "We've all seen Amrita's skinny little snake."
It sleeps all day in her house, then roams around at night. 

"That's the snake I turned out of my house," said a recent bride, emboldened.

-x-x-x-x-x-x-

While recreating a typical rural setting for a women's group, squatting in the open air - on the fringes of civilization - answering nature's call - there are no restrooms in the interior of India -- this metaphorical exchange highlights the sophisticated, tangential use of language by unlettered peasants. The divergence of utterance meaning from literal meaning, emboldens repressed women to not only discuss taboo subjects like sex, but enables them to acquire a humorously satirical perspective to the issue.

The code word "snake" which is a shared meaning, gives them the power to share a common experience and go beyond the referential meaning of reptile and the creation of referential responses to it in terms of fear and being bitten or poisoned. By transferring the 'dread' from one context of meaning to another by means of a shared code, they are using language self consciously, obliquely. By transforming the time and place euphemistically into the "Ladies' Hour", the protagonist bestows a certain legitimacy and decency to the act of communal defecation.
Mukherjee's brief exchange frames are so artistically chiseled and compact in information, setting and nuance that they soon acquire the characteristics of a visual, miniature image, full of acute detailing, simultaneously recreating for the reader several perspectives and judgments. While India-born writers of the 60s & the 70s used dialogues to either highlight character or further the plot of the text, these writers of the 80s are far more conscious of techniques like exploring levels of meaning. They endeavor increasingly to give the reader the pleasure of decoding their texts.

I watch him part a mass of wires with his pliers, then reach for his soldering gun. "I can do that, you know. I've had experience. Small skinny fingers and all. I've handled a soldering gun".

"Congratulations"

"I understand circuitry". I pick up the soldering gun, and he pinches the wires together over the terminal as I drop a bright-bead of smoking silver on it.

"I've also killed a man, you know. There is nothing in this world that's too terrible". I drop a second bead on the next connection.

"I know", he says, "So have I. More than one".

-x-x-x-x-x-x-

In the above exchange frame, between Jasmine, the protagonist and Du the Vietnamese we have an instance of a locutionary act that behaves like an illocutionary one.
Emigrants and expatriates to the States from South Asia – India and Vietnam to be exact - Jasmine and Du are soldered together by more than the bond of mother and adopted son. Legally it is not even that, become she is still not married to Bud, whose child she carries. And yet these two are bound together by the adhesive of a similar, singular past - of violence, rejection and sexual abuse. Taken advantage of by unscrupulous elements within the host country, Jasmine and Du had to snap ties and remake unorthodox connections and arrive in a circuitous way, where they did. In their fight for survival, neither has hesitated to murder, "to handle a gun" when necessary or snipe wires when needed, to further their cause of bare existence in the States. Experience has taught both of them to "alter circuits, change the course of electricity, when necessary, in order to survive". It has also taught them to patch up and solder, and make as good as new. They have mastered the art of mutation - of splicing genes, to lose and gain identities as would a soul in its inevitable course of transmigrations. Thus while mother & son exchange notes about circuitry and soldering which is the reality outside and in their hands, the illocutionary connotations of the terms are metaphorically maneuvered by them to convey an "other" reality which is not immediate and now, but resides in the past.
While they speak the language of the white Anglo-Saxon American in terms of syntax and lexis, they are actually "talking" an other language which is exclusively theirs - of the brown, non-white native, who do not originally belong to the States. Their gory experiences and encounters are richly encoded in the English Language which reveals the extent to which they have mastered and appropriated the foreign "code" to carry the personal code of their own existence. Another obvious reason for the disparity between locutionary act and illocutionary act is the permanent need to contain the secret of the past and not divulge it to the white Anglo-Saxon protestants around them; who would anyway not "understand" or be able to take the information or tolerate it in the least.

Their understanding of and intent in circuits and electronics creates a rare affinity between these two strangers in a strange and foreign land. It is indeed ironical that what solders them together and binds them in a common bond of empathy is not happiness or beauty but pain and sorrow and the sleazy side of life. And of course it is no coincidence that they depend on "engineering" to survive socially, culturally and professionally.

By manipulating language metaphorically in the exchange frame, the writer, Mukherjee, is treating the dialogue in a
new and novel way. By allowing the reader to decode the illocutionary act by filling in the connections, she provides grist to the mill, after all, greater the absence of explicitly stated intermediate steps, better the work of art. The ambiguity of multiple meanings, that a reader can read into a work, enhances the literary value of the work.

Thematically too, the above exchange frame between mother and son seeks to highlight the skill and patience that both have cultivated to deal with depressing situations; human relations and electronic circuitry both tend to be extremely fragile if not frail. They require very careful "handling", an inborn ability and skill to keep them from breaking down and disintegrating. As underprivileged, third-world people, it is ironical that they should bring succor to the overpampered, dissipated WASP population, that they should solder and hold together a crumbling civilization.

This exchange frame is preceded just a few sentences before, by Jasmine's reference to, and comment on the socio-economic strains which is breaking down the civility of the citizens because of prolonged drought: "he'd hate to use an old-fashioned word like "civility", but that seems to be fitting. "The drought's a catalyst, its not the problem". Unable to bear the strain, the white population is rapidly
cracking up, "something's gotten out of hand in the heartland", says the Elsa County Mental Health Centre Consultant------". "They either choose to kill or get killed, "over by Osage a man beat his wife with a spade, then hanged himself in his machine shed", or chose to build a moat of hate around themselves. At a time like this it is Jasmine and Du who provide a sanctuary into which, Bud, her handicapped husband can retreat to. As Jasmine tells the reader "At 11.05 the phone rings. I cradle it. I let it ring against my chest". When her husband calls long distance from a hotel conference, she soothes and mothers the harassed man, even over the phone. She is able to provide the balm for his soothing nerves, as she encourages him to think positive and boosts his morale with praise and persuasion "Be proud of Elsa County", I said "Be proud of Baden. You practically built it". Her words, her language are bright beads of smoking silver. As she advices her son Du who is getting another scavanged tuner, "fill it with soil and plant some corn or beans inside. Keep the knobs and dials on the outside". The life giving East comes to the rescue of the dried up West - who is fast floundering in the desert sands of technological competence. What ails Elsa county, also ails the rest of the vast country—an absence of the rain of mercy and compassion.
Thus, the strategies of verbal exchange and narrative very graphically demonstrate among other things, that a socio-cultural position of power is ably reflected in the linguistic competence of the characters. The language of India-born writers of the 80s, like Mukherjee is adequately empowered to encode the politics and ideology of the immigrant. The expatriate voice is no longer subdued and unsure but confident, to not only take its place in the main stream, literacy circuit, but is able to functionally enhance and "gift" something more.

We heard Pitaji say, "Hooligans! Now they are throwing sticks and stones; next month they'll throw bombs!".

Masterji had his game plan. "It isn't like Lahore, is it? Lahore was Rome. But we know from the great historian Mr. Gibbon, where there is a rising, there is also a falling. Hooligans who soar must - also come down".

My father sighed, "We should have had our Nero to fiddle while we burned ........ Masterji you are here to tell me that there is a lotus blooming in the middle of all this filth, no?".

Masterji kept his eyes on the little girl working the Buffalo dung. "An educator's duty, Sir, is not to burn the flower with the dung".

"In this country" - Pitaji laughed - "We are having too many humans and not enough buffaloes".

"Yes, yes, in hot weather countries mother nature is too fecund ............... surely you know, Sir, that in our modern society many bright ladies are finding positions?".


-x-x-x-x-x-x-

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An exquisite instance of a gracious way of life, fast fading, threatened by crass materialism, this verbal exchange highlights the author's sensitive approach to life, in language. Recreating entire attitudes and values of life by a word here, a gesture there, Mukherjee attempts to portray simultaneously the subtle power games that the two interlocutors are engaged in and the tangential, oblique, manner in which the wordy duel is carried on, gently peppered with flattery and rebuke, condescension and conquest.

Jasmine's teacher, Masterji, is visiting her father - Pitaji - to convince him to allow his little daughter to study further and not get her married off. To pave the way for a smooth entry, Masterji astutely refers to Lahore—the pet nostalgia, hobby-horse of the father. While equating Lahore with the great Roman Empire he, in the same breath also sounds an optimistic note for the father, "Hooligans who soar must also come down".

Pitaji, no less perceptive than Masterji, is well matched with his opponent and has sensed the purpose of the visit all too clearly. He defensively anticipates the request by putting the words into Masterji's mouth. "You have come to tell me, there is a lotus blooming in this filth". Mukherjee has lifted a much used rural idiom of
Lotus-in-filth and put it to a clever metaphorical use. Not to be out-foxed, Masterji parries the thrust with an equally clever under-cut, by asserting that the flower cannot be burnt with the dried buffalo dung. The 2nd metaphorical retaliation not only drives the point home but amazingly recreates the rural ambience of the scene: the two villagers squatting, the little child patting wet buffalo dung into cakes for drying. Once again we see the finished artistry of the author combining, contracting in a concise verbal exchange, entire word-pictures of the village, the way of life, the values, the topic under discussion, as well as the tone, the moods, the smells and the attitudes.

Masterji's indirect attempt to negotiate the topic back to the tracks, and Pitaji's abrupt stalling of the same with an offensive, "positions?" is a brilliant instance of the tentative tentacles of modernism, of change, trying to dislodge, die-hard conservatism and age old rooted traditions. The fate of the young girl swings precarious between the fluctuating positions of pitaji and masterji, paradoxically both, her protectors and champions. Thus an innocuous verbal exchange, between two villagers, is also able to recreate the conflict of changing times, with a minimum of explicit statement or narrative. Mukherjee seems to infuse new power into the old technique of dialogues.
"This is a gathering of many poets", he says clearly, "and I cannot claim to be one of them.

"But I am the messenger, and I bring verses from a greater one than any here assembled".

The audience is losing patience: "Silence the fellow, throw him out".

"The star" Mahound Cries out

"In the name of Allah, the compassionate, the merciful! 'By the pleiades when they set: Your companion is not in error, neither is he deviating.'"

"Nor does he speak from his own desires. It is a revelation that has been revealed: One mighty in power has taught him."

"He stood on the high horizon: the lord of strength. Then he came close, closer ................ revealed."

"I saw him also at the Lote tree ........"

-x-x-x-x-x-x-

Though structured as dialogue, the above exchange frame is monologue, fragmented into separate syntactical units. Mouthed by Mahound, the prophet, as the divine revelation, the verbal output begins as a formal speech in the first couple of lines, and subtly changes into a theoretical narrative in the next few lines! In the beginning Mahound is full of self importance, confident and assertive as can be seen from the profuse use of the 1st person singular pronoun "I". He wishes to assert, that, as messenger of God, his position is superior to that of the poets' even. But when he notices the crowd's restlessness Mahound lexically shifts the focus from himself to "the star": the
pronoun 'I' disappears to be replaced by "your companion" who is none other than himself. He further reduces himself to "he" a mere third person pronoun. In the very next pronouncement the revelation becomes the subject of the sentence, not the messenger, thereby altering the importance of one to the detriment of the other. By shifting the focus away from himself, he is syntactically shifting the blame of the coming revelation - which is going to be a compromise, anyway - from himself on to the power that has taught him. This shift is more acutely realized in the choice of the passive construction, "that has been realized". Moreover by lexically choosing, negative, derogatory terms to commence the discourse of revelation, the prophet foreshadows "the error" and the "deviation" that is to follow and which will give rise to the endless controversy of the Satanic Verses, semantically and structurally placing the deviant first, Rushdie anticipates the importance of the same. The monologue also proves a very graphic index, linguistically, to the character of Mahound. His opportune change of syntax and semantics to suit the immediate demands of the context of situation reveals the subterranean workings of the prophet, the man of God.
"I fainted" - he remembers

"Fainted", she murmurs, 'that's weakness, Mahound. Are you becoming weak?" Don't say anything, Mahound. I am the Grandee's wife, and neither of us is your friend .......... My lost lover was the boy Baal, Yes I heard he had got under your skin. But it doesn't matter. Neither he nor Abu Simbel is your equal. But I am".

"I must go", he says.

"Soon enough" She replies. I am your equal, 'She repeats', and also your opposite. I don't want you to become weak. You shouldn't have done what you did".

"But you will profit" Mahound replied bitterly, "There's no threat now to your temple revenues".

"You miss the point", She says softly, "If you are your Allah, I am your Al Lat. And she doesn't believe your God when he recognizes her. Her opposition to him is implacable, irrevocable,....... The war between us cannot end in truce. And what a truce! Yours is a patronizing, condescending Lord. Al Lat hasn't the slightest wish to be his daughter. She is his equal, as I am yours. Baal: he knows her, as he knows me" -

"So the grandee will betray his pledge", Mahound says.

"Who knows"? Scoffs Hind. "He doesn't even know himself .......... Between Allah and the Three there can be no peace. I don't want it. I want the fight. To the death, that is the kind of idea I am. What kind are you?"

"You are sand and I am water, Mahound says, "water washes sand away".

"And the desert soaks up water", Hind answers him. "Look around you".

-x-x-x-x-x-x-

The above exchange frame, between Mahound the Prophet, and Hind, the Grandee's wife, is an interesting instance of power negotiations at multiple levels; the religious, the
political and sexual. Caught in the cross-fire of a conjugal war between Abu Simbel, the Grandee of Jahilia, and Hind, his equally powerful wife, Mahound, in a moment of weakness compromises his religious principle of Allah, as one god, and publicly acknowledges Al-Lat - the reigning deity of Jahilia, as the daughter of Allah. By accommodating "the other", Mahound tilts the balance in favour of Abu Simbel, only to let down his wife Hind, who had more than religion at stake in Mahound's antagonism with her husband. Consciously associating herself with the goddess Ah-Lat, and her position of supreme power - politically, religiously, Hind would like to keep the tension alive between herself and Mahound as an outwardly realized religious antagonism but subterraneanly an emotional one. As she explains to Mahound, "I am your equal, and also your opposite. The war between us cannot end in a truce". Her accusation and altercation with him about religion at the locutionary level, is a brazen, sexual connotation at the illocutionary one: Being the quintessential woman, she seeks unadulterated manhood in Mahound. Masterful, unyielding, all powerful, desirous.

Being his equal, she is justifiably enraged when her goddess Ah-Lat is granted the patronized status of "daughter" of Allah. Because Hind associates herself with
the goddess, she would like a superior, if not equal status for Her.

Towards the end of the exchange, the binary, metaphorical, juxtaposition of sand & water is a brilliant instance of the oblique war of the sexes in the context of the immediate culture of the desert which gave rise to Islam. Structurally too it is a vital choice on the part of Rushdie, to encapsulate the genesis of Islam: Had Hind not taunted and instigated Mahound in this verbal encounter, he would not have recapitulated once more, renouncing Al-Lat in totality, thereby giving birth to the concept of the Quaranic verses as well as the Satanic. By recreating the labyrinthine patterns of sexual, religious and political desires, in this exchange frame, Rushdie successfully traps the workings of the oriental mind, "unable to find a single line, only sequences of geometries" (122).