

Courtesy in Conflict:
The Strange Character of the Briton in
Indian and Pakistan English Fictions

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IN INDO-ANGLIAN fiction the figure of the Briton is often puzzling. It conforms, in the main, to one of two clearly distinguishable patterns, neither wholly attractive. But while one pattern simply repeats the antagonisms of race, culture, and climate, the other explores, in a slightly friendlier mien, mutual interest and affection, albeit cloaked in misunderstanding and tending to disaster. To some authors the Briton is simply the epitomization of crude, bullying arrogance, racial intolerance, cultural indifference, and insensitive interference. This epitome is perhaps best portrayed with vividly painted woodenness in Mulk Raj Anand's *Colonel and Mrs George Hutchinson of Untouchable* (1935). Here East and West are irreconcilable. The image here is clear and not worth pursuing.

The other major pattern, more frequent, slightly less unattractive, will be traced here in the writings of a succession of six eminent authors whose lives span the history of the novel in "Indlish" (as it is apparently called by the young intelligentsia of Bombay/Mumbai). It is repeated over and over again, from the Victorian era and Rabindranath Tagore to late twentieth-century modernity and Nayantara Sahgal. The image here is of the Briton, gauche, inassimilative, loud and bullying, but nonetheless the welcome participator, somehow essential for the successful dramatic resolution of an Indian fiction. It is this latter image which merits exploration, deriving from the history of the cultural contacts of two complex nineteenth-century societies, Britain in India and subject India, anxious for self-esteem and open, as always, to collaboration with novel, alien forces.

Here it may be helpful to suggest that in this context the character of the Briton is a representation, in terms of what is known from past experience, of what is unknown and misunderstood but nevertheless desired or feared in the present or the future. It is an imagined form ascribed to the dimly conceived and remotely, numinously, alien. The character is also the reflection, as in a mirror—true, false, plain or coloured—and may be in the depth of the mirror or in the surface texture. It may be sought in the very heart of the matter, in the English language used, and its careful selection by those who have access to other idioms and language throughout their working lives.

The function of the Briton/European/English[wo]man (terms which have been used with bewildering equivalence) is to serve as a not-always-kindly mirror held up to the soul and the historic destiny of India, in occasionally hideous self-exposure. The character of the alien Briton put before us by the Indian author is rarely a commentary on the Briton as he, or she, might really be. Much more often it is a device whereby the reader may glance slyly, discreetly, as through a Zenana-screen, into the intimacies of India. The trail lies through the *obiter dicta*, familiar and unknown, of influential writers, not necessarily of fiction, not necessarily Indian, such as E. M. Forster, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, and Pandit Nehru. At the end of Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924) it will be recalled, in that most famous of Anglo-Indian climaxes, the friends Aziz and Fielding, Afghan Muslim-Indian, and the home-county's English schoolmaster, are out riding near Chandrapur perhaps for the last time before Fielding returns home to Britain. They dispute, at first in a playful way, about India's future. Fielding mocks India's divisions. His words hurt unintentionally. Suddenly Aziz explodes:

"Down with the English anyhow. . . . Clear out, you fellows, double quick, I say. We [Indians] may hate one another but we hate you most. . . . if it's fifty or five hundred years we shall get rid of you, yes, we shall drive every blasted Englishman into the sea and then"—he rode against him furiously—"and then," he concluded, half kissing [Fielding], "you and I shall be friends." (316)

The Briton is tactless and insensitive but crucial to the happiness of the Indian at this stage in the drama.

It is a short and not irrelevant journey, as Oliver Stallybrass has shown (7), from Forster to Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's Aligarh. Forster, in exploring the bond between Fielding and Aziz, explains his own friendship with Ross Masood, grandson of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, creator of the great, modernizing Muslim university in Aligarh. Writing in the Muslim community *Alligarh Gazette* (sic) in October 1869, Sir Syed said to his fellow Indians:

I cannot absolve the English in India of deep discourtesy. . . . [They look] on the natives of India as animals and beneath contempt. . . . [But] they are *not* far wrong . . . the natives of India . . . contrasted with the English . . . are as like them as the dirty animal is to an able and handsome man. (Qtd. in Graham 125)

As Sir Syed was for some fifty years, with the Aga Khan, one of the most influential and revered leaders of the Muslim community in India, one whose words, however unorthodox, commanded obedience, his simile has a most perplexing, embarrassing ring. It may—or may not—help that later he suggested to his co-religionists that they should not despise the European because he urinates standing up instead of crouching, as enjoined by Holy Writ.

A generation after Sir Syed's death, Nehru, at his Allahabad trial for sedition against the British government in March 1922, said, according to R. Darvedi's *Life and Speeches of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru*,

When I returned from England I was more of an Englishman than an Indian. I looked on the world from an Englishman's standpoint. . . . I was as much prejudiced in favour of England and the English as it was possible for an Indian to be. (4-5; qtd. in Brecher 50)

The *Manchester Guardian*, on 11 February 1955, reported Nehru as having said at his trial that "an important part of me has been made by England" (qtd. in Brecher 50). In September 1948, after the vicissitudes of colonial evolution had converted Nehru from prison convict to prime minister of the most populous democracy in the world, he wrote a very strange letter to, of all people, George Bernard Shaw, living at Eyot St Lawrence, in Hertfordshire. Nehru says:

I do not know quite why I am writing to you, for we are both busy men; but [someone] has [shown] me a letter [of yours] in praise of India

and this has produced an urge in me, to write to you. 40 years ago . . . at Cambridge I heard you address a meeting. . . . [I] have grown up in company with your writings. . . . I suppose a part of [me] has been moulded by that reading. . . . In a sense you have been near to me . . . to my thoughts. . . . I have often wanted to come into closer touch with you. . . . I apologise that I, like so many of my countrymen, may seem to be pestering you for your views on India. [Perhaps I] have not outgrown an old Indian habit of seeking testimonials from others [from the British]. Perhaps that is due to a certain lack of faith in ourselves. Events have shaken us badly and the future does not seem bright as we had once imagined it would be. (500-01)

In Nehru's words we sense the importance of the European setting to the inmost exploration of the thoughts of India's cherished leader.

The thoughtful insight of Thomas R. Metcalf, author of *New Cambridge History of India: Ideologies of the Raj* (1994) is relevant here:

As the British scrambled in the 18th century and early 19th century to understand Hinduism, they created for that religious system a degree of coherence . . . it had not possessed before. . . . By imposing their knowledge upon it, the British made of Hinduism, previously a loosely integrated collection of sects, something resembling a religion—although, as they saw it, it seemed a religion that was yet *not* a proper religion. To the present day, scholars of religion remain at odds over the extent to which the Hinduism of precolonial India can be described as a religion, with an orthodoxy that defines the faith of a set of believers; as distinct from a set of beliefs and practices embedded in India's larger social order. (134)

Metcalf's provocative analysis has not so far been controverted. He suggests here that in certain contexts the Indian's sense of Hindu Indianness in the British period and after is the product of the alien's interpretation.

Fundamental to the representation of the Briton is the matter of language. The English language was a token of imperial presence. It was embraced, if not joyfully, then at least competently, out of a sense of necessity, during the period of British rule. Not yet rejected in the half century following India's independence, English has been taken from its frame of colonial exploitation, a frame discoloured by the discourtesies and brutalities of conflicting national ambition. "Indlish" has since 1947 been converted into an instrument of therapeutic internal anal-

ysis and of international infiltration, undreamed of by Macaulay and Trevelyan when in 1835 they persuaded the British Government in India to enact that English should be the language of the higher Indian Courts of Law, and of the teaching of the European culture, science, and philosophy to be offered in the emerging institutes of higher education springing up all over India. In Indian hands, "Indlish" has become a wand of magicians, and a magic glass, to be moved by fairies good and evil. "Indlish" is never quite what it seems; it is certainly not as used elsewhere. It is both more and less. The cadence, the subtle choice of phrase, discreetly suggest deep differences in perception and approval, of dramatic insight and of understanding. Much of any exploration of what is most interesting in point of style in twentieth-century English—elegance, vitality, novelty, experimentalism, the poised, the mature, and the delicate—has to be sought in the work of the writers like R. K. Narayan, Nirad Chaudhuri, Ved Mehta, Dom Moraes, Nissim Ezekiel, V. S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi, Bapsi Sidhwa, and Anita Desai. The list is endless. The latest work of each of these authors has to be considered carefully by the panel-judges of any Anglo-American literary prize, before the annual award is announced. Every month, it seems, some new champion of Indo-Anglian writing of "Indlish" emerges mature, ready for both the bestselling lists and for critical acclaim. Not the least wonderful of the powers of "Indlish" is its remarkable therapeutic value, its ability—like brandy or in some cases like vinegar—to preserve its champions in an active, apparently sempiternal twilight of creativity. Rabindranath Tagore was nearly 81 when he died in 1941, but he was a comparative youth; Ahmed Ali, the Delhi Muslim author was 84 when he died in Pakistan in 1994; Khushwant Singh is 80; Narayan is 91; Mulk Raj Anand, author of *Untouchable* (1935) and *Across the Black Waters* (1940) is 93; and Chaudhuri, the tiniest, the sharpest-eyed and the longest-lived of all, will shortly celebrate his 100th birthday, surely with an accurate and cutting tirade against some establishment figure. "Indlish" preserves the Indo-Anglian wordsmith!

Thus it is that the British "other" revealed in "Indlish" does not resemble that exposed in the fictional works of nostalgic Britons

writing about their Indian experiences, or of fond American cultural missionaries pursuing their Indian dreams, but is rather the cumulative distillation of a variety of experience derived from nearly four centuries of contact. The two traditions, of Indian use of the English language and of Indians telling Indian stories, both reflect the unique circumstances of empire. While this is not the place to explore the close detail of British Indology, any exploration of the image of the Briton in this context has to take in the major role of the British in the rediscovery and revitalization of Indian classical culture. The British made at least three major contributions to the reanimation of Indian self-esteem before Independence, which influence and may possibly be seen in Indian images of the Briton in Indian fictions. The first contribution, of course, is the introduction of the English language as medium of government, of law, of higher education, with the apparent concurrence of India's intellectual leadership. The second contribution was the recovery of India's lost antiquity largely through the research of the Asiatick Society of Bengal. The Society, founded in 1784 by Sir William Jones and Warren Hastings and led for sixty years by those giants of Indology, T. E. Colebrooke, Horace Hayman Wilson, James Edward Prinsep, and Brian Houghton Hodgson, established the cognate kinship of Sanscrit and Pali (source languages of so many of India's modern vernacular languages) with Avestan, and the close kinship of all within the European linguistic family. The Aryan cousinhood of Brahmin and of Briton was asserted (if not always believed). An amazing investment of talent, energy, money, and devotion by the Society's amateur European scholars (mainly East India Company servants) in the tracing, purchase, and decipherment of long neglected texts and inscriptions led to the clarification of India's Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain past, and to an unsettling debate over Hindu purity and the need for religious reform. The initiative here was almost totally European and mainly British, until German and French scholarship came to the fore in the late nineteenth century. It was this British dedication to the rehabilitation of India's cultural inheritance in the early nineteenth century that caused Indian leaders like Rammohun Roy to concede to the British the right to intervene in the

reformation of Indian society. Roy's hugely influential Brahmo-Samaj movement indeed conceded that the British had the moral and intellectual right to lead Indian moral and political reform. Early nineteenth-century reformist India embraced the English language, and every consignment of European science and philosophy wrapped in English, with overwhelming enthusiasm. For a brief while, in the period 1790-1850, the intellect of India was happy to subordinate itself to and collaborate with European innovation, welcoming the compulsory imposition of the English language, in effect, as an Indian *lingua franca* and as, more significantly, the language of Indian middle-class aspiration. For a brief while, it was as if India had found a long lost parent, alas that it was the boorish Englishman, that most reluctant and repressive of fathers.

The third and not least important English contribution to the revitalization of Indian self-perception was the foundation by the English East India Company of the College of Fort William in Bengal. The College, set up in 1801, largely staffed by the enthusiasts of the Asiatick Society, profoundly influenced the evolution of Indian literary culture in both vernaculars and in English, and the acceptance and use by Indian writers of certain images of the European "other." As the importance of the College of Fort William, which was to have a brief life before merging its staff and traditions with the incipient University of Calcutta in the 1850s, has been adequately explored by David Kopf, T. W. Clark, Tapan Raychaudhuri, and Sisir Kumar Das, it will suffice that the British rulers of India in Company days arrived often as mere children of less than fifteen years old to provide almost immediately, if possible, incorruptible management of the vast territories and the huge populations of British India. The English East India Company's attempt to create, in the College of Fort William, a university wherein these ignorant adolescents should be rapidly educated in the languages, history, customs, and religions of India was beset by problems. It was discovered, a bit late, that there were no texts available in the vernaculars. More seriously, there were no printing presses with the appropriate founts capable of printing in the vernaculars. Moreover, the vernaculars for the most part had no agreed, settled orthography or gram-

mar. Apart from Urdu, the main vernaculars Bengali, Hindi, Assamese, Gujerati, Mahratti, Tamil, Telugu, Kanarese, were still in the process of formulation, out of the elegant and complex inflexibilities of Sanskrit (by 1800 a largely forgotten language). All popular culture all over India depended on oral tradition, on the mnemonic vernacular verse narratives of wandering bards, like the *bauls* of Bengal. If the College wanted teaching texts, College staff would have to provide them. By opening the coffers of government, by massive focused and generous patronage, the Company and its servants, Indian and English, rapidly made good the void.

Although the College of Fort William had a relatively short independent career, its traditions and its staff, its printing presses, and rapidly structured traditions became the source for the emerging collegiate structure of higher education and literature in the vernaculars of India. By the combination of the amateur scholarship of the Company's European servants and the enthusiastic dedicated collaboration of vernacular scholars and savants recruited from India, the orthography and grammar of India's languages were settled, founts were cast, and texts began to emerge. At first these early texts were translations of allegories and fables from Aesop, Lafontaine, and Buffon, and fairy tales hesitantly translated into the vernaculars from English translations of the fables of the brothers Grimm and of Andersen. Longer, more ambitious prose works drew heavily on Walter Scott, rhapsodizing the morality and heroism of Anglo-Saxon or Celtic man; or on the Indian romances of the Rev. Hobart Caunter, an English priest who had tried but failed to get critical acceptance in Britain of long stories about Indian folk heroes like Toda Mall, Akbar, and Shivaji the Mahratta leader. James Tod's *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, which appeared between 1829 and 1832, were immediately plundered of their dramatic contents and translated into vernacular form by College pundits. As recently as the 1830s, the College was still the major literary patron in India. Original compositions in the vernaculars, written to College command, were often primarily intended for use by young British Company servants, in turn translating, presumably, as they went, back into English. Vernacu-

lar fictional form and imagery were intended as much for the alien as for the Indian reader. In developing this alien tradition the Indian storyteller imparted a strong clear moral core to his fiction even in the Indian vernaculars, and inserted a didactic component deriving almost certainly from the early experience of writing for an alien schoolroom. This didactic component will be noticeable when the Indian author projects the Briton.

By the 1870s, and with the publication of Bankim Chandra Chatterji's Bengali novels in serialized newspaper format, the Western novel form was being used confidently in an Indian vernacular and for an Indian reading audience. But it is worth recalling that even Bankim began his writing career with *Rajmohun's Wife*, written in 1864 in English for serialization in the *Indian Field*, a journal with a predominantly European and anglicized Bengali *babu* readership. Chatterji's importance for us is that his Bengali writings, especially *Bangadarshan* (the Revelation of Bengal), with its implicit message that the European had to be seen as a hostile alien, were the prime inspiration for the young Rabindranath Tagore as he set out on his strange Indo-Anglian literary mission to bring both India and Britain to a correct sense of India's worthiness, and readiness, for self-sufficient statehood.

In Tagore's *Gora* (White Man) adumbrated possibly in the 1890s but not published until 1924, we see first, and perhaps most clearly, the strange, courteous ambivalence of the sensitive "Indlish" imagination to the notion of the white alien, the British intruder bearing gifts for India, both benign and evil. *Gora* is set in the 1880s. It remains the essential statement of Indian political aspiration up to 1947. It is a constant contrast between an Indian perception of India and an Indian perception of European thinking about India. *Gora* is at one level a fascinating work in which the spirit of India declared its readiness for nationhood. However, read as a novel, it may seem less exciting. In its 408 pages there is little action, little dramatic development: the characters debate, to destruction, the problems facing Hinduism and Indian society in the colonial setting. An immediate problem is that the first English edition by Macmillan, which did not appear until 1924, suggests that the work, originally composed

long before, is a translation by Tagore's friends and relatives of his Bengali original. But this is a polite fiction, a double bluff in a fictional world. We know from Mary Lago's extensive studies of Tagore and from her editions of Tagore's correspondence with his publisher, Macmillan, and his many missionary and literary friends like C. F. Andrews, W. W. Pearson, Edward Thompson, William Rothenstein, Robert Bridges, and W. B. Yeats, that Tagore was as at home in English as in any of the Indian languages he commanded and that he supervised most translations to his own taste. In a sense he had no need of any translator. The "Gitanjali" Poems with which he won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913 and his novelettes and dramas, such as *The King of the Dark Chamber* (1914) and *Chitra* (1917), were all translated from his own Bengali by his own pen and it seems possible that the same is true of *Gora*, despite its disclaimers. Tagore, for all his worldly success, all the acclaim, the Nobel Prize, the knighthood, the Oxford doctorate, and the approval of the Western literary world, was a deeply diffident, vainglorious, neurotic perfectionist. He suffered from a paranoid irresponsibility of authorship, which in a sense mirrors and exemplifies the attitude of this great Indian author towards his European character. He uses English in a diffident, self-deprecatory manner while at the same time he asserts in correspondence and debate his right to be the final arbiter of style, even against such masters of English language as Robert Bridges and Yeats. He uses English as an alien medium, knowing that in his hands it might not be adequate or even appropriate for India's champion. So he hides behind a fictionalized translator (who is mostly himself, but who may be made to bear another name) so that the blame, if critical blame there be, should be shouldered by the other. The tensions within his sense of language extend to his exploration of character. Tagore's hero Gora is indeed a reflection of Tagore's personality and of his vision of the fissures manifest in Indian society. Was it, for example, adequate that India's championship should be embodied in a high caste Hindu traditionalist, adhering to and asserting the uncompromising Brahminical values that *Gora* at first projects? The author seems uncertain.

In this novel, India's hero is called Gourmohan Dayal, "Gora" to his friends. He is son of Krishnadayal Babu, a wealthy re-

tired government commissariat officer, and of Anandamoyi, Krishnadayal's wife. Both parents come from the highest ranks of Brahminical orthodoxy, although Krishnadayal has until retirement been a man of provocatively unorthodox views and habits, imitative of everything European in successful pursuit of a career with the alien British government of Bengal. Now in retirement, he has re-embraced caste orthodoxy. His son Gourmohan approves deeply, and wishes to follow his father in the rediscovery of orthodoxy. Krishnadayal is short, dark, and withdrawn; Gourmohan is huge, pale, and has a voice which bellows, even at the most intimate assertion. Gora is distressed that his closest friend Binoy has fallen in love with the daughter of a follower of the reformist, syncretic, "Brahmo-Samaj" movement founded by Rammohun Roy half a century earlier to purify Hinduism of idolatry and the debasing accretions of centuries of superstition. Brahmo-Samaj theology asserts Hinduism's monotheistic origins. Gora objects. Ordered debate, mainly between Brahmo-Samaj reformists and orthodox Saivite Brahmins committed to the worship of idols as symbols of godhead, with occasional interruptions by Muslims and Christians, provides the novel's interest. The debate concentrates on the state of India, especially Bengal; and of Hindu society and on that Hindu society's manifest faults. It explores closely the rights of the alien, the British, to criticize India and Hinduism, especially when that English criticism clearly provides a spurious or real moral justification for delaying India's political progress to self-sufficient nationhood. Gora's attitudes to communal division and social stress change as the debate progresses. To begin with, he rejects the right of the alien to criticize:

We must refuse to allow our country to stand at the bar of a foreign court and be judged according to a foreign law. Our ideas of shame or glory must not depend on minute comparisons at every step with a foreign standard. We must not feel apologetic about the country of our birth, whether it be about its traditions, faith or its scriptures, neither to others nor even to ourselves. We must save our country and ourselves from insult by manfully bearing the burdens of our motherland with all our strength and all our pride. (23)

Reform can wait awhile yet. Reform will come of itself from within, after we are a united people. . . . When at last we are really one then

which of our orthodox practices shall remain and which shall be abolished, the Country and He who is the God of our Country, shall decide. (51)

. . . our disunion is the result of the presence of the alien [that is, the British]. . . . I cannot admit any error or feebleness in our caste differences, customs and rules. It is only by a strict adherence to our old laws that India has been able to withstand the mighty adverse influences of the Muslim and of the Christian. . . . although India has been plundered of all else, her soul is still hidden safe within the confines of our inflexible caste regulations and the idols through which we contemplate the divine. . . . No oppressive foreigner has the powers to touch her. . . . But so long as we are subject to some foreign nation we must observe strictly our own caste and religious laws leaving till a later day all discussion of their suitability. . . . Whilst the world that has forsaken India and heaps insults up on her brow must share her dishonour in this caste ridden superstitious idolatrous India of mine. (73)

Although he clearly finds the reconciliation of different Indias a complex metaphysical problem, Gora tries to establish, as a basis for a proper Indian (Hindu) patriotism, the total acceptance of both the good and the evil to be found in India, and the rejection of alien criticism, the English standard. Only by seeing and accepting both perfection and deformity can the true Hindu see God, whose essence it is to be manifest in variety both in images of godliness and in extremes of good and evil. India certainly has no need of help from outside, from the alien ruler seeking to apply surreptitiously Christian values disguised as modern Western enlightenment, still less from the Christian missionary.

Gora argues his case in a series of confrontations with representative Britons. The English are portrayed as ugly, alien, contemptuous, typified in the white fellow-passenger on a ferry in stormy waters, who joins, from the security of his comfortable first-class deck, with a rich Europeanized Bengali *babu*, in mocking cruelly the plight of poor Indians below, struggling on the slippery deck of the steerage class. He upbraids the Englishman for his moral insensitivity. The Englishman reflects and in the end has the grace to apologize and confess himself ashamed. Later, Gora is enlightened as to the suffering of Bengal's—mainly Muslim—Indian peasantry at the hands of rapacious European indigo processors; and of British administrators who

apply an alien law system in favour of these processors. While Gora does not ignore the numerous Indian agents who facilitate European oppression, he sees that the alien is the motivator and main agent of oppression. Interceding in a dispute between villager children and the Indian police (interestingly, over the aftermath of a game of cricket), he is brought before a British magistrate, Mr. Brownlow, whose arrogant self-esteem Gora has already insulted. A trumped-up charge of obstruction leads to a sentence of a period of imprisonment to purge his insolence. The case for Mr. Brownlow the magistrate is made by one of the Bengali lawyers in his courtroom. The lawyer tells Gora:

The British fear a perpetual conspiracy of educated seditious. They fear that the Englishman's life in the countryside will become unsafe if ever the native Indian is allowed to become uppish. An injury to the least white-man is rebellion against the British authority in India. (143)

The British then are portrayed as corrupted by power if not by mercenary greed. They are tyrannical, aloof, indifferent, cocooned in exclusive alienness and all too real in their base alloy. Gora on the other hand is portrayed as the pure, virtuous champion of India, an Indian untouched by India's defeats and blemishes, the essence of India's reasonable antipathy to Englishness. He is intrinsic to the Hindu scheme. And yet Gora, this champion of India's soul and its image, is himself a Briton and must perforce finally stand outside the system. Krishnadayal, his putative father, fearing death, reveals the circumstances of Gora's birth. His real father was an Irishman who died fighting the Indian mutineers in 1857, his mother a heavily pregnant English fugitive from the massacre who died in childbirth, nursed by Anandamoyi. Lacking other children, Anandamoyi had insisted that he be raised, in defiance of all the rules, as a caste Hindu so that he might remain her son. This discovery stuns Gora perhaps more than it does the reader. After a brief moment's perplexity, Gora finds salvation in his disinheritance from Hindu caste rules, and in the strength of his foster-mother's love. As the outsider who knows all India and is totally committed to India's salvation, he can now truly assert his right to be the reconciler of all differences in the struggle to establish Indian unity. In his new

knowledge of himself, Gora finds the strength and the legitimacy to champion all castes, all sects, all communities. He can voice the common denominator of Indianness, and lead India to self-determination. Only the outsider can truly pull together all the threads of Indian discord.

Have we understood Tagore and his metaphor aright? Is it his intention masked by his translation, that India needs an alien hero? We are left to resolve the enigma in our own manner. In the West, *Gora* passed rapidly into critical limbo. Long delayed in the publication, it had possibly passed its "sell-by date" even by 1924. It had unfortunate similarities with Kipling's *Kim* (1901). It coincided with a period of racial rancour between the English and India. The racial and political issues excited by General Dyer's handling of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919, his subsequent self-justification, and the raising of a huge testimonial fund among the British newspaper-reading public for Dyer's enforced retirement, had led to an outbreak of Indophobia among the British public. The hearing in March 1924 before the London High Court of the related libel case "O'Dwyer versus Nair," brought by the Governor of the Punjab against an Indian judge, had reopened all the issues of Jallianwala Bagh. In the circumvalent fury, the English critics ignored or were baffled by *Gora*. *Gora* remains a huge derelict on one of the lonelier shores of English literature, a mysterious object of fascination to the psychohistorians of empire and of Indian independence, and for those who would write the great "Indlish" novel.

For the device adopted by Tagore has remained a constant *leitmotiv* in the subsequent history of the "Indlish" novel. Reworked and adapted, this device shows in various forms the image of the alien as manipulator, the ironic onlooker, the occasional saviour, and almost always a perplexed and perplexing *deus ex machina*. The alien is usually stated to be English, though on occasion he or she is the Irishman or the Scot defending British values, like Manohar Malgonkar's character Patrick Mulligan, the brutal, harsh prison-governor-turned Partition hero and saviour of *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964). On the very last page, an appropriate place for the descent of the *deus ex machina*, Patrick suddenly reappears five years and three thousand miles

from his last appearance, with "his round red face, his pale grey eyes . . . [his] voice of authority hoarser than ever, but more commanding," to lead a group of Hindus, caught on the wrong side of the Partition divide, to safety through Muslim hostility. Mulligan is a vision of India's all-seeing, despising, contemptuous friend.

The uneasy focus on the Briton as the bad-tempered, loud-voiced *deus ex machina*, part saviour, part onlooker, not necessarily well-disposed, recurs time and again as the volume of "Indlish" writing grows. It is strange that the character does not disappear after national independence. One might have thought that the increasing worldly success of Indian authors, the easy international movement of academics and writers, the explosive expansion of sophisticated literary exploration of theme and market would have eliminated the need for an image redolent more of power than of friendship, more of past than future. It is one which, at one level of interpretation, might seem, in the words of Nehru quoted earlier, to express an Indian "lack of faith in ourselves." There is a sense that behind the English language there lurks of necessity a censorious English onlooker. Behind the censoriousness there may lurk too the diffident, not easily revealed, often tactless friendliness of a Fielding. In Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*, first published in 1954, Rukmani narrates her sad story of a poor Indian peasant woman's struggles against poverty and the extremes of adversity down the long funnel of the years. But comfort is provided by Kenny, an Englishman, a remote bitter figure, a doctor, very likely a medical missionary. Possibly he has been Rukmani's lover. Certainly he has left or been left by his English wife and family because of his love for India and, possibly, his contacts with Rukmani. He comes and goes, an erratic *deus ex machina*. He is not central to the plot, nor does his presence have verisimilitude. But he always appears at times of greatest crisis. In the end, after the death of Rukmani's feeble, shadow-like husband Nathan, Kenny provides the work by means of which one of her sons may support her in her old age. Kenny's commitment, though, is strained and much more restrained than that of Tagore's Gora. He is hardly relevant to the exploration of rural poverty in late twentieth-century India:

"You are not one of us" [says Rukmani] "You live and work here; and there is in your heart solicitude for us and love for our children. But this is not your country and we are not your people. If you lived here your whole life it still would not be [your country]."

"I do not know which is my country" [replies Kenny] "until today I had thought perhaps it was this . . . [but] save your regrets; you have told me nothing I did not know . . . but know this: you must cry out if you want help. It is no use to suffer in silence. Who will succour the drowning man if he does not clamour for his life? . . . there is no grandeur in want or in endurance."

Rukmani reflects that want is their companion from birth to death and wonders "What profit to bewail that which has always been and which can not change?" To which Kenny replies: "Acquiescent imbecile, . . . do you think spiritual grace comes from being in want . . . from suffering. . . what thoughts have you when your belly is empty? . . . tell me they are noble . . . and I will call you a liar." Rukmani's answers that

"our priests fast and inflict on themselves severe punishments . . . we are taught to bear our sorrows in silence, and all this is so that the soul may be cleansed."

Kenny struck his head . . . "My God," he cried, "I do not understand you people. I never will. . . . Go, before I am entangled in your philosophies." (111-16)

But he stays. In his perennial struggle to raise the money for, and get the contractors to complete his hospital, we are led to see comfort both for his own conscience and for Rukmani's material circumstance. The image here is of a white man sympathetic to but wholly disorientated by his Indian experience; and of the white man's burden resumed in the context of independent India, a life dedicated to martyrdom that verges on self-indulgence. In Kenny, we meet again the alien agent. He is free to go, to return to the comforts of the West. He stays without solace in his exile save for the sustained but noncommittal affection of the ageing and inarticulate Rukmani. In Rukmani and Kenny, India and the West explore the inevitable hopelessness of co-existence, but without reassurance.

On the other hand, in Khushwant Singh's *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* (1959), John Taylor is crucial to and at the same time remote from the development of the novel's plot. The novel is a vivid saga of terrorism in an up-country Punjab District in 1942.

Taylor is the young British Deputy Commissioner, the Chief Civil Administrative and Police Officer. His role is to hover as the omniscient, manipulative, suggestive representative of an alien Raj whose power and prestige, although damaged by Japanese victories in Malaya and Burma, is still without term and boundary. He rules over a community wherein the main Indian communal components, Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim, are already, five years before Partition, in uneasy competition, their mutual suspicions and hatreds mollified by an extensive web of local patronage and corruption woven mainly by the British. The picture is not a pretty one. The local community are united only in their fearful hatred of, and healthy respect for, alien English authority. Through Taylor's eyes the sins and weaknesses of this community are ruthlessly exposed as in a distorting mirror.

Buta Singh, a magistrate, is the natural leader of his Sikh community; his commitment to the British Raj is complete. His loyalty is maintained by the British by a steady stream of small courtesies, favours, honours, and threats. His son, Sher Singh, a disaffected college student, is the leader of a gang of well-armed but aimless nationalists who exercise their weapons, and their commitment to anti-British terror, by futile demonstrations. They shoot rare birds out of season. Finally, for a dare, they murder a village headman, who is blackmailing Sher Singh. Taylor knows but cannot prove Sher's guilt. However, Sher, whom we know from other evidence about his marriage to be a posturing sexual inadequate, is summoned to an informal interview with the all-knowing, all-seeing, terrifyingly omnipotent English Deputy Commissioner. Sher has visiting cards made especially for the occasion. He agrees to his father's suggestion to wear his father's silk tussore suit, so that he may look neat. The scene is set for racial cringe. Taylor is a successful operator. His knowledge of human psychology inspires him to open the interview by praising Sher's success as student leader. We follow Sher's agitation. He thinks:

A kind word from anyone one hates or fears has quicker and greater impact than it has from another person—and he, Sher Singh, felt both fear and hatred for Taylor. . . . the friendly tone and praise however, captivated and won him over completely. He did not know what to say. . . . Sher could not believe it. . . . he heard himself saying to

Taylor: "At a time like this when the enemy is at our gates we should be united and strong. The way the English are standing up to their adversities should be a lesson to us Indians." (98)

Released without immediate charge, Sher Singh explores the dregs of self-contempt, mortification, humiliation, and terror. In the end, John Taylor, in spite of his certain sense of Sher Singh's guilt, lets the matter slide. There is no point in excessive zeal. Partition and the total withdrawal of British authority are too close. True justice and the operation of the law are for quieter times. It is now more important to leave the father, Buta Singh, in his complacent self-esteem, his petty sense of honour. Taylor foresees that Nemesis will work cruelly, with the certain collapse of the Sikh community in this Muslim-dominated area that is destined for Pakistan. Taylor, here, represents the image of the departing *deus ex machina*, the inspired but fading and failing authority, aloof, still terrifying, untouchable as any Brahmin and ultimately indifferent; above all, he is impotent in his omnipotence, a shackled god.

Communal trouble has of course bedevilled the history of South Asia throughout the twentieth century. The 1947 partition of India into Muslim and Hindu (professedly secular) segments, with attendant massacre and migration on a huge scale, has been a favourite theme, a scratching sore, for any ambitious Indian author, with the British available as whipping horse and scapegoat. Among the most humane and moving treatments is *Azadi* (1974), by the prizewinning Chaman Nahal. *Azadi* traces through the 1930s and 1940s the impact of increasing awareness of communal identity, and hence of communal hostility upon a long settled healthily integrated and prosperous community of Sikh, Muslim, and Hindu merchants living in Sialkot, within the Muslim majority areas of West Punjab and what is to be Pakistan. We interpret events through the eyes of Lala Kanshi Ram, a successful Hindu grain merchant, who is a self-respecting Arya Samajist Hindu. In obedience to the orders of the leadership of the Arya Samaj, Lala Ram "hates the English and wanted Azadi (freedom) . . . Axis victories please him beyond measure" (18) in the early years of the war. And yet such is the way of the world, the sound of a British military band and the spectacle of a recruiting

march have him and his children on the streets waving Union Jacks, cheering and longing for recognition, just a nod, from the British officers. To Lala, it is a source of reassurance that he can balance his secret duty to India to hate the English and pray quietly for their departure, against his certain knowledge that the British were invincible, an absolutely inflexible race whose presence in India meant order, settlement, and martial magnificence and, at least for the likes of Lala Kanshi Ram, ever-increasing prosperity. His children form a chance friendship with a wartime conscript, Sergeant Bill Davidson, a humble though educated representative of Raj. They discuss the implications of the various solutions the British put forward to the political bickerings between Congress and Muslim League, and the responses of the Indian factions in the period 1945-47 to these several British initiatives. When Partition takes place and race riots break out, Bill Davidson manages to commandeer a truck and arrives to help remove Lala Ram and his family from dangerous exposure to a protected camp. "Ordinarily the presence of an Englishman in his house would have been a prospect beyond the Lala's wildest dreams," but now the horror of his situation and the prospect of destitution and exile inspire him:

"We have been let down by you people," Lala said softly in Urdu pointing his finger at Bill Davidson [whose Urdu is good enough for him to catch the force of the Lala's indictment.] "All I had, all that I had taken thirty years to build is being lost because you refuse to protect me . . . you were . . . our mother and father, I really gave you all my loyalty. When you struck your deals with these leaders Nehru, Gandhi and Jinnah, did you ever think of us and our fate? . . . Freedom to be sure but why the violence—this is to deny what the English stood for for two hundred years—It is you English who have the biggest hand in this butchery: you alone had the power to prevent it, and you did not use that power."—Lala wondered at himself, a humble servant of the English . . . argu[ing] with one of his masters . . . But now they were his masters no more; they had betrayed his trust and had no right to his loyalty. (141-42)

Davidson holds his peace; this is not the time to argue about responsibility for the catastrophes of Partition. Davidson's role, the only role possible in the context of 1947, is to be the mutely compassionate bystander, witness to a tragedy he is no longer able to control or even influence. Davidson and

all the English go. Lala, and such of his family as will survive, endure alone, without help from the alien power, the ever-mounting horrors of life in inadequately protected refugee camps and the long trek across the Punjab to areas of Hindu domination wherein there is little comfort or welcome, so scant are the resources available in the devastation that was North India in early 1948. The English are completely forgotten—or almost.

After the great sadness of *Azadi*, and thoughts about Partition and what might have been if only the gods had been stronger, it is a pleasure to explore the new India with Nayantara Sahgal. Sahgal writes with great clarity and sharp wit. Her characters sparkle with charm and the confidence that new money and power bring as she explores the cosmopolitan pleasures of industrializing Northern India in the 1970s and 1980s. Sahgal would have every reason to resent the British if she chose to remember them at all. After all, she is Jawaharlal Nehru's favourite niece, and while still a schoolgirl lost both her parents as well as her uncle to long periods of incarceration. All her nearest relatives were imprisoned for their militant opposition to British rule and for sedition. Her father, Ranjit Sitaram Pandit died because of inadequate medical treatment in a British Indian gaol in 1944, and Sahgal's later education was mostly American. And yet in her ruthless explorations of the corruption to be found in modern India, Sahgal chooses Britons as the images of untainted sanity: Michael Calvert in *A Situation in New Delhi*, and the earth-mother figure of Rose in *Rich Like Us*. Rose is an uneducated but lovely, vital, compassionate, and understanding cockney girl whom the high-caste Kashmiri Brahmin Ram has married in a moment of irresponsibility in London in 1931 and with whom he remains in love until, at the height of Mrs. Gandhi's Emergency in 1974, he has a stroke. It is Rose the earth-mother who unwittingly preaches and practises the gentler arts of living the moral life, in a world increasingly violent and corrupt. Untutored as she is, she becomes the model and inspiration of true morality for her circle. In the end, she is murdered for interfering in a feud between oppressed villagers and their rapacious landlord. Sahgal dedicates her novel "To the Indo-British Experience and what its sharers have learned from each other."

And so the characterization of the Briton in Indian fiction as a rough alien has persisted. In the works of six major "Indlish" authors, the constant figure of the Briton as just-not-enemy has been established. He/she lurks, ever eager, curious about India, watchful, imbued perhaps with other-worldly, even demonic powers. The time spent by these authors on this standardized character may perhaps be taken as a typical act of Indian courtesy, as a reflection of a folk memory of the British presence as not wholly unpleasant. It is perhaps, in the more modern writers, a device enabling the figure of the Briton to bow out of India's subconsciousness with a little more grace and gentle dignity than was possible in the sordid clamour of 1947.

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