The Empire's Shadow: Kiran Nagarkar's Quest for the Unifying Indian Novel

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ABSTRACT

Kiran Nagarkar, who won the Sahitya Akedemi Award in India for his English language writing, is a man who attracts controversy. Despite the consistent strength of his literary works, his English novels have become a lightning rod – not because they are written in English, but because Nagarkar was a well-respected Marathi writer before he began writing in English. Although there are other writers who have become embroiled in the debate over the politics of discourse, the response to Nagarkar's move from Marathi and his subsequent reactions perfectly illustrate the repercussions that accompany such dialectical decisions. Nagarkar has been accused of myriad crimes against his heritage, from abandoning a dedicated readership to targeting more profitable Western markets. Careful analysis of his writing, however, reveals that his novels are clearly written for a diverse Indian audience and offer few points of accessibility for Western readers. Beyond his English language usage, which is actually intended to provide readability to the most possible Indian nationals, Nagarkar also courts a variegated Indian audience by developing upon traditional Indian literary conceits and allusions. By composing works for a broad Indian audience, which reference cultural elements from an array of Indian ethnic groups, Nagarkar's writing seems to push toward the development of the seemingly impossible: a novel that might unify India, and present such a cohesive cultural face to the world at large.

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INTRODUCTION

When Kiran Nagarkar's historical opus, *Cuckold*, was awarded the Sahitya Akedemi Award in English, his place in the Indian literary canon ought to have been cemented. As Khushwant Singh wrote in *The Telegraph*, "Kiran Nagarkar has the touch of genius. In my opinion, he is one of the best Indian writers of our time" ("Kiran Nagarkar"). With each successive publication, Nagarkar's voice became more fully developed, his characters richer, and his prose more artful. Nagarkar has had a long and illustrious career, and his novels, plays, and screenplays have won both critical acclaim and commercial success. But while Nagarkar's writing is consistently thought provoking, incendiary, and brilliant, his literary career is overshadowed by his linguistic choices and the politics of discourse.

While this position is certainly not uniquely Nagarkar's, both the critical response to his move from Marathi to English composition and his subsequent reactions uniquely identify how highly fraught such dialectical decisions can be. Responding to allegations that he has abandoned his heritage in favor of more profitable Western markets, Nagarkar has begun to compose novels that are not only designed for an overwhelmingly Indian audience, but at times seem designed to exclude a Western readership. Despite choosing to compose in English, Nagarkar has attempted to preserve his culture by developing upon historically Indian literary conceits. While he is certainly not a traditional writer, each novel serves as an homage to variegated Indian traditions, religions, styles, and issues. By composing works for a broad Indian audience, which reference cultural

elements from an array of Indian ethnic groups, Nagarkar's works seem to push toward the development of the seemingly impossible: a novel that might unify India, and present such an Indian representation to the world at large. Although Nagarkar now writes in a historically imperial language, his writing style, subject matter, utilization of allusion and manipulation of diction indicate that he is not simply pandering to Western ideals. Instead, Nagarkar has developed an ethnographic artifact – yes, his books have great literary merit, but they can also provide a glimpse into historically marginalized Indian populations readers in Western markets are rarely allowed to witness.

CHAPTER 1

THE POLITICS OF LANGUAGE

Nagarkar began his career writing in the regional language of Maharashtra, and initially, he was heralded as the writer who would redefine the Marathi novel. Despite a brief renaissance of impassioned creativity and technical experimentation following Indian independence, Marathi literature is largely construed as pandering to middle-class ideals and traditional narrative structure (Sarang 310). Nagarkar's first novel, *Saat Sakkam Trechalis*, engaged in bold linguistic experiments, adapting the syntax and established grammatical rules of Marathi to suit the purpose of the narrative (Masselos viii). Nagarkar's inclination toward language manipulation was established even within the pages of that first novel, which indulged in long passages written in Hindi and English. The text was translated into English in 1980 and republished as *Seven Sixes are Forty-Three* – a move which failed to acknowledge the political relevance of the original, with its variegated linguistic code-switching. The success of the translation, perhaps, inspired Nagarkar, and in 1995 he published his first novel written in English, *Ravan and Eddie*. In India, a country in which some 845 languages are commonly spoken (Ramanathan 111), the act of choosing just one language in which to write is inevitably a polarizing one. As Nagarkar began to publish in English, Marathi readers branded him a traitor to his home state, while Marathi critics let his novels go almost entirely un-reviewed. As Rashmi Sadana points out, the accolades for Nagarkar's English writing seemed to alienate his original Marathi readers who viewed his turn to English as a grave misstep (307).

Nagarkar's shift to English composition is perhaps less surprising than the fact that he wrote anything in Marathi in the first place. In an interview published in 2006, Nagarkar states, "My taking to Marathi was a big event. Barring the four years in school, I never studied Marathi. It has always been English. So it was more like going back when I wrote my first book" (Paul). Born in 1942 as India was on the verge of Independence, Nagarkar was educated primarily in English. Nagarkar's family was highly Westernized, and great emphasis was placed upon English fluency. Nagarkar's grandfather was monotheistic and rebelled openly against idol worship, and his belief system alienated him within his Hindu community. Furthermore, Nagarkar's father was both English-literate and Anglicized (Paranjape 4). In such an environment, it is possible to imagine that Nagarkar's "revolutionary" manipulation of traditional Marathi grammar might have been more an act of ignorance than of protest and adaptation – Nagarkar's written Marathi must have been that of the out-of-practice schoolboy. For academic purposes, Marathi ceased to be Nagarkar's language when he began attending English schools, and self-admittedly using English for his academic thinking (Paul). Despite the lingering resonance of early English-education proponents like Sir Thomas Babington Macaulay and Governor-General Bentinck, English is the language that is most commonly used for official and commercial purposes in India, and the education system is no exception (Ramanathan 113).

As Sadana suggests, there is no simple solution for the development of a single national language for India. Hindi was traditionally spoken throughout

Northern India, and consequently its nationalization limited the ability of South Indians to compete for government jobs. Sadana writes:

> In the British colonial period, knowing English was key to obtaining government jobs, including those in the railways and police force, and by necessity, an English urban elite was created across India. If Hindi were to replace English at the national level in post-independence India, access to government jobs would require knowing Hindi instead. In this context, English was curiously a more neutral language, even in the 1950s and 1960s, when it was still arguably a postcolonial language. (314)

Despite the ineluctable imperial associations of English in India, its selection as the language of education was inspired, at least in part, by a desire to provide fluency for the largest possible population of Indian citizens. Because English was not associated with local ethnic groups, its use did not privilege one segment of the Indian population over another (Sadana 314). In order to address the issue of multilingualism, a three-language formula has been implemented throughout Indian public schools, and students are examined in two of these three languages in Standards 10 and 12. Two of these languages must be Hindi and English, ensuring that all Indian public school students encounter a substantial quantity of English education by the time they complete their schooling. The matter of which local language completes the curriculum is regionally determined (Ramanathan 114).

The problem of interpersonal communication and language barriers is one that features repeatedly throughout Nagarkar's writing. In the opening pages of *Ravan and Eddie*, for example, Nagarkar discusses the inability of Victor Coutinho to speak to his beloved Parvati Pawar. He writes, "Victor could have talked to Parvati for hours. But who was going to translate his Konkani or English into Marathi for her?" (1-2). Despite being neighbors in the same chawl, the two are divided by language, regardless of decorum or social custom. The language discrepancy is perhaps further highlighted by the words of Victor's wife, Violet, to Parvati after Victor's sudden, unfortunate death. As Violet accuses Ram/Ravan of being responsible for the demise of her husband, she calls him a "murderer," unwilling or unable to translate her condemnation into a language the infant's mother might be capable of understanding (6).

The subject of incomprehension is re-introduced as Nagarkar describes a religious incantation that takes place in Chawl No. 17. Nagarkar writes:

> Even the Hindu neighbours had no way of figuring out what the priest recited, though it was in their mother tongue, Marathi. He didn't give a damn about the meaning of the words, the feeling behind them, the poetry of the language or the complex manoeuvres of the plot line. He had no thought for metaphysical implications nor time to translate them in terms of everyday life. (9)

The people who should have been most comfortable with Marathi had become estranged from the language, unable to relate to it as anything other than a

cacophonous, ambiguous recitation. Moreover, the sentiment that the priest is unwilling to translate the scripture into "terms of everyday life," suggests that Marathi is no longer the language of the people, even in Maharashtra. Subtly, Nagarkar is acknowledging his linguistic shift and excusing it in his first English novel – he is predicting the demise of Marathi before it has fully come to pass. Although *Ravan and Eddie* was not published until 1995, it was begun in 1979 as a Marathi screenplay (Lukmani, "Introduction" xii). Because of the life-span of *Ravan and Eddie*'s nascence, Nagarkar's attention to language bears the historical mark not only of the language riots of the 1960s (Sinha 358) but also the Shiv Sena riots and rejection of Anglicized city names of the 1990s (Kamdar 75-6). Having just experienced large-scale and extremely violent riots in 1992 and 1993, it seems possible that the idea of a distinctly Maharashtrian city, as opposed to a more cosmopolitan Indian city, might have been foregrounded in Nagarkar's mind as he completed *Ravan and Eddie*. In such a context, Nagarkar's insinuation that Marathi is incomprehensible to the general populace seems to suggest that such renamings are not truly designed to strengthen cultural identities, but to illustrate the power of local political organizations.

In *Cuckold*, Nagarkar elucidates his thoughts on language death even more clearly, but through the veil of antiquity. Speaking through the first-person voice of the Raj Kumar – unnamed, though historically intended to represent Bhojraj,

the Mewari heir-apparent in the 16th century – Nagarkar discusses his frustration with his attempts to understand Sanskrit[1]. Nagarkar writes:

> Who killed Sanskrit? How does a language die? It wasn't as if a cataclysm had wiped out the populace of the country or the Muslims had decreed one day that Arabic or Afghani would replace the mother of our languages.... a mother tongue is the destiny of a people. I have the strange feeling that man created language but now it creates us. (*Cuckold* 463)

For the Rajputs, this prediction proved correct; *Cuckold*, after all, describes the fall of the state of Mewar to the Moghuls. If language is the destiny of the people, then the fall of Sanskrit seems to foreshadow the fall of the nation itself. Although the stakes for the extinction of Sanskrit were higher than those of Marathi – it was, after all, the language in which the most canonical texts of Indian literature were written – language death always takes an emotional toll on the local speaking community. As Theophilus Mooko writes, studies conducted in Botswana indicate that communities in which indigenous languages are subordinated in favor of other dominant dialects generally lose appreciation for their own traditional cultures. Moreover, he suggests that such negative connotations spread even to the languages that have fallen by the wayside (112). The most common cause of language death is the scorn of its speakers (Mooko 113), and such negative attitudes risk extending to a community's sociology,

[1] Throughout *Cuckold*, the protagonist is most frequently identified as "the Raj" or "the Raj Kumar." In the interest of consistency, that is how he shall be referred to throughout the majority of this paper.

history, and even people. But despite their abandonment of conversational, accessible Sanskrit, Nagarkar describes a Mewari population who exhibit an almost destructively strong sense of cultural identity.

The concept of language creating people seems evocative on several levels. While Nagarkar may simply be poking fun at the Raj's self-awareness, indulging in a post-modern recognition that this character has been manifested merely by words on the page, there is surely some historical relevance as well. As the Raj suggests will happen repeatedly throughout the text, he has been relegated to a footnote in the annals of Indian history. Because historians did not see fit to document his life, his invention was left to later generations who chose to resurrect him in whichever image they selected. For the Raj, his reinvention came in English – a language that would have been completely alien to him. As stated by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, "Because particular languages provide a limited lexicon they may also be said (metaphorically) to 'use' the speaker, rather than vice versa" (43). In light of language politics, it seems inevitable that Nagarkar is also making reference to how the Raj's reincarnation would have been interpreted differently were it written in Sanskrit, Mewari, or even Hindi, each with their own unique lexicons. By suggesting that language invents its speakers, Nagarkar is subtly questioning how the languages we speak shape our worldview and reality. As the Raj is incarnated in English, his character inevitably assumes some of the baggage associated with English and imperialism in general. Furthermore, the language in which he is written makes it impossible to completely contextualize him in the era from which he sourced, as

English would have been unknown. If the Raj were written in Sanskrit, perhaps his rebirth would have been more authentic, but also utterly inaccessible for the vast majority of contemporary readers.

For many writers who still work in "local languages," and have chosen not to move toward English, their writing stands partially as a statement of independence and liberation from homogenized globalization. There is little doubt that the English (like other imperial powers) sought to formalize their grip on colonial territories by encouraging the use of the English language by their subjects. This program of assimilation was even more successful because access to domestic languages was simultaneously discouraged. Even as Lord Macaulay opens his infamous "Minute on Indian Education," he states, "We have to educate a people who cannot at present be educated by means of their mother-tongue. We must teach them some foreign language" (428). The long history of the European desire to denigrate the literary works and dialects of those they governed is, indeed, enough to make any former colonial subject bristle at the thought of speaking English. Negative implications haunt any formerly colonial tongue. Macaulay's assertion that the ultimate goal of the English must be to develop an army of middle-men who look Indian but feel English is no less incendiary (430). If the threat of becoming a soldier in such an army is taken seriously, then writing in English becomes an automatically fraught endeavor.

The elimination (or dramatic diminishment) of appropriate forums in which to speak local languages was a powerful tool for the empire for myriad reasons. It almost certainly increased the colonized subject's dependence on those

who spoke English fluently, and English became a form of much-sought currency. But it also helped to psychologically justify occupation in the minds of English officials. Not only did the limitation of fluency encourage the colonizer's view that the colonial subject was less intelligent than his European equivalent, it helped to establish similar self-doubt within the colonial subject himself. As Ali A. Abdi writes:

> To what extent and with what elegance one spoke the colonial language represented, therefore, an authentic certificate of striving for, and, of course, never arriving at the *rendez-vous* of high culture, social achievement, and finally an assurance that you were not as 'savage' as the rest of your brothers/sisters. (50)

Refusing to speak the colonizer's tongue is absolutely a reclamation of culture and history, but it is also a statement of self-respect and pride. By writing in traditional regional languages, authors can emphasize the merit of their culture. Moreover, they signal an unquestionable allegiance to their countrymen, indicating the location of their loyalties.

Traditionally, English was most accessible to people in positions of power. The English government officials introduced the language, and the people who gained fluency most rapidly were those who worked closely with them. Perhaps it is for that reason that there is a pervasive sense that English holds a place of privilege throughout the Indian sub-continent, subordinating all other languages. Speaking to the proliferation of English in India, Aijaz Ahmad writes:

> ... there has clearly developed, in all the cosmopolitan cities of the country, an English-based intelligentsia for whom only the literary document produced in English is a national document; all else is regional, hence minor and forgettable, so that English emerges in this imagination not as *one* of the Indian languages, which it undoubtedly is, but as *the* language of national integration and bourgeois civility. (75)

This attitude is enhanced because so many Anglo-Indian writers are still living, and writing, within India, and not speaking from a place of exile. The writers who are arguably driving the Indian literary establishment choose to write in English, and if they are Indian, then surely their writing is quintessentially Indian as well. With each successive Indian English publication, the grip of English on the corpus of Indian writing grows progressively tighter.

That being said, the task of extricating former colonial territories from the web of English is exceedingly difficult, if not objectively impossible. As Abdi suggests, working within the confines of the English language may be the only way to ensure the survival and relevance of indigenous cultures and traditions (57). As local language speakers are becoming increasingly rare, aspects of a culture may be more effectively preserved if translated into English, simply for the purpose of increasing audience size. Even prominent postcolonial writers like Ngugi wa Thiong'o, who have been lauded for their willingness to forego English in the name of "local" languages, have had to revert to English. As Abdi writes:

> ... with the cultural and psychological damages already done, the small literate corps in *neo*-colonial Sub-Saharan Africa are neither that willing nor even that competent (more importantly, not patient enough to 'lower the quality of their reading') to read, analyze, and articulate in the native language which is not exclusive and which is spoken by the uneducated, unsophisticated, and unknown rural, urban lower classes. (56)

Even when internationally acclaimed writers, like Ngugi, attempt to revitalize scripts like Gikuyu, it may at this point be simply, grimly too late to achieve any kind of substantial readership. If the individuals who express fluency in the language cannot afford the time or the investment to read literary novels, the author is conflicted by a perceived ethical dilemma. He must choose between a sense of obligation to write to his ancestral roots, or to a contemporary, purchasing audience. While recognized literary giants like Ngugi are in the luxurious position of being able to choose their writing language, others are surely forced to compose in English simply for economic reasons. For writers in developing countries who are able to publish in English, it is inevitably the choice that promises higher financial return.

Ngugi addresses the unlikelihood of the eradication of English by describing an inescapable multiplicity. Although individuals form identities within whichever language they adopt – through choice or obligation – their identities will perpetually differ from those that would come to pass in the language of their ancestry (Rodrigues 162). As Frantz Fanon would argue, any

shift from the language of a man's birth community is indicative of a more pervasive personality change (9). Even if an individual reclaims his mother tongue, the essence of the language of integration will perpetually follow as a diluted version of the original – once it has been introduced to a region it cannot be erased. Ngugi suggests that speaking in or acknowledging a foreign language is an act of perpetual translation that affects even the process of thought. In an interview given in 2004, Ngugi references the Anglicization of his name, stating:

> Ngugi becomes Anthony and Anthony becomes my shadow. Whatever I do, wherever I go, whatever I achieve, Anthony is always on the corner. But I have my own name, we have original names, which were barred or shadowed. Even when we are producing knowledge about our own culture, about our own landscapes, or politics and economics, for that matter, by putting that knowledge in English, French, or Portuguese we are losing the original texts. There is a kind of mental translation going on all the time. (Rodrigues 163)

Despite the fact that Ngugi is not Indian and is not writing about India, his theories have universal relevance. Ngugi seems to imply that the damage of such linguistic adaptation can be mitigated by an insistence on writing in so-called "local" languages. For Ngugi, then, the drive to revitalize marginalized languages is not prohibitive of such works being translated into English, and preferably other marginalized languages in addition.

There is no debate over whether putting diverse cultures into conversation via translation is informative and fascinating. The dialogism that takes place when pluralistic texts interact can inform international relationships, and even lead to a heightened sense of identity for readers in both cultures. However, translation is a task that generally requires enormous resources; the burden of locating an educated translator, an editor who can demonstrate fluency in one or more marginalized languages, a willing and insightful publishing house, and even a commercial market can prove to be too much for many writers working from developing nations. In India, for example, an attempt to develop translations among the languages of Bangla, Tamil and Kannada stalled as the publisher struggled to locate suitably bilingual translators (*Perishable* 192). As Ngugi himself admits, much of his work with translation could not come to pass until he relocated to the United States, and new resources were presented (Rodrigues 166).

For the author writing in a marginalized language, anticipating literal linguistic translation into English, the power dynamic between the marginalized language and the dominant one is destabilized. Historically, members of the upper classes, privy to advanced educational opportunities, have access to English education. For this reason English is perceived to be the language of privilege. But to write in a marginalized language with the expectation that immense resources will be devoted to the translation of the text into English indicates an even more expansive network of power. Furthermore, as Ngugi recognizes that he writes about the same topics regardless of the language he uses, it seems clear that his message is one he feels passionately about. He states, “You must talk about

globalization, about labor, about the global movement of capital, or the operations of capital that are strong enough to act as police in our own countries. These issues are there, no matter which language you are using" (Rodrigues 163). If the ultimate goal is to provoke thinking on such subjects, it seems a text written in English could impact a more massive portion of the global population. These are issues that are no longer exclusive to any one region, and regardless of historical ramifications, English is the language that is spoken over the most variegated international territories.

While Ngugi suggests that there is something to be learned from all cultures and languages, he also asserts that the former colonial subject writing in English will always be "walking on a territory defined by the language of our adoption" (Rodrigues 162). In this case, any Anglo-Indian writer (or former colonial subject) runs the risk of becoming nothing but a mimic man. As Homi Bhabha asserts in his oft-quoted "Of Mimicry and Man," the colonial subject who seeks to adopt the behaviors of those in power will forever hover in the purgatorial space of "*almost the same, but not quite*" (122; emphasis original). While Bhabha is certainly not simply referring to colonial subjects who adopt the English language, use of the colonizer's tongue, at least according to Fanon and Ngugi, is indicative of a more systemic intrapersonal assimilation. Therefore, use of English can be treated metonymically as a symptom of cultural mimicry. For the Indian writer accepting Bhabha's theory of mimicry, such a partial representation would mean it would be impossible for anything authentic to be composed in English. However, as the developing world becomes increasingly

developed, achieving "first world" status with English as the *lingua franca*, the face of those in power is beginning to change. Major postcolonial novelists writing in the language of the former colonizer have impacted worldviews and the face of literature in English. As described in *The Empire Writes Back*, postcolonial literature thrives in the space between abrogation (refusing to accept the colonizer's assumptions about the legacy of their language) and appropriation (the manipulation of a language to reflect the ethos of the former colonial territory) (37-8). Moving through the treacherous waters of colonialism and into the more neutral realm of world literature, those writing in English are attempting to make the language work to reflect their own cultural histories and attitudes, and Kiran Nagarkar is no exception.

The ambition to translate marginalized language texts into other "local" languages is not unique to Ngugi, and Meenakshi Mukherjee is another vocal proponent. She suggests that the act of translating one Indian language into another is ultimately more satisfying than what she describes as the "uphill task" of bypassing the multifaceted obstacles that prevent Indian texts from being appreciated by outsider audiences (*Perishable* 189). Her argument, however, is not that English is only accessible in the West, but that it is more difficult to determine the connecting tissues that would bring together a potential English readership. When translating into a language that boasts a relatively small, regionally specific speaking population, the author is capable of identifying shared scaffolding upon which to build. When working with English, however, no such assumptions can be made – as Mukherjee asserts, one must translate for the

"indeterminate and undifferentiated mass" (*Perishable* 190). Unlike Ngugi, who focuses on the same themes regardless of language, for Mukherjee the primary complication involved in translating Indian novels into English lies in their content. The solution seems to rest in a hybridized novel – perhaps one written in English, but which maintains Indian terminology that might be made relatable to a broad and diverse audience.

Despite the theoretical accessibility of English, there is an undercurrent of animosity toward Indian English writers from the general population, particularly those who have proven they can find success as *bhasha* (vernacular Indian language writing) writers. As Mukherjee states concerning Nagarkar, "I must confess I was mildly surprised that a writer who was so powerful in Marathi should now choose to write in English" ("Celebrating *Cuckold*" 27) – a sentiment which is certainly not uniquely hers. The criticism of Nagarkar's English novels does not focus on the fact that he writes them, but instead the reality that he did not *always* write them. Sadana indicates that the *bhasha* community reviles such writers, at least in part, because they are seen as being motivated by purely financial gain. Simultaneously, however, such writers are sent mixed messages as their literary clout improves based on the size of advance they are able to earn from their publishers (Sadana 318-9), and multinational publishing houses are able to outspend any *bhasha* literary publishing house (Sadana 311). While writing in English, and publishing with international conglomerates, is seen as an excision of part of one's Indian identity, it is concurrently a marker of success. Nagarkar's shift undeniably alienated him from his devoted readership in

Maharashtra, but simultaneously earned him (theoretical) admission into a larger national, and to some extent international, community.

Perhaps influenced by the monetary element of English publishing, Tabish Khair raises the question of the class alignment of Indian English novels. Khair suggests that only the elite members of Indian society write creatively in English, and therefore only a small window of Indian life is ever presented in such a medium (x). Furthermore, he goes on to say that there are certain stories that simply cannot be told in English – the language is insufficient to narrate the events (xi). The English Indian novel is only able to tell the story of the person who lives in "English India," enjoying an upper class, colonially influenced lifestyle. Nagarkar, however, seems to be determined to avoid this trap. While it is true that Nagarkar grew up speaking English, it is also apparent that he felt loyalty to his Marathi roots. Moreover, the stories Nagarkar writes are not ones that fall along explicitly postcolonial fault lines. Nagarkar does not write about the diaspora of Indians to other imperial locales, or the sense of alienation that stems from leaving one's homeland through choice or necessity. Instead, he writes of life in the chawls of Bombay, the interactions of untouchables and members of the lower middle class, the existential crises that are associated with coming of age, regardless of region, and the missteps that opened the door for the Moghul invasion. The presence of colonialism permeates his writings, and the fact that he is writing in English focuses the reader's attention in this direction. However, the colonial legacy features mostly as an inescapable element of Indian life, rather than a quintessential plot point. Nagarkar's characters are haunted by history, but

not exclusively the fact of the imperial governance of the British. The Indians Nagarkar depicts are equally influenced by other conquerors, and the aspects of their culture that led to successful occupations.

Although Khair acknowledges that certain English Indian writers have described both rural and lower-caste characters, he alleges that the Indian novels written in English have followed traditional patterns of societal structure, and the figures that would be marginalized in contemporary society are marginalized in text, as well (137). Although issues of caste-based oppression feature in many Indian Anglophone novels, in *Ravan and Eddie* Nagarkar goes out of his way to illuminate the class cruelty associated with Hinduism. In his depiction of the "untouchable," Shahaji Kadam, he certainly falls preys to Khair's accusation that all lower-caste individuals are depicted from upper (or, perhaps more accurately in this case, lower middle) class perspectives. Nevertheless, this perception is complicated by the fact that Ravan is also a child, and innocent of the politics surrounding untouchables. Upon discovering Shahaji's relationship with Tara Sarang, Ravan is surprised rather than horrified. He thinks, "What was she doing with that man anyway? Didn't she know nobody spoke with the people from the ground floors of Chawl Nos. 7, 11, 22, 23 and 29, neither the Hindus nor the Catholics? It wasn't a taboo or anything of the sort, you just didn't" (*Ravan and Eddie* 86). Ravan's confusion concerning untouchables reveals his near-complete ignorance of class division; members of other castes avoid untouchables explicitly because such interactions are taboo. Instead of comprehending the rationale behind such ostracism, Ravan has been conditioned to simply accept prejudice as

normative behavior. Upon his examination of the attitude behind the alienation of untouchables, Ravan is unable to isolate a cohesive rationale, and his conduct becomes susceptible to adaptation. Almost immediately, Ravan becomes complicit in the romance of the star-crossed couple, carrying messages between them. In a daring interrogation of the status quo, Ravan even goes out of his way to touch Shahaji, putting his arms around his waist on the back of a motorcycle (*Ravan and Eddie*, 93-94). Tara's liaison with Shahaji ends brutally, as Tara's father discovers the affair and beats his daughter so aggressively that she miscarries their child (*Ravan and Eddie* 113). While this could be construed as a textual confirmation of Shahaji's alienation, instead the segment serves to question which character boasts the most humanity. Mr. Sarang is proven monstrous – beating his faithful daughters for nearly any provocation – while Shahaji is painted as a flesh and blood man – imperfect, but certainly human.

While Nagarkar's treatment of class division itself is a variation on the traditional Anglo-Indian novel, his insinuation that English may be a way for marginalized Indians to improve their social standing further inverts the conceptualization of English as the language of privilege. This is particularly evident in his aside entitled "A Meditation on Neighbours" in *Ravan and Eddie*. He writes that in the CWD chawls:

> Hindus spoke Marathi, Catholics, English.... English was the thorn in the side of the Hindus. Its absence was their cross, their humiliation and the source of their life-long inferiority and inadequacy. It was a severely debilitating, if not fatal, lack that was

> not acknowledged, spoken of or articulated. It was the great leveller. It gave caste-Hindus a taste of their own medicine. It made them feel like untouchables. It also turned the tables. The former outcastes could now look down upon their Hindu neighbours. (179)

Nagarkar's spelling of "outcastes" is a fortuitous invention here. He suggests that those who were unable to gain traction within the Hindu community were capable of finding another avenue for attaining power – this time by learning to converse in the language of the colonizer. Nagarkar indicates further that this is nothing more than what had been happening throughout India for thousands of years. After all, he argues, historically the word "sanskriti" was synonymous with culture and tradition – and those unable to converse in Sanskrit were simply unable to participate in cultural goings on (*Ravan and Eddie* 181). The alienation of those without access to the correct language was nothing new, and certainly not the exclusive legacy of the British colonizers.

CHAPTER 2

MIMICRY AND HYBRIDITY: BEYOND THE WORD

Colonial languages carry inescapable burdens throughout former territories, but it is not simply the language in which one speaks that references the remnants of imperialism. Although Nagarkar has been criticized for his move to write in English, and perceived abandonment of his heritage, he is still a quintessentially Indian writer. In an attempt to better understand Nagarkar's relationship to his homeland, it seems worth looking at him in contrast with another writer who has faced similar accusations. As a writer of Indian descent, V. S. Naipaul has sought to develop an overarching analysis of mimicry and associated risks within the confines of both fiction and non-fiction. After the publication of *An Area of Darkness*, for example, Naipaul was immediately condemned by the Indian community he had written about – not simply because he focused upon aspects of Indian life that might be perceived as unsavory to the Western reading public, but also because he acknowledged a prevalence of misguided mimicry of the West (Dhondy 183). Naipaul's recognition and critique of such mimicry, however, seems to ring falsely to some readers, based on some of his dismissive comments concerning his native Trinidad, his relocation to England, and his desire to write in English. Naipaul's adoption of English culture is far from limited to his use of English, but his choice to write in that language is indicative of his more comprehensive assimilation. His actions resonate somewhat hypocritically: if Naipaul can take on the oppressor's language and culture and not be made ridiculous, it seems that it must be possible for others as well.

Nevertheless, Naipaul's literary works seem to indicate a belief that such a transmutation is, if not impossible, nearly so.

While Bhabha's conceptualization of mimicry allows the colonial subject some level of power – the mimic man's slightly inaccurate representations of English culture can horrify as well as soothe the colonial conscience – Naipaul's assessment of mimicry in *The Mimic Men* is bleaker. Atreyee Phukan argues that the mimicry demonstrated by Naipaul's male protagonists leads to a temporary, unsustainable hybridization, regardless of whom the individuals are mimicking (149). Ralph Singh and his father, Gurudeva, are both entirely dependent on mimicry, as they seek to reinvent their identities while Isabella moves toward independence. Born into colonialism, with its legacy of French and British imperialism, both Ralph and Gurudeva had lived their entire lives in imitation of European customs. However, the same tool of imitation could be used to echo the behaviors of members of other castes and classes. While this seemingly frees the men from their original personas, neither of them is able to maintain the facade. Ralph is able to identify with the English through Pamela, and then with the descendents of Africans on the island through Browne, while Gurudeva is able to relate to the working classes through the widow of the transport contractor and subsequently his followers. But Gurudeva's movement is drawn to a close by his murder, while Ralph finds himself repeatedly cast out by the people he seeks to join.

While Naipaul seems critical of hybridization throughout *The Mimic Men*, his sentiments towards both British imperialism and Indian independence seem

confused and contradictory throughout his oft criticized non-fiction texts. Naipaul does not shy away from describing an Indian government that has forgotten its people, become driven by greed, and seems completely clueless about the rules of governance in the modern world. In *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, Naipaul describes the Indian government as having become criminalized, as politicians turned to the black market and those running the criminal underworld to assist in cutting through red tape (*India* 69). Speaking to the Bangalore scientist Subramaniam, who references how his grandfather believed that Indians were incapable of self-rule and wished the English would remain in power, Naipaul himself expresses similar sentiments. He describes seeing Indian people who had been brought to Trinidad, served their indentures, and had then been left to their own devices. The fate of these people, in Naipaul's eyes, was dismal: they became bereft and homeless. He writes:

> The idea came to me, when I was quite young, seeing those destitutes, that we were people with no one to appeal to. We had been transported out of the abjectness of India, and were without representation. The idea of the external enemy wasn't enough to explain what had happened to us. I found myself at an early age looking inwards, and wondering whether the culture – the difficult but personal religion, the taboos, the social ideas – which in one way supported and enriched some of us, and gave us solidity, wasn't perhaps the very thing that had exposed us to defeat. (*India* 159)

While Naipaul certainly seems to feel that the abandonment of colonial forces is somewhat to blame for the situation he witnessed in Trinidad, he also seems to be suggesting that the very nature of Indian culture complicates independence.

This kind of sentiment is especially inflammatory coming from Naipaul who, while of Indian descent, is nevertheless not an Indian national. Born in Trinidad, Naipaul was educated in England, and as even Naipaul himself would admit, growing up aware of one's ancestral homeland is not the same as growing up within it. In the 2010 preface to *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, Naipaul writes that while he could not consider himself an insider in India, he could nevertheless not fully recognize himself as being a complete outsider. He had, after all, always valued his heritage, and his feelings on the nation were consequently convoluted and confused (xv). It is this level of remove, the lack of being a direct and immediate figure of authority, that has led critics like Edward Said to assert that Naipaul is uneducated and uninformed, and worse, unconcerned about the risk he undertakes by disseminating his own ignorance (113). Discussing Naipaul's assault on Islam in *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey*, Said levels a series of accusations that can easily be extended to all of Naipaul's commentary on India. Said writes:

> Unrestrained by genuine learning or self-education, this persona—Naipaul the ex-novelist—tours the vulnerable parts of his natal provenance, the colonial world he has been telling us about via his acquired British identity. ... If it is criticism that the West stands for, good—we want Naipaul to criticize those mad mullahs, vacant

> Islamic students, cliché-ridden revolutionaries. But does he write *for* and *to* them? Does he live among them, risk their direct retaliation, write in their presence so to speak, and does he like Socrates live through the consequences of his criticism? (116)

As Said concludes, he determines that Naipaul never risks facing the people he critiques – his vitriol is relegated to books published for Western markets and the *Atlantic Monthly*. Although this seems like a somewhat unfair critique – after all, English language journals and magazines are central to the publishing realm Naipaul has now inhabited for over half a century – it is indicative of how far removed Naipaul is seen to be from the cultural heritage of which he writes. Naipaul is writing about cultures without writing for them – a critical difference between him and Nagarkar. Although Nagarkar levies criticism against India, he always does so with a local readership in mind.

In Martha Nussbaum's original discussion of the Stoic and Kantian philosophy of cosmopolitanism, certain aspects of Naipaul's attitude could actually be viewed as laudable. Nussbaum's ideal cosmopolitan "citizen of the world" disregards the accidental location of his birth, and privileges a respect for humanity in its entirety over any nationally, ethnically, or religiously bound allegiances ("Kant" 7-8). That being said, the morality Naipaul seems to privilege is less universal than it is Western, ignoring the benefits that come from viewing the "other" as part of a common body ("Kant" 20). In later writing, however, Nussbaum has retracted her own support for the idea of universal cosmopolitanism, suggesting that privileging universality over patriotic allegiance

can be detrimental to the human psyche. In "Toward a Globally Sensitive Patriotism," Nussbaum writes:

> I do not, however, even endorse cosmopolitanism as a correct comprehensive doctrine. Further thought about Stoic cosmopolitanism ... persuaded me that the denial of particular attachments leaves life empty of meaning for most of us, with the human psychology and the developmental history we have. The dark side of Stoic thought is the conviction that life contains merely a sequence of meaningless episodes, once particular attachments have been uprooted: and the solution to problems of particular attachments ought not to be this total uprooting, so destructive of the human personality. (80)

Even if Naipaul can consider himself to be cosmopolitan, therefore, he risks psychological damage by privileging global allegiance over more nearly delineated cultural ties. Nagarkar, in contrast, maintains a level of national pride even while acknowledging the importance of respect for external cultural contributions.

While Nagarkar seems to express ideas about hybridization that are in direct contrast to those of Naipaul, he arrives at his different conclusion through many of the same avenues. One issue that features heavily in the writing of both authors is architectural construction, and the corruption associated therewith, both before and after independence. Neither writer suggests that Indian architecture mimics that of the British; instead, both argue that perhaps the Indian people

would be better served if contemporary Indian architecture were more traditionally European. The differences between architectural and linguistic mimicry are innumerable: the adoption of a colonizer's tongue can be said to shape the way the colonial subject thinks and communicates. Nevertheless, the space in which a person lives, and the homes citizens build for themselves, can concretely impact individual and community development. Naipaul states that architecture in India post-independence fails to consider basic human welfare – a charge he fails to level against the British. From his perspective, this is a particularly grave offense because the Indian people were meant to be building for their own countrymen, and should therefore exhibit greater concern for the future inhabitants of the buildings being built. Naipaul suggests that British architecture attended to the Indian climate and attempted to increase the comfort of its inhabitants (*India* 280). In contrast, however, he writes that the buildings the Indian people have constructed for themselves are not only ugly, but also airless – architecture that is not simply uncomfortable but "disdainful of the people it serves" (*India* 281). In Naipaul's perception, the Indian people are responsible for the discomfort he perceives in their own massive cities – a level of overcrowding and lack of practicality that was never at issue when the British were in power.

Nagarkar is not quite so effusive in his praise for British construction in India, but his opinion concerning that which came after is consistent. He describes the Central Works Department chawls, or group housing units, designed by the British with a decidedly condemnatory tone. The plus-sign layout of the chawls demands that on average forty families share each corridor. The twelve by

twenty-four foot rooms were so overcrowded, housing to six to eight people each, that many residents spent their nights sleeping in the hallways (*Ravan and Eddie* 66-7). But Nagarkar's point seems not to be that the British built thoughtlessly designed spaces in which people should be forced to utilize inhumanely close quarters. Instead, he particularly praises the original design of the space, writing, "The British engineers who had designed the water supply set-up some seventy years ago had done a good job. Despite heavy use and maltreatment, the system still worked" (*Ravan and Eddie* 68). Emphasizing the length of time the system has been in place and blaming any of its shortcomings on overuse, however, puts culpability for the living conditions of the chawls squarely on the shoulders of the Indian people. The chawls are a legacy of the British, Nagarkar seems to suggest, but their current state of decline is the responsibility of the residents of Bombay[2].

Nagarkar furthers his discussion of life in the chawls, and their status, in *God's Little Soldier*. Zafar, a Bombay Muslim, left India to study architecture. Upon his return, his liberal ideas of breaking away from the skyscrapers which obliterated the Bombay skyline and moving toward more humanizing design horrified his family. Nagarkar writes:

> His idea was to tear down the chawls of Bombay and transform them into homes for the chawl tenants, built around a central common area with utilities like playgrounds, schools, and markets; to give each family space, light and air. He wanted to design and

[2] Here the name "Bombay," and not the more contemporary "Mumbai," is used to remain consistent with the naming of the city throughout Nagarkar's novels.

> landscape public spaces. Architecture, he was always saying, is the source of human dignity, the basis of a civic society. (45)

As Zafar goes about realizing his dream and at one point builds a public space parallel to a new roadway, he is only granted the government project on the condition that he let the revenue minister's son construct some spans of the flyover. The awarding of such a nepotistic contract dramatically disrupts all of Zafar's ambitions, as the flyover collapses, and Zafar's own brother-in-law absconds overseas with all of the profits. In this scenario, the chawls, first built by the British, are clearly condemned. However, when an Indian man attempts to improve living conditions for his countrymen, he is thwarted first by his father's traditional disapproval, and then by the corruption of his family and the government. The situation is even more complex because it is only after Zafar receives an English education that he seeks to improve conditions in India – again relying on the influence of the former colonizer. What is obvious, more than anything else, is that in the world of *God's Little Soldier* the Indian people are working against themselves, as they resist tearing down the legacy of the British and building something that would better serve the populace.

While both Naipaul and Nagarkar are critical of post-independence India and the people who have been placed in charge, the critique rings differently when espoused by Nagarkar. Nagarkar, after all, has chosen to continue living in Mumbai, while Naipaul has never made any part of India a long-term home. This geographical choice is not simply a matter of establishing oneself as a cultural insider – it also reveals a lack of pretension on Nagarkar's part. Naipaul has

suggested that his emigration from Trinidad was an "escape" (Gourevitch 27), and his repeated descriptions of developing nations suggest a level of scorn and disdain. Nagarkar is no less critical of India than Naipaul, but his criticisms, written from his home in Mumbai, do not carry the same tone of condescension. While Nagarkar is less generous in his praise of the British Raj than Naipaul, he is certainly more a spokesperson for hybridization than Naipaul would ever purport to be. Naipaul's characters seem to find their downfall in their desire to imitate the behaviors of other social groups, yet Nagarkar argues that just such hybridization, in moderation, is a ruler's strongest character trait. In the historical note that follows *Cuckold*, Nagarkar writes of the Moghul leader Emperor Akbar. He states that his greatest achievement lay in his willingness to appoint Hindus, Muslims, Jains, and Zoroastrians to prominent positions within the government, exhibiting enlightenment and tolerance for people from all sections of society, while simultaneously learning from the strongest elements of each different worldview (*Cuckold* 607-608). To an extent, this praise of Akbar is simultaneously an endorsement for the imperial mindset. Akbar was cosmopolitan in his willingness to promote aspects of diverse cultures. Even if Immanuel Kant rejected colonialism in his writing on cosmopolitanism, Nussbaum suggests that was more a condemnation of oppression and brutality than the philosophy of imperialism itself ("Kant" 14). Nevertheless, any praise for Mughal leadership is treacherously loaded, and can be interpreted as an indication of Islamic leanings, imperial nostalgia, or perhaps more ambitiously, the dream of a united India. Here, contextualized with the views detailed throughout Nagarkar's written body,

it seems plausible that his praise of Akbar is primarily indicative of a drive to bring India under one multicultural umbrella. This suggestion of hybridization and urge to adopt aspects of the colonizer's culture, however, strikes some critics as even more offensive than condemnation from an insider/outsider like Naipaul. A critique is sometimes more devastating when it comes from someone who possesses intimate, first-hand knowledge.

CHAPTER 3

SHAPING AN INDIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY

While Indian writers in English have their detractors, there is also a vocal subset who seem to suggest that English Indian writing is the wave of the future, and moreover that its production has already surpassed the quality of the works being composed in any of the vernacular languages of India. In fact, this is a viewpoint Salman Rushdie espouses in his introduction to *Mirrorwork: 50 Years of Indian Writing* (viii). In defending the use of English in India, Rushdie argues that the national drive to teach every school child English will lead to greater economic opportunities for children who were not born into the upper classes (x). Moreover, he states that many of the languages that have been naturalized by India bear the trace of the colonizer's tongue and therefore English should not be ostracized for such a specious rationalization (xi). But most interestingly, perhaps, is his reiteration of the rationale for the critics of Indo-Anglican writers – so much so that it seems worth quoting at length. He states:

> Its practitioners are denigrated for being too upper-middle-class; for lacking diversity in their choice of themes and techniques; for being less popular in India than outside India; for possessing inflated reputations on account of the international power of the English language, and of the ability of Western critics and publishers to impose their cultural standards on the East; for living, in many cases, outside India; for being deracinated to the point that their work lacks the spiritual dimension essential for a 'true'

> understanding of the soul of India; for being insufficiently grounded in the ancient literary traditions of India; for being the literary equivalent of MTV culture, of globalizing Coca-Colonisation; even, I'm sorry to report, for suffering from a condition that one sprightly recent commentator, Pankaj Mishra, calls 'Rushdieitis ... [a] condition that has claimed Rushdie himself in his later works'. (xi)

While Rushdie's point is certainly not that any of these accusations are relevant for any of the Indian English writers working today, it nevertheless seems necessary to address the complaints in specific relation to Nagarkar. Certainly, they have each been leveled against him equally, and it is not productive to dismiss them without some examination. For if these are the allegations that are intended to challenge a person's "Indianness," they are weighted insinuations indeed.

Perhaps it is most logical to begin at the end, with the accusation of "Rushdieitis." Nagarkar is certainly a writer who has been compared to Rushdie, and not entirely without reason. Nagarkar cannot be considered one of "Rushdie's Children," partially because a substantial portion of his groundbreaking *Seven Sixes are Forty-Three* was published as early as 1967 (Lukmani, "Introduction" ix). Nevertheless, there are some undeniable similarities between works by both writers. *Ravan and Eddie*, in particular, pays homage to Rushdie through details and imagery – names and physical characterizations seem to flirt with the text of *The Satanic Verses*, dancing on the line of direct references. In *God's Little*

Soldier, Nagarkar's protagonist even sets about carrying out the fatwah against Rushdie (135). But critical differences isolate Nagarkar from his more internationally recognized counterpart. As Makarand Paranjape points out, the majority of Indian English novelists write from one of two perspectives: either a to reveal the psychological interior of the Indian subject, or to display a level of irrefutable, undeniable acumen with the English language itself (15). This is certainly true of Rushdie's writing: its complexity and attention to diction announces his right to write in English; anyone able to wield the language so skillfully certainly should. But Nagarkar's novels are not simply character studies or linguistic showmanship. Although the characters that populate *Ravan and Eddie* and *Cuckold* exhibit intense levels of development, they seem to be subsidiary to the plot. The texts seek to depict the realities of childhood lived in the Bombay chawls and the elements that allowed the Moghul invasion, respectively. Nagarkar's desire to write about Indians living permanently in India, without indication of desire to emigrate, comes second to his need to tell a good story. Yasmeen Lukmani suggests that even more subtle differences set Nagarkar apart from Rushdie. Rushdie has a voice that is immediately recognizable – it splays across the pages of all of his novels, linking them together. But Nagarkar's novels boast different tones, attitudes, and subject matter (Lukmani, "Introduction" ix). Upcoming writers do not ape Nagarkar's style because it is difficult to pinpoint; a casual reader would be hard pressed to determine whether a single author penned all of his English works. Nagarkar's varied voice and

breadth of narrative style complicates any comparisons one would make between his corpus and that of any other novelist.

Lukmani also suggests that part of what makes Nagarkar so inherently Indian, and what sets him apart from Indian English writers she views as outsiders, like Rushdie, is his treatment of sex and sexuality ("Introduction" xi). Lukmani argues that in historical Indian society, sex is discussed openly and publicly. Nagarkar's Indianness, and the merits of his novels as ethnographic representations of Indian society for an English reading audience, has been repeatedly called into question because of his language choice. However, it is worth exploring exactly what makes his novels nationally representative, removed from the matter of compositional language. Throughout Hindu temples, many of the Gods and even Goddesses are hyper-sexualized -- something Nagarkar acknowledges particularly through his representations of the liaisons between Krishna and the Little Saint in *Cuckold*. It is because of this tradition, Lukmani argues, that Nagarkar's images of sexuality are integrated casually into his writings. This is notable even on the first page of *Ravan and Eddie*, as Victor's stream-of-consciousness transitions easily from complimenting Parvati's son to ogling her breasts. After listing the physical attributes of Ram/Ravan, Victor thinks, "Though of course he doesn't have your pomegranate breasts. Pom-pom, pom-pom, may I squeeze them?" (*Ravan and Eddie* 1). Although this segment of text is largely written to partially surprise and humor the audience, as well as to establish that Victor's infatuation with Parvati is not platonic, it is notable in how unabashed it is in its frankness. In this way, Lukmani argues, Nagarkar distances

himself further from Rushdie, and other Ango-Indian writers, whose depictions of sexuality are relatively squeamish ("Introduction" xii).

Nagarkar's overt sexualizations suggest that he has not been exceedingly influenced by Western culture, particularly in his desire to depict characters that express facets of both male and female sexualities. The Raj Kumar, for example, is in many ways a model of hyper-masculinity. He is a valiant warrior who copulates with multiple women outside of his marriage. However, this image is frequently called into question, through instances of impotence, the court's mockery of his reluctance to take multiple wives, and his indulgence of the extramarital activities of both his wives. After the Raj Kumar's second wife, Sugandha, begins to carry on publicly with his brother Vikramaditya, the heir apparent acknowledges the importance of the appearance of masculinity, indicating that a king who cannot impregnate a woman is viewed to be no king at all (*Cuckold* 499). Still, despite initial reluctance, the Raj Kumar is willing to don the guise of a woman and even embrace aspects of newfound sexuality in the role. Nagarkar writes:

> If he had been horrified at the thought of masquerading as a transvestite, why was he not incensed that his step had become light and his torso lissom? Or were the reasons for this quite simple and banal? That at heart he was a woman or perhaps all human beings are really bisexual? ... What is the most complete and sufficient idea that mankind has had? God. And yet if you assign

> sex to God, then he or she too becomes finite and incomplete. (*Cuckold* 496)

Moments after the Raj has his epiphany about the flexibility of gender roles, he copulates, still dressed as a female, with his wife, who is dressed as a male. While gender roles may be temporarily confused, there can be little question that this is an act of heterosexual activity, simultaneously deregulating and re-enforcing established sexual mores. Mukherjee asserts that Nagarkar works to overturn nearly every socially pervasive gender stereotype throughout the text — as evidence, she cites the court eunuch who manages to impregnate a woman and female characters that are ultimately more powerful and prescient than the males who purport to control them ("Celebrating *Cuckold*" 35). In Nagarkar's literature, the males and females each boast traits that would stereotypically align them with the gender role in direct opposition of their sexual biology.

As Ashis Nandy writes in "The Psychology of Colonialism: Sex, Age and Ideology in British India," one of the major strategies the British employed in order to maintain control in the colonies was to juxtapose a feminized colonial subject against a hyper-masculinized English gentleman (8). As Nandy states, the concept of being genuinely feminine was much less anathema to that of the femininity inherent in masculinity, or hermaphroditism ("Psychology of Colonialism" 8). In that context, the Raj Kumar's identification with the feminine is somewhat less horrifying when he feels himself legitimately *becoming* female – at least then he is embracing authentic womanhood as opposed to an alien blend of masculine and feminine. In colonial psychology, the concept that "all human

beings are really bisexual" is much more threatening than the idea that a man could legitimately become a woman.

Nevertheless, the sociological development of masculinity throughout the colonial empire is intrinsically confused. As Nandy suggests, to be seen as manly, males in the lower societal strata were expected to be exceptionally virile and overtly sexual, while members of the upper classes were to exhibit almost supernatural self-control ("Psychology of Colonialism" 10). As the Raj Kumar vacillates between these two behavioral patterns, his sense of sexual identity is perpetually in flux. The Raj successfully demonstrates restraint by refusing to marry Leelawati, the Finance Minister's daughter and one of the crown prince's closest confidantes. Despite considering Leelawati to be one of the most beautiful women in Mewar, not to mention an exceedingly intelligent one, the Maharaj refuses her advances (*Cuckold* 564). Although he has a last minute change of heart and decides to send for Leelawati, stealing her from her husband at her behest, he never has an opportunity to follow through with his intentions, and his sexual self-restraint remains unchallenged (*Cuckold* 579).

This ability to abstain from carnality plays out somewhat ironically in the Raj's relations with his wives, however. As the Little Saint refuses to consummate their marriage, the Raj finds himself forced to exhibit self-restraint. Although his feverish lust for her occasionally overpowers him, resulting in the ill-fated encounter on their wedding night (*Cuckold* 46) and his repeated imitations of Krishna, the majority of their marriage is chaste, albeit bitterly. By the time the Raj is coerced into marrying his second wife, Sughanda, it seems his sexual

fortunes are to be reversed. When faced with his bride's forward advances on his wedding night, however, he finds himself not simply unwilling, but unable to perform sexually (*Cuckold* 463). In this instance, it is the Raj's lack of agency that strikes him as being so unjust. He thinks, "My world had lost its moorings. What was left of life if I could not depend on sheer, straightforward lust?" (*Cuckold* 463). While the Raj is in control of his sexual urges he can still consider himself to be powerful, but when that power is taken from him, as it is by both of his wives, he ceases to be sure of his position in the world.

At times, however, the Raj exhibits sexual urges that would more closely align him with members of the lower classes. While this is partially inspired by his occasionally overwhelming desire for the Little Saint, it also sources from his willingness to participate in sexual liaisons that are ill advised or abjectly dangerous. After sitting in judgment in small claims court over a man claiming his wife, Sunheria, was engaged in extra-marital activities, the Raj begins to carry on an affair with the woman. As Sunheria's husband could easily learn of the affair and name the Raj a co-respondent in the case, leading to great humiliation for the royal family, this is an extremely dangerous dalliance (*Cuckold* 13). Similarly, the Raj's longest romance exists between him and his wet-nurse and childhood nanny, Kausalya. As Kausalya is the mother of Mangal Simha, the head of intelligence and the Raj's only true male friend, the somewhat Oedipal relationship risks creating a devastating rift. The fact that the Raj is willing to take such extreme risks in the pursuit of physical release, regardless of any associated

emotional reward, indicates that his libido is not as controlled as members of the upper classes might wish it to be.

It is the very complexity of Nagarkar's representations of gender and sexuality that are so interesting to his role in the framework of Indian literature. Nagarkar is not writing exclusively to reestablish the Indian bravado regarding sexual potency or to condemn the interference of colonial powers in gender construction – instead he is engaging in a multifaceted analysis of the current and historical state of sexual identities throughout India. Through sexual representations Nagarkar brings to bear class discrepancies and to reveal the diversity that can be found within Indian philosophy. By doing so, Nagarkar moves toward creating a snapshot of Indian psychology, encapsulating his perception of reality from multiple vantage points.

The Raj Kumar's ability to straddle the liminal territory between Nandy's variations of masculinity – the virility of the lower classes and the self-restraint of high society – is paralleled by his compulsive, seemingly uncontrollable code switching. As the Mewari heir sets about writing his memoirs, he indicates that the voice that flowed from his pen was one that startled even him. Nagarkar writes:

> I tried to resist it, at times tore up page after page but finally gave in. I realized for the first time that my mind was a two-tongued instrument: an austere, distanced and deliberative high Mewari for the purposes of ratiocination and logic; and a cross between the language of the court and the colourful, pungent and coruscating

> dialect of the eunuchs, servants and maids in the palace. (*Cuckold* 346)

The Raj, therefore, exhibits traits from multiple genders and classes. He exhibits masculinity in his self-restraint and occasionally his overwhelming urges, while displaying femininity in his willingness to cross-dress and his occasional lack of sexual dominance. He is obviously aristocratic in his sexual asceticism and use of high Mewari, yet identifies with the lower classes in his lustful moments and his conversational dialect.

While the gender confusion throughout *Cuckold* is, no doubt, partially an allusion to the feminization of Indian men by the British imperial forces, this duality is also in alignment with traditional Indian philosophy. The Raj Kumar's cross-dressing is inspired, after all, by the legend of Radhekrishna – an unbreakable union between the male Krishna and his female beloved, Radhe (*Cuckold* 491). In traditional Hindu mythology, Gods are simultaneously males and females, even though they are most frequently depicted as simply having one sex. As Hira Steven writes, in some ways the traditional Hindu view is postmodern in that it recognizes the relativity of truth (148). In Hinduism, nothing is absolute, and everything is a gradation. Therefore Nagarkar uses instances of inverted sexual binaries and various digressions from normative gender-based behaviors not simply to highlight the liberation of Indian sexual philosophy, but of Indian philosophy on a larger scale.

Because of this alignment between Hindu duality and Indian culture in general, the desire of the British to eliminate such hybridized sexuality in their

Indian subjects is even more treacherous. As the Indian rulers pushed against insinuations of femininity and weakness, they moved toward an exceedingly violent and unthinkingly valorous method of proving their masculinity and strength. Referencing Nandy's research, Mukherjee writes:

> Ashis Nandy has argued that the British dismissal of the Hindu male as weak and unmanly had resulted in a reflex reaction which invoked *kshatriyahood* as the only desirable masculine model, erasing in the process the inclusive androgyny of certain Hindu concepts. ("Celebrating *Cuckold*" 34)

In this manner, not only were traditional gender roles brought into question, so was the dominant national religion. Much research has indicated that the British needed the psychological salve of believing that their Indian subjects were feminine and in need of guidance – a belief that, in turn, emphasized British manliness and right to rule ("Celebrating *Cuckold*" 34). However, the ramifications were more devastating to the Indian worldview than could have been anticipated.

Although Hindu philosophy cannot be entirely correlated with Indian ideology, it is undeniable that many aspects of the religion have permeated the collective mindset of the Indian population, regardless of religious identification. As Nandy writes in "A Report on the Present State of Health of the Gods and Goddesses in South Asia," Indian culture has long been defined by a plurality of elements of various faiths. He states:

> Kumar Suresh Singh's survey of Indian communities shows that hundreds of communities in India can be classified as having more than one 'religion'. (It is doubtful if these believers see themselves as having multiple religious identities; they define their Hinduism or Islam or Christianity in such a way that the symbols of sacredness of another faith acquire specific theological, cultural and familial status.) Thus, there are one hundred and sixteen communities that are both Hindu and Christian; at least thirty-five communities that are both Hindu and Muslim. (132-3)

Therefore, even if an Indian person is not Hindu, it can be assumed that certain elements of Hinduism have unavoidably permeated his psyche. Using Nagarkar as an example, he himself admits he writes about religion despite the fact that he does not consider himself to be religious (Paul). Instead, the mere presence of religious elements in his texts, rather than acting as an homage to his personal beliefs, serve as a shared experience to draw together a diverse Indian audience.

As Nandy asserts, one of the major identifiers of Hinduism is the manner in which Gods and Goddesses interact with their human charges ("Report" 126). While the Gods and Goddesses possessed power beyond that of the average mortal, they differed from the deities of Western mythologies in that they were fallible, and frequently flawed. Nandy writes, "Gods and humans are not distant from each other; human beings can, if they try hard enough, approximate gods. They can even aspire to be more powerful and venerable than gods" ("Report" 129-30). It was not until missionaries and reformers entered India that the Gods

began to take on a more omnipotent persona. One of the first movements to force the Gods into polite behavior was that of the Brahmo Samaj ("Report" 126), of which Nagarkar's grandfather was a strident member (Paranjape 3). It seems that Nagarkar's desire to revitalize the traditional misbehaviors of the Gods may be more than a return to Indian form, but also a familial rebellion.

In addition to Nagarkar's resurrection of traditional Hindu deities, the audience is also asked to consider *Cuckold* as something of a traditional Indian epic. In its most traditional form, an epic poetically recounts the achievements of heroes throughout history – and it would be possible to view *Cuckold* in this light. Despite the fact that the Raj Kumar does not succeed in defending his kingdom against the invasion of the Moghuls, his foresight and valor indicate that his bravery and intelligence is worthy of remembrance. But *Cuckold* is more than a simple valorization of one individual. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a national epic as "a nation's conception of its own past history, or of the events in that history which it finds most worthy of remembrance" ("Epic"). As Nagarkar makes reference to various epics throughout his works – notably the *Ramayana* in *Ravan and Eddie* and the *Mahabharata* at various points throughout *Cuckold*, it seems clear that he is trying to forefront the concept of epics in his readers' minds.

The purpose of an epic, then, is multifaceted. It is intended to speak of heroism and also serve as a people's history as they wish it to be remembered. As Usha Hemmady writes in "Cracks in the State: Morality and Tradition in 16th Century Mewar," epics, rather than being tragedies, are "meant to reveal the true

moral fibre of mankind, with a little help from the gods. And this is what Nagarkar's *Cuckold* does" (267). That being said, *Cuckold* does not simply present a single, unified sense of morality throughout the Mewari population, or even a singular, perfectly relatable protagonist. The audience likes and responds to the Raj Kumar, but he is far from being a pillar of morality. Instead, Nagarkar uses his epic to show the many flaws and shortcomings of Gods and men, and to make a statement about the behaviors that are destructive to a people, regardless of time period.

While Nagarkar's tendency to reference epics is a tribute to Indian writing unto itself, the method in which he does so reveals much about his intended audience. His novels refuse to pander to ignorant readers or even situate allusions within an accessible framework. Instead, Nagarkar builds upon an assumed level of previous familiarity. One particularly notable instance of this comes while discussing self-denial. Nagarkar makes use of the character of Bhishma from the *Mahabharata* through the mouthpiece of Bruhannada, the chief eunuch at the palace. If Nagarkar reminds his readers of the essential elements of the tale, he does not do so in a way that invites naive readers to feel any relevant association, nor does he explain the plot or background of the *Mahabharata*. Instead, he simply writes:

> As you are well aware, Bhishma's ageing father Shantanu fell in love with the beauteous Satyavati but she would not agree to the marriage unless her son and not Bhishma inherited the throne. Shantanu would not ask his son for this terrible sacrifice, yet

> Bhishma not only renounced the throne but took a vow of eternal celibacy. (*Cuckold* 508)

To relate to the next several pages of text, as well as the later conversation in which the Raj challenges Bruhannada's interpretation of the tale (*Cuckold* 533) the audience must have a much more intimate understanding of Bhishma's story than Nagarkar has provided. While this is an element of the text that can be appreciated by readers of varying levels of familiarity with the Sanskrit canon, it is certainly one that will expose disparities among audience members. Those intimately familiar with foundational Indian texts will respond to the allusion differently than readers who have previously encountered strictly Western cultural experiences.

Throughout *Cuckold*, no one escapes Nagarkar's critical eye. He not only portrays heroes, Gods, and mere mortals as being imperfect, but also revered saints. If the Raj Kumar is a mere footnote in history, the Little Saint is none other than the saint Mirabai. Nagarkar takes liberties with the legend, but to an Indian audience the reference is immediately identifiable. As Paranjape points out, the fourth possible conclusion to *Cuckold* is a variation on a well-known Indian legend in which Mira disappears into a statue of Krishna (18). In "Mirabai Comes to America: The Translation and Transformation of a Saint," Nancy M. Martin asserts that Mira's appeal is universal. The reputation of Mira as a woman forced to marry against her wishes, despite her belief that she has been called to a higher power, made her a hugely sympathetic martyr. The fact that she historically stood up to her powerful husband and remained true to her faith, writing overwhelming

quantities of poetry at a time when such a profession was almost exclusively available to men, made her a role model for the feminist movement. Although Mirabai has made her presence known in America and the West in general, her legend has become enormously distorted in its translation. Robert Bly's early translations of Mira's poetry, not to mention Daniel Ladinsky's later reinterpretations, deliberately de-emphasized religious references, and instead focused on more global themes. Over time, the stories and poetry inspired by Mira speak mostly to romantic love, rebellious feminism, and religious loyalty. While these themes can certainly be discerned in Mira's work, the specific sentiments expressed in her poetry have been heavily subordinated (Martin 25).

While Nagarkar's rendition of Mira is divergent from her historical representations, it is also not the same Mira that crossed the sea to America. As C. T. Indra writes, Nagarkar's Mira is actually seen through less than sympathetic eyes. Indra states:

> The Meera of tradition, the most sacred of female saints has been defamiliarised. We see her primarily in her role as wife who refuses to perform her wifely duty to her husband, and flaunts her love for Krishna. As the story is presented as mainly a first person account by the Maharaj Kumar, her husband, the novel centers on him and not her. We see her from his eyes and have to sympathise with him in the raw deal he is getting in his married life. (185)

Indra goes on to suggest that this rhetorical strategy inverts the victor-victim paradigm (186). Historical images of the Bhojraj represent him as, if anything, an

oppressive patriarchal force who attempted to diminish Mira's liberty. By letting him tell his own story in a post-feminist framework, the audience is able to see how every historical narrative has multiple facets. Moreover, Nagarkar is careful not to situate his text as a pro-patriarchal fable, since *Cuckold* is riddled with pointedly strong females, particularly Kausalya and the Rani Karmavati. Instead, Nagarkar utilizes the legend of Mira to draw in his Indian audience and ask them to question their own assumptions about the histories and legends they have internalized.

By locating polarizing opinions and concepts within a historical framework, Nagarkar is able to encourage his audience to question accepted traditions and mindsets in a relatively unthreatening and depersonalized context. There is little question that while the Raj Kumar of *Cuckold* is based on a historical figure, he also serves as a thinly masked mouthpiece for the opinions of Kiran Nagarkar himself. In "Narrative Technique in Kiran Nagarkar's Fiction," Lukmani writes:

> In both *Seven Sixes* and *Cuckold*, one suspects that the mental make-up and sensibility of the protagonists comes remarkably close to that of the author, and the "I" mode allows the author to express the inner world of these characters from very close quarters. It is almost as if there is an identity of vision, a coalescing of personalities, of mindsets. (107)

While Nagarkar never explicitly indicates that he is the one speaking, many of the sentiments expressed by his narrators are suspiciously close to those Nagarkar

himself has evinced in interviews. Moreover, Nagarkar goes to great pains to make the reader view his speakers as trustworthy – as Manjula Padmanabhan writes, the audience should bristle at the Raj. He does, after all, engage in countless instances of deceit in an effort to find victory on the battlefield, massacre thousands of soldiers, and sleep with multiple women. As Padmanabhan points out, however, the Raj Kumar is not simply described in heroic terminology, but is infinitely empathetic and endearing (299). The Raj serves as the narrator for the majority of the text, and his opinions are only supported in the few chapters that are presented by a third person narrator. The Raj is developed in such a way that he is perceived as both a reliable narrator and a wise man. Similarly, the omniscient voice of *Ravan and Eddie* is supported by periodic, journalistic asides, in which subjectivity is never called to mind – instead the reader is invited to take the diatribe as explicit fact.

If the Raj Kumar is to be believed, then, it was the Rajput adherence to traditional battle formations and nationalistic values that led to the end of their regional dominance. As the Raj states, the Rajputs were known throughout the Indian subcontinent for their exceptional bravery, fearlessness, and valor (*Cuckold* 57). But this same sense of honor also prevented them from appreciating the importance of retreat, or understanding that a traditionally "honorable" battle of head-to-head warfare could be easily anticipated and planned for by less conventional oppositional forces. Despite the Raj Kumar's warnings that the Moghul forces had superior weaponry and more technological know-how, and despite the historical evidence that the Moghul forces were capable of defeating

armies who fought in the traditional Rajput style, with straightforward assault strategies and myriad elephants, the Rana insisted upon waging war as his ancestors before him (*Cuckold* 513-15). As the Raj laments the crushing defeat that takes place almost immediately upon entering the battlefield, he thinks, "Perhaps it might have been a good idea to use strategy three from Shafi's book of retreats.... No one among our leaders, however, had taken into account a defeat, let alone a retreat, so there was no question of a premeditated and orderly withdrawal" (*Cuckold* 583). Instead, the Rana exhibits the self-sacrificing heroics that his people are so famous for, with predictably catastrophic results. As he rallies the troops by charging headlong into the fray, he allows himself to be wounded in sight of his soldiers, inciting them to scatter, panic, and disband.

While it seems clear that Nagarkar is suggesting that a hubristic inability to adapt can lead to destruction, closer inspection suggests that a lack of unification was as deeply to blame. Nagarkar, through the Raj Kumar, lauds the strategy of the Moghul leader, Babur, in his ability to fragment the various Mewari battalions. As the reader witnesses Babur's success, it seems clear that it relies on the knowledge that the oppositional forces had not trained together, did not speak a common language, and were not motivated by religious zeal (*Cuckold* 582). As a conquering kingdom, Mewar absorbed former enemies as subjects, but instead of welcoming them and their cultures, they ostracized and mocked their defeated adversaries (*Cuckold* 488). This reluctance to embrace elements of other cultures resulted in the growth of a resentful and disenfranchised populace – and moreover, one that was susceptible to hostile takeover.

Presciently, the Raj Kumar recognizes that Mewar's growth is dependent on incorporating Muslims, Jains and Hindus thoroughly into the infrastructure of Mewar, allowing them each to feel they hold a stake in the future of the nation (*Cuckold* 384). Anirudh Deshpande illustrates how Nagarkar uses thoroughly researched historical fiction to illustrate differences between traditional Indian methods of warfare and those of outside invaders. Deshpande writes that the type of army nurtured in ancient and medieval India, while visually striking, "...had a low degree of cohesion and, as a consequence, were usually defeated by smaller professional armies in pitched battles" (1825). As Rajput pride and caste rigidity invited the Mewari elite to scorn and isolate their newly conquered countrymen, it seems reasonable to assume that infighting and hostility made it impossible to function collectively in combat.

CHAPTER 4

WESTERN DISREGARD

Based on Nagarkar's analysis of the fall of Mewar, an outsider might theorize that a universal tongue could have greatly benefitted the Rana's fighting forces. Nevertheless, such a thing would surely have seemed unthinkable at the time. As Hemmady writes, "In Maharashtra, Dnyaneshwar was the first to break from the old ways. Persecuted and reviled, he still dared to translate the sacred old texts into Marathi, allowing access to the common man" (237). While certain individuals thought to attempt to bring together people from all castes and backgrounds, the response of the larger population, and particularly the upper societal echelons, was overwhelmingly negative. This response, however, is not so unlike the reaction of those who critique Nagarkar's move to write in English. While there are no exact figures that state the number of English speaking people in India, one estimate places it at 333 million people, more than 28% of the population ("India English Growth 'Too Slow'") – a marked increase from the 7% who speak Marathi ("South Asia: India"), particularly when combined with the number of English speakers worldwide. Given such numbers, little more than simple economics drives publishing houses to invest greater resources in Indian novels written in English.

In light of such a massive global English speaking population, it seems remarkable that English translations of Indian texts so rarely find recognition on the international market. Regarding the general undercurrent of ambivalence that shadows English Indian writing, Mukherjee suggests that part of the reason for

disavowal even of English translations of Indian texts lies in the fact that they hardly ever enjoy more than domestic success. She writes:

> The category of writers called 'The Third World Cosmopolitans', who are globally visible, who are taught in postcolonial classrooms the world over, and who are hailed in the review pages of western journals as interpreters and authentic voices of the nonwestern world, hardly ever include a writer from India who does not write in English. (*Perishable* 197)

Nagarkar, however, is writing in English and nevertheless has eluded the pages of the *New York Times*. It is not because his novels lack merit – their Indian popularity and the reception of the Sahitya Akademi Award seems to dismiss any such claim. Therefore, it must be because the topics of his novels seem to belie Western interests as perceived by publishing houses. Nagarkar's novels, for their attention to Indian narrative tradition and mythological and religious references, are interpreted as being simply "too Indian" to find a market in the United States.

The literature of colonial discourse has long followed certain, specific tropes, and for the Western literary establishment, it has long been convenient to look at all literature coming from the developing world under the blanket of postcolonialism. As Ahmad writes:

> In the fullness of time, the literary documents of this other kind of cultural production would be called 'Third World Literature', within a discourse that would speak of a fundamental, generic difference between West and non-West, redefined now as a binary

> opposition between First and Third Worlds – and an opposition, moreover, which was said to be partly an effect of colonialism but partly a matter also of civilizational, primordial Difference. (63-4)

Although Nagarkar is obviously a writer of Indian literature, he is not a writer of the same brand of "Third World Literature" which is processed and packaged by publishers in developed, metropolitan publishing houses. The books he writes are written for Indian readers, and generally do not speak specifically of difference between the East and the West. Instead, Nagarkar's writing capably connects the Western world, through the use of English, to the Indian world, through subject matter and allusions, without allowing either culture to define the literature as a whole. This strategy is what brings Nagarkar's fiction into the scope of world literature, exposing readers in the West both to the world of India and also Western perspectives of what Indian life looks like (Damrosch 14). Nagarkar is willing to point out the shortcomings of his characters, and it is true that they are Indian. But the weaknesses illustrated – those of lust, unfaithfulness, poverty and prejudice – are certainly not faults that are isolated within the Indian population. While Nagarkar's characters, sourcing from different classes, time periods, and regions, may express different cultural traits than their Western counterparts, they cannot be accused of exhibiting any sort of intrinsic, paradigmatic difference. It is for this reason, perhaps above any other, that Nagarkar has not found his place within international world literature curricula.

Regardless of Western willingness to accept Nagarkar's novels or message, there is a lingering question surrounding the audience he actively seeks. Nagarkar has said:

> The feeling is great when my books are published in the West. But this does not mean I need Westerners to endorse my work. Much of the literature published there is not of high quality. The situation is similar in India. Why are we looking at the West? I feel regional Indian literature is superior than much of the literature being produced in the West. (Paul)

Although Nagarkar aligns the Indian and Western markets by alleging that the majority of literature published in both regions is of poor quality, he simultaneously separates them by subordinating Western literature to much regional Indian writing. Nagarkar articulates a desire to develop a Western readership, but also seems to suggest that he would not want to write the same kind of novel that might gain traction in the West. If Nagarkar is not writing specifically for a Western readership, however, it begs the question of which audience he is currently courting. As Sadana emphasizes, Nagarkar's accolades for his English writing seem to alienate him progressively further from his Marathi audience (307) – an attitude shift that Nagarkar has openly lamented (Sadana 308). That being said, however, he has made little action toward retaining such a readership, aside from allowing the publication of a few passively snide remarks. If Nagarkar is not writing for the approval of Westerners, and has

abandoned the language of his initial readership, it seems relevant to question for whom he chooses to write.

In *Cuckold*, Nagarkar explicitly details thoroughly researched historical events in modern English vernacular. At the beginning of the text he inserts a note explaining the decision, stating that he aimed to develop an "easy colloquial currency of language" (v) that would lend an element of realism and accessibility to a readership so far removed from the subject matter with which they would be asked to engage. It seems that Nagarkar's desire to find a discourse that can span centuries is furthermore a drive to span regions, to develop a global commonality. Nevertheless, upon reading any of Nagarkar's English texts, it becomes immediately clear that a reader decontextualized from the everyday occurrences of life in India would founder, struggling to decode all but the most basic of references. Mukherjee references the language of both *Ravan and Eddie* and *Cuckold*, writing:

> These novels, which I enjoyed for quite different reasons, made me aware that the language of a novel does not necessarily affect the world it creates. I also began to realise that the use of English does not automatically give the writer a global readership. Nagarkar's novels are so intensely and unselfconsciously located in their milieu – in one, it is a Mumbai chawl in all its raw liveliness, and in the other, Rajput life in 16th century Mewar – that for readers entirely outside the cultural context of India, it may not be easy to respond to the humour in one, or decode the allusions and

> references woven into the texture of the other. ("Celebrating *Cuckold*" 27)

Nagarkar's allusions to Hindu mythology and Indian legends alone indicate an intended audience that has lived in India. In this sense, Nagarkar's English Indian novel manages to make the Western English reader feel like an outsider, even while reading in their mother tongue. To read Nagarkar's writing as an American is akin to eavesdropping on a conversation that is not truly meant for your ears – while you can follow the emotion and sentiment, there is the recognition that the subject matter will never prove to be fully accessible.

Nagarkar's references to cultural facets that resist complete cultural translation emphasize an intrinsic difference between India and the West – one which simultaneously reflects an abrogation of English and its appropriation. There is a cultural space developed between the English in which Nagarkar is writing and the english that is incapable of fully explicating the myths and traditions referenced. As detailed in *The Empire Writes Back*:

> It is the 'absence' which occupies the gap between the contiguous inter/faces of the 'official' language of the text and the cultural difference brought to it. Thus the alterity in that metonymic juncture establishes a silence beyond which the cultural Otherness of the text cannot be traversed by the colonial language. By means of this gap of silence the text resists incorporation into 'English literature' or some universal literary mode, not because there is any inherent hindrance to someone from a different culture

> understanding what the text means, but because this constructed gap consolidates its difference. (53)

Although this is a trait that is certainly found even in domestic, monoglossic American literatures, linguistic variance and regionally specific referents do more than simply increase the authenticity of literary settings. Such terms serve to include or ostracize the reading population. The use of allusions reconfirms such difference – while an outsider audience can still deduce contextual meaning through such devices, the audience is reminded that an ethnographic snapshot is not a complete cultural analysis. It is essential that the outsider recognize that the literary text does not reflect, in the words of Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, a "shared mental experience" (58).

Beyond simply referencing events that would be familiar to the Indian population, Nagarkar's work is further complicated by the fact that he seems to shift easily between the discourse of antiquity and that of modernity. As Janet Giltrow points out, this allows modern readers to interact with ancient time periods, providing an access point to antiquity while never allowing the reader to completely forget that they have been displaced from their own chronology (43). *Cuckold* is clearly set in 16th century Mewar, and the reader cannot neglect that detail, yet the casual tone of contemporary language protects the reader from complete disorientation. Nevertheless, the use of regionally specific jargon and cultural indicators can isolate Western readers. Giltrow writes:

> ... the 'alien' word – which Bakhtin counts as endlessly inventive and eager in the space which surrounds its introduction –

> configures for Western readers alien speakers and populations, and immediately their own alienation. When we hear a word we do not know, we not only learn of the word's existence and a hint of its application: we also learn, sometimes with a shock of estrangement, of the concurrent discourses of other populations. Moreover, at these moments, for Western readers, the diachronic dialogism of the narrative – the engineered interlocutions between epochs – can upset, for Western readers may no longer know where to schedule *Diwali* or *nautanki*: to what Rajput consciousness are they contemporary? Are they dated and historical, or are they current traditions, survivors of the past? (46)

For Western readers, therefore, Nagarkar's writing can actually serve to distract from a symbiotic relationship with India. By incorporating terminology that lacks a viable English equivalent, Nagarkar is emphasizing inescapable cultural difference through linguistic metonymy (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 52). While Nagarkar does welcome Western English readers, he is unwilling to develop scaffolding that might aid their access to his works, such as a simplified glossary. If Western readers are to appreciate his novels, they will simply have to do their homework themselves.

If Nagarkar harbors no little ambivalence toward his Western readership, he seems to feel similarly about the English language itself. As *Seven Sixes are Forty-Three* opens, the narrator, Kushank describes his attempts to seduce a woman. Nagarkar writes, "'You have beautiful hands.' I had to say it in English.

Couldn't bear to say it in Marathi. After all, it was my mother tongue. I opened and closed her hand. 'Really exquisite fingers. So delicate. Positively artistic,' I lied" (6). The implication seems to be that Marathi is a sacred language, and that to lie in it would be unthinkable, even blasphemous. In Shubha Slee's translation of the Marathi text, this attitude assumes greater import. The reader is unable to discern which aspects of the text are true and which ring false through the analysis of code switching – any passage of text could be a falsehood. As Nagarkar states at the conclusion of the "Afterward" to *Cuckold*, "...storytellers are liars. We all know that" (606). But if English is the language of choice for liars, the audience is left wondering what Nagarkar intends by transitioning away from Marathi. For all of Nagarkar's textual insinuations that English is a universalizing language for India, it seems that he may be unable to shake a subtle, lingering sense of estrangement from even his own writing in the colonizer's discourse.

CONCLUSION

There is no simple answer for the "great Indian novel." India is an enormous country with a long, rich, and complex history. For one author to believe he can speak for the general population of such a diverse region would be beyond arrogant, it would be blasphemous. As Stuart Hall articulates, creating a body of artistic representations that speak for the "black subject" is not simply a matter of replacing white writers with black ones (Hall 225). The idea that all black writers share viewpoints and ideals would be a re-articulation of an old racism; the misconception that all individuals who embody difference from the hegemonic white mainstream are all the same (Hall 225). It is this very diversity that allows writers like Naipaul to disparage India and the developing world. One of the most important elements of liberty is the ability to speak as you feel, regardless of the consequences or political ramifications.

In Nagarkar's most recent English novel, *God's Little Soldier*, he addresses the notion of liberty through the voice of the misguided zealot, Zia. As he plans to assassinate Salman Rushdie, Zia thinks:

> The Prince of Darkness chose to appear at select gatherings and seminars if they dealt with human rights, censorship and the freedom of the press. These were soapboxes where he harangued his audience, scolded Britain and the other Western nations for not isolating Iran. Behind all that highfalutin talk of democratic ideals, Zia saw Essar help himself to a theory of state-sponsored individual freedom that was tailor-made to suit his predicament

> while promoting the age-old romantic notion that liberty is licence without responsibility. (*God's Little Soldier* 137)

While this diatribe is to be taken with a grain of salt – after all, Zia is shown to be a man who is easily manipulated, capable of fully embracing or completely renouncing his own radical ideals – it nevertheless contains a truth Nagarkar clearly believes. For Nagarkar's books are never written from a viewpoint that he feels is irresponsible. Nagarkar, like the character Amanat, is constantly questioning the status quo in the hopes of finding a better solution. His books are written to encourage the Indian population to interrogate their beliefs. But unlike Naipaul, Nagarkar's criticism is never levied without a constructive, patriotic purpose. While Naipaul condemns the developing world for the sake of distinguishing it from the developed world, Nagarkar does so to help the developing world develop. Nagarkar takes license, absolutely, but it is weighted with the responsibility of national loyalty.

Language helps to formulate reality, but that is not a task it completes exclusively. Regardless of the language in which an author speaks, humans are the products of their environments and experiences. Hall suggests that new multicultural literature is beginning to acknowledge, "that we all speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, out of a particular experience, a particular culture, without being contained by that position as 'ethnic artists' or film-makers" (227). Nagarkar is an Indian writer, and his writing is designated for the Indian people – he has proven that through attention paid to the diverse history of India has a whole. Nagarkar does speak to his former Marathi readership, but

also seeks to write something worthwhile for a more diverse population of Indian readers. His writing is literary and powerful, but also the kind of ethnographic tool that can help to expose international readers to a multicultural worldview that sometimes seems inaccessible. If the Western world ever hopes to understand, appreciate, and learn from Indian culture, it is essential for Anglican markets to read authors like Nagarkar. By writing for an Indian audience in a language that much of the world's population can comprehend, Nagarkar allows global readers to begin to access India's multicultural complexities, at least as one Indian nationalist sees them.

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