The Postcolonial Bazaar: Marketing / Teaching Indian Literature

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A GOOD WAY perhaps to measure the viability of a critical methodology or approach is to count the number of anthologies it generates. Another is to count the number of public disagreements among its practitioners over its very name. In the case of "postcolonial" studies — in all its typographical variants — both numbers are quite high. In just the last few years at least as many as five substantial "introductions" to and readers and anthologies of "postcolonial" criticism have been published by major academic presses[1]. Major journals such as *ARIEL, Callaloo, Critical Theory, October, PMLA,* and *Social Text* have all published special issues on "postcoloniality."[2] This has been accompanied by the growing appearance of "postcolonial" sections not just in college bookstores but also in the outlets of major popular chains. But if in all this activity it has become easier to find postcolonial criticism, there is still little agreement over the uses and implications of the different versions of its name. These disagreements have been aired so often it may not be worth belabouring them here.[3] Suffice it to say, the crux of the matter is usually that of coming to terms either with the temporality of colonialism suggested by the "post" or the affiliations with other "post-isms" that the term calls to mind. Surprisingly enough the timeline of postcolonial studies itself is usually taken for granted. If we were to take as our guide the chapter breakdowns and page allotment of major surveys of the field, either Robert Young's influential *White Mythologies* or Bart Moore-Gilbert's recent *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics,* it would seem that the story of postcolonial studies proper takes Frantz Fanon as short preface but really begins with the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* and comes into its own with the career of Edward

Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha in the 1980s. I do not suggest that this is a claim made by these theorists themselves; indeed, Said, in "*Orientalism* Reconsidered," published six years after *Orientalism*, has graciously acknowledged that much of what he said in that celebrated book had been said long before by a number of Third World scholars and writers, such as Anwar Abdel Malek, Talal Asad, Frantz Fanon, and Romila Thapar. Said does not dwell too long, of course, on why it is that his analysis has nonetheless become the defining text for postcolonial criticism while most of the names he cites — with the exception of Fanon — are still (fourteen years after the publication of "*Orientalism* Reconsidered") not as well known to his audience in the West.

A number of critics hostile to postcolonial studies as refracted through the Said/Spivak/Bhabha trinity have been far more forthcoming with answers to that question. The most prominent critiques of this trajectory of criticism are those of Aijaz Ahmad, principally in *In Theory: Nations, Classes, Literatures*, and Arif Dirlik in *The Postcolonial Aura.* Both Ahmad and Dirlik point to the institutional articulation of postcolonial studies in the 1980s and 1990s and to the specific locations of postcolonial theorists both geographically and in relation to poststructuralist and postmodern theory. Ahmad, in particular, sees in the poststructuralist inflected version of postcolonial studies, operating under the signs of diaspora and mixing, an emptying out of a politics of resistance to neocolonialism and multinational capital. For Dirlik, one of the major targets of attack is the language of the poststructuralist postcolonial critic. The poststructuralist postcolonial critic is, according to him, guilty of obscuring and obfuscating "concrete" political and historical issues, and of textualizing all politics to the point of disenabling any possibility of resistance. The currency of this poststructuralist trajectory, for Dirlik, as for Ahmad, is accounted for in the figures who represent it: a set of elite, trans-national intellectuals who from the comfort of the metropolis set forth discourses that marginalize the problems and struggles of those who, in Dirlik's words, "continue to be victimized by Euroamerican power" (x). These discourses are

furthermore sanctioned by their fit with the other great late twentieth-century Euroamerican power: poststructuralism.

For all their vigorous disagreements with postcolonial theory, Ahmad and Dirlik operate on its terrain — colonial discourse analysis — and their objections can at one level be seen as largely directed at methodology; ironically enough both Ahmad and Dirlik's texts may now be said to have entered the catalog of essential reading for postcolonial theory. There are, however, objections to the telling of the postcolonial tale of origins that are located in an older critical tradition and which center as much on the object of criticism as on critical methodology. Critics such as Gareth Griffiths, Stephen Slemon, Helen Tiffin, while they are not hostile to "theory" per se, decry what they see as a selective amnesia on the part of many newcomers to postcolonial studies regarding the origins of the field.[4] These critics identify two trajectories of postcolonial criticism: the colonial discourse analysis model — the Said-Spivak-Bhabha trajectory — and an older tradition arising out of Commonwealth Literature studies. The major point of distinction is that whereas the discourse analysis model focuses less and less on the literary work, the older tradition is anchored very strongly in literary criticism. The discrediting of the older field by the ascendant propounders of "theory" is traced to a larger suspicion both of the humanist model of scholarship and of the privileging of the authoritative literary work as the only archive. But such a characterization of Commonwealth studies as a naive, apolitical exercise, it is argued, is itself a caricature which ignores the ways in which much of Commonwealth criticism as well as the texts it considered were themselves "theoretical" and anticipated the concerns of the later poststructuralist trajectory. That this component continues to be ignored is, for these critics, a further sign of the power of the court language of metropolitan postcolonialism: significance is given only to that work which presents itself from within a specific European philosophical tradition.

The disdain for "literary criticism," it is further argued, spills over into the treatment that is sanctioned when literary texts from the postcolonial world are examined by poststructuralist

postcolonial critics. Griffiths, Slemon, and Tiffin argue that the imbrication of this trajectory of postcolonialism with postmodernism makes for a scorning both of that postcolonial literature that falls into a realist paradigm and of readings of any postcolonial literature that emphasize realism. As a result only a handful of writers come to be examined over and over again whereas the large majority of new postcolonial critics remain ignorant of the large variety of postcolonial literature that does exist and of the large variety of its interests. Here Griffiths, Slemon, and Tiffin advise attention to W.J.T. Mitchell's caution that metropolitan postcolonial studies threatens an imperialism of its own, one in which the third world produces texts for the first world academic's consumption.

Attempts to create a unitary history of a field as heterogeneous as postcolonial studies are perhaps bound to fail, and it is not my goal to try that here. Nor is it my intention in rehearsing these debates to attempt to take sides. As someone who is sympathetic to the concerns of both the poststructuralist and Commonwealth criticism trajectories of postcolonial studies, as well as to the critiques that these have been subjected to by critics like Ahmad, I would argue instead that most "postcolonial" scholars operate within all these modes. I am, however, very interested in what the different "histories" leave out. In particular, it seems to me that the near total erasure of the tradition of Commonwealth criticism from the major anthologies and introductions that constitute the institutional face of postcolonial studies is significant. This for two reasons. First, it glosses over the fact that Commonwealth criticism is alive and well, and indeed the dominant mode of postcolonial criticism—in a numerical sense if not in terms of prestige; second, it masks the fact that in many ways postcolonial theory, whether it likes to admit it or not, has much in common with Commonwealth criticism. This becomes clear if we conceive of postcolonial theoretical studies not just in terms of what they set out to do — the analyses of alterity, hybridity, subalternity and so on, which, in any case many Commonwealth critics would claim as having long been their interests as well — but also in terms of how these analyses are usually grounded in the undergraduate and

graduate classroom. This ground, and a quick survey of course syllabi on the Web will bear this out, continues to be creative work, especially the novel, from the ex-colonized world. In this sense, at least, the high theory tradition of postcolonial studies privileges the colonial and postcolonial novel as much as the older more literary tradition. (And some might say with much greater critical force: certainly Commonwealth studies never attempted to raise authors to the kind of representative position that Salman Rushdie alone has come to occupy in postcolonial theory.) Criticism in the Commonwealth studies tradition, on the other hand, while it remains on the whole wary of the reading strategies of poststructuralist inflected postcolonial studies and retains much of its own original comparatist approach, has become more interested in issues of nation and identity as raised by the other tradition.

However, not enough attention has yet been paid to the histories of these literatures themselves — as situated in social, cultural, and historical contexts other than those of metropolitan criticism, be they Commonwealth or postcolonial — or to the histories and modes of their arrivals in the first-world academy. The Commonwealth tradition's continued focus on what is "common" to the literatures it studies by definition shifts focus away from the local; and in the case of a high theoretical postcolonial studies, it often seems that texts function more as pretexts for discussions about "meta" issues such as alterity, hybridity and so on.[5] In the case of my primary focus in this study, Indian literature, more theorizing about it as a category seems to have been done in recent years in the popular press than in the academy, which continues to be its largest market.[6] The unfortunate result of this situation is that in the very attempt to teach the fictivity and instability of constructs such as race, ethnicity, and nation (which seem to be the predominant concerns of most postcolonial syllabi) various naturalized, transparent versions of "Indian" literature and of "India" get surreptitiously created and circulated. There are, of course, a number of directions from which one could attempt to destabilize these hyper-real constructions. I would like to focus here on the issue of language and national identity and the

convergences in the ways in which these are conceptualized both in Commonwealth/postcolonial literary criticism, old and new, and in the new global literary market's reduction of these complex issues to glib pronouncements of authenticity.

One of the founding contradictions and anxieties of Commonwealth studies in its early stages was that its comparative model was simultaneously a competitive one. The new national literatures — and, by extension, the criticism on them — had to prove their worth against the existing great body of English literature whose frontiers they were seen as expanding rather than questioning. There was as such little question in the beginning of studying literatures in any language other than English. While in the case of African literatures these questions began to be contested fairly early on by politically engaged writers such as Achebe, Ngugi, and Soyinka, the study of Indian literature in the West was left largely untroubled by these debates. The reasons for this difference are complex and while I cannot do justice to them here I would like to make a few brief points. For one thing, English as the language of colonial power in Kenya, for example, had exerted a greater dominance in the cultural realm than it had in colonial India, where it had been a relatively minor vehicle of native cultural expression. While for African writers seeking to create an authentic literary expression English had to be reckoned with both as the language of the oppressor and in itself an oppressive language, for the early generations of Indian writers in English it was more likely to be the established canons of vernacular literatures which generated the greater anxiety of authenticity. It is partly for this reason perhaps that early Indian writers in English were more likely to align themselves and be aligned with Anglo-European literary traditions — if not politics — than were their African contemporaries. Coupled with the general unavailability of translations of major contemporary works from other Indian languages, the pre-eminence of a handful of writers in English who were easily assimilated into prevailing modes of literary criticism seems to have kept early critics from delving deeper into the linguistic definition of Indian in Indian literature. And as Commonwealth criticism's attention in the 1970s focused

more and more on the literature of ex-"settler" colonies, developments in Indian literature received less and less attention.

All of this changed with the publication of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981). Marking among other things the coming of age of a generation of subcontinental writers for whom English was their primary language, *Midnight's Children*'s success led both to a flood of publication of Indian writers in English and, for some, critical acclaim and market success in the West. The themes of the most prominent of these writers — cross-cultural identity and mixing, interrogations of the colonial encounter — too resonated both with the interests of the burgeoning field of postcolonial studies in the academy and with the resurgence of interest in the British Raj in the culture at large. The academic interest in Indian literature and culture did not seem to extend, however, to Indian literatures in languages other than English. This can perhaps be traced to the theoretical directions Commonwealth criticism took in the 1970s as it began to remake itself under the influence of Canadian and Australian critics — a remaking that politicized what had been at birth a very conservative undertaking and which heralded the merging of the interests of literary scholars working outside the Western canon with those of scholars in the field of colonial discourse analysis. While the quarrels over the definition of the field were occasioned by the concern that the "Commonwealth" in the field's name might draw the various emerging national literatures into an orbit of "English" literary study which would remain centered around the actual geographical mass of England, the various new names proposed for the field by the younger critics — "Terranglia," "New Literatures in English" — very much retained the primacy of the English language as a first principle, and were not really conducive to the kind of examination of the relationship of Indian literature in English and those in other languages which might have resulted in a broadening of its focus.[7] And almost twenty years after the publication of *Midnight's Children*, and with postcolonial studies established as a sophisticated, interdisciplinary field of study, Indian literature in the Western academy remains largely and implicitly defined in English — despite the

fact that quality translations of literature in other Indian languages are now readily available.[8] An in-depth reconceptualization of the idea of Indian literature and its consumption both inside and outside India is needed. This is, of course, an undertaking beyond the scope of this present article. I would, however, like to inaugurate it with a close reading of what is perhaps the most coherent recent attempt to theorize Indian literature: the Summer 1997 special fiction issue of *The New Yorker*. In the process, I hope to highlight the reasons why such a reconceptualization is needed.

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Published in connection with the worldwide celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Indian independence, *The New Yorker*'s Summer 1997 fiction issue was devoted entirely to contemporary Indian literature. The ironic cover art depicts a white couple in full stereotypical colonial garb — khakis and solar topees — parting thick jungle vines and peering at a statue of Ganesha, the Hindu god of learning — reading what is presumably a book by an Indian writer. The artwork reinvokes, even as it satirizes it, the theme of the discovery of India — a theme which resounds fairly self-consciously, and uncritically, in the two editorial pieces that frame the literary artefacts on display in the rest of the issue. The two pieces for the most part attempt to do the same thing: introduce Indian literature to an American audience which presumably has very little knowledge of it as the category "Indian literature"; and while they take different paths to this goal, their sins of omission and over-generalization, however tacit, well-meaning or misinformed, too seem to be of a piece.

The first piece, "Declarations of Independence: Why Are There Suddenly So Many Indian Novelists?" by the editor of the special issue, Bill Buford, is preceded almost immediately by a lavish corporate advertisement for International Paper, a company which, according to its slogan, answers to the world. The ad copy begins with the sentence, "Every day at 36,000 feet, a global exchange of sorts takes place," and goes on to describe the uniquely multinational traffic that is allegedly embodied in

the uses of their product. The copy may well have been written especially for this issue and placed strategically near Buford's article, for Buford uses much the same terminology to characterize the Indian-ness of what to him is "Indian" literature. Referring to a photograph printed in the issue of a number of the writers whose work is represented Buford answers his own question, "What does it mean to be an Indian novelist today?" in the following way:

> Again, the photograph. It was taken in London on the morning of May 30th. Two weeks earlier, the plan had been to have it taken in New York. In truth, the photograph could have been taken just about anywhere, with more or less the same fortuitous mixture of Indian writers on hand — anywhere, that is, except India. On the occasion of this particular shoot, Arundhati Roy had arrived the night before from Amsterdam. Vikram Seth had arrived a few hours before that from Vienna. Others came from Toronto, Boston, New York and Cambridge. Only one — Vikram Chandra — journeyed from India, and that was because he had been visiting family; he lives in Washington, D.C. (8)

Apparently, an Indian novelist is one who lives outside India. Buford's editorial takes some pains to establish a new Indian literary movement — he refers to the Beats, the Modernists, the Romantics — before finally deciding that what is taking place "is not a school or a trend but something bigger in scope" (8). What this turns out to be is the birth of a new kind of English: a language, like American English, born out of the crucible of colonialism and the postcolonial reworking of the colonial heritage. And for Buford the first confident literary utterance in this new language is Salman Rushdie's second novel, *Midnight's Children*. It is not surprising then that the descriptions that Buford provides of the new Indian English seem to be descriptions really of Rushdie's style: "There is a physicalness to the language, like the physicalness of paint on canvas: the reader is always aware of it as a medium, a thing that the writer is having to work and fashion the world from" (8). There are a number of related major problems with this description. At the very basic level of demanding simple applicability from a first principle one might suggest that it does not apply to the styles of very many major Indian writers; certainly, Amitav Ghosh,

Anita Desai, and Vikram Seth — to name only writers featured in the *New Yorker* photograph — write in styles that are as distant from Rushdie's in tone as they are in energy. It seems as though Buford in his haste to define "Indian" literature begins with certain representative authors, chosen apparently at random, extrapolates certain shared aspects of theme and style from their work, and then applies these backwards as the defining characteristics of "Indian" literature. But this would be mere quibbling if it did not connect to a more crucial aspect of Buford's argument, one that he takes so much for granted that he does not even discuss it: the very founding terms of his formulation.

Buford sees no distinction between "Indian" literature and Indian literature in English. The seventeen other official Indian languages do get an occasional mention but only as proof of Indian diversity and as the babel from which the new English emerges. There is not one mention of a single writer or work in a language other than English. Indeed, reading Buford, one could be forgiven for thinking that there is no Indian literature other than in English. But this is not the only erasure in Buford's formulation. Even among Indian writers in English a few are made to seem so representative of the many that they all but erase them as well. The earlier quotation of Buford's narrative of the group photograph may have indicated the basic multinational character that he seeks to ascribe to Indian literature. But while it is true that a number of the more prominent Indian writers in English are based at least part-time outside India, it is also true that the vast majority are based full-time inside it. This too might seem like mere quibbling. What gives it greater significance is the sense that the disproportionate emphasis on the diasporic voice is more than just an inaccuracy arising out of ignorance; rather, it seems that the global significance of this new Indian English that Buford celebrates lies precisely in this claimed multinationalism of its practitioners. One suspects that the as yet unresolved "future of Indian literature" that Buford's article looks forward to in closing is for him emblematic of the future of literature itself. This reading is further bolstered by the second "editorial" piece, written by that omnipresent-even-in-hiding representative of postcolonial Indian culture, Salman Rushdie.

While Buford may possibly be unaware of the long traditions of literature in Indian languages other than English, Rushdie clearly knows better. Indeed he raises the question of these other literatures in the very subtitle of his article, which notes that Indian writers are writing some of the most exciting contemporary fiction, but then goes on to ask, "Why is not it in Hindi (or Assamese, or Bengali, or one of the fifteen other national languages)?" (50). The question is, of course, meant to be a rhetorical one; Rushdie is not concerned with proving this. Indeed, the point is exactly that proof of this kind is impossible to find. Instead, Rushdie makes the following unequivocal statements:

> The prose writing — both fiction and nonfiction — created in this period [the fifty years since independence] by Indian writers working in English is proving to be a stronger and more important body of work than most of what has been produced in the eighteen "recognized" languages of India, the so-called "vernacular languages," during the same time; and, indeed, this new, and still burgeoning, "Indo-Anglian" literature represents perhaps the most valuable contribution India has yet made to the world of books. The true Indian literature of the first postcolonial half-century has been made in the language the British left behind. (50)

Between the first long sentence and the second short one a great deal of distance is traveled. The first merely sets out a comparison — even if it is one of staggering scope; the second, however, makes a major representative claim for the first — it declares not only that Indian literature in English is "stronger" but that it is also the only truly "Indian" literature. The sole basis of this astonishing statement is Rushdie's reading over a few months of what he calls bad translations. The reader is then pointed to a grocery list of Indian "vernacular" writers and asked to make her own assessments. Leaving aside the unlikelihood of even the most diligent reader of *The New Yorker* actually being able to find these books in an American store or library, one is struck almost immediately by the fairly haphazard grouping of Rushdie's list of writers. All the names on it are truly big ones, but missing are so many of the writers who have consistently won major Indian national awards for fiction over the last twenty or thirty years, that one begins to suspect that the list has

been compiled more from a cursory glance at a shelf of translations at a Delhi bookstore than from informed research of any depth into the current state of the other Indian literatures.[9] If an American reader were to be armed with a research list of Indian "vernacular" writers, surely it could be a more complete and truly contemporary one. It is, of course, besides the point that even the writers on Rushdie's list could be argued to prove the lie to his statement. It is very interesting though that this negative evaluation of "vernacular" literature is limited only to the generation of writers after independence. Of the non-English writers who were active in the century before independence Rushdie has far nicer things to say. Such writers as Tagore and Premchand are worthy of "a place in any anthology" (52). It is only their postcolonial successors who fall short. We return then to the substance of the second sentence in Rushdie's statement: that in the postcolonial era the literature in English is the only "true" Indian one.

This part of the statement is supported as vigorously as the first was asserted. The first step is to prove that English is an authentic Indian language. While I am not entirely sure if the naturalization of English as an Indian language can really be compared, at least at present, as Rushdie does, to the situation of Urdu, there will be no arguments from my end about the authenticity of Indian English. (At this historical juncture, claims otherwise seem, at best, pointless.) Rushdie is surely correct, however, in comparing English to Urdu as another Indian language that cuts across regional lines. He is also correct in suggesting that many South Indians often prefer English to Hindi as a neutral language of cultural exchange. But to claim, as Rushdie does, that this lack of fixed regional affiliation necessarily makes English the ideal language of national representation is to make a leap across a divide that may not really exist. It is not enough, in other words, to note that English is spoken in more Indian states than any other Indian language. There is, of course, the statistical issue that this spread nonetheless involves less than five percent of the total population of India. More important is the question of whether any one language, whatever its regional distribution, can be made to be

representative of a country so literally polyglot and multicultural as India. Languages exist side by side in India, often at differing levels of public discourse, and monolinguals are rare. Someone who may use English as a unit of professional exchange may nonetheless dream and read predominantly in another language. And while the English language may be spread over a wide geographical area, an individual who speaks and writes in English in any one area does not necessarily through it gain any access to a shared experience that crosses all the boundaries of culture. Rushdie's argument is that the "vernacular" writers suffer by definition from a parochial outlook. This seems inherently dubious. A Marathi who also speaks English, or even primarily speaks English, may have something in common with a Kashmiri who speaks English, but this commonality does not and should not trump other links that each may have to fellow Marathis and Kashmiris who speak less or no English, or the links that they may have to people from entirely different language groups. No one language can hope to hold the key to Indian culture. To put this another way, the argument that English literature links a reader in West Bengal to a reader in Gujarat, in a manner that neither Gujarati nor Bengali can, would stand only if translations between Gujarati and Bengali did not exist. Aijaz Ahmad makes a similar point in *In Theory*, arguing that in the absence of the increase of such translation, and in the context of a growing corpus of translation of "vernacular" literature into English, we run the risk of having English become the medium through which the other Indian literatures know each other. Ahmad makes the further point that English may indeed be the least suitable language for such an enterprise since it is, according to him, "among all the Indian languages, the most removed, in its structure and ambience, from all the other Indian languages" (250). This may be arguable, but the point even for Ahmad is not that some other Indian language should be chosen to be the refractory lens through which "Indian" literature becomes visible, but that the very conception of "Indian" literature needs to be a multilingual one in which the relationships between the various language and literary groupings needs to be rigorously, historically analyzed.

This is clearly a conception of "Indian" literature far removed from Rushdie's competitive model. What is interesting though is that later in his article Rushdie himself states that "there is not, need not be, and should not be an adversarial relationship between English-language Indian literature and the other literatures"(57). This sudden democratic gesture, however, is not really extended back to his earlier debunking of the poor "vernaculars." Rather it becomes clear that Rushdie's peace with the other tongues comes about only by consigning them, finally, to an almost nonverbal cultural background. As he puts it,

> knowing and loving the Indian languages in which I was raised has remained of vital personal and artistic importance. Hindi-Urdu, the "Hindustani" of North India, remains an essential aspect of my sense of self as an individual, while as a writer I have been partly formed by the presence, in my head, of that other music — the rhythms, patterns, and habits of thought and metaphor of all my Indian tongues. (57)

It is not of interest to Rushdie (or *The New Yorker*) what the other, so much more diverse, hybridities may be — how the "rhythms, patterns, and habits of thought and metaphor" of English may have worked their way into the other Indian tongues and each of theirs again into each other. Rukmini Nair has argued quite convincingly that part of what drives Rushdie in this article is a version of a Bloomian anxiety of influence.[10] In dismissing the older postcolonial "vernacular" writers, Rushdie, she argues, "in one well-judged stroke . . . gets rid of all older fathers." Save, of course, himself; and the heirs he assembles around him too are those whose cosmopolitan English speaking sensibilities are more allied with his own — a literary lion claiming a pride, Rushdie kills off not only the old monarchs but also all their children. The "prehistorical," as it were, colonial "vernacular" writers are venerated, but it is Rushdie and his successors who are to be their true heirs. According to this argument the issue of whether contemporary "vernacular" writers are really better or worse than their English siblings is a red herring; as Nair puts it, "Not comparison, but paternity is [Rushdie's] suit."

In any event, Rushdie's argument is not made to an Indian audience. (Indeed, the reception in the Indian media of Rushdie's claims about the comparative merits of Indian literature, in both this article and in other similar pieces, has been as hostile as he anticipates it to be. Regrettably much of the backlash has fallen into the very traps that Rushdie sets — arguing vociferously for the merits of "vernacular" writers over the English ones.) To an American audience which neither knows nor cares too much about the histories of Indian literature, Rushdie's summary is a good easy reference. Especially since, to return to the point at which this discussion of the *New Yorker* issue began, the terms in which he couches it resonate so well with the bland "reach out and touch the world" ideology that covers over the messy trails of transnational capital. At the end of the comparative section of his article Rushdie has this to say:

> One important dimension of literature is that it is a means of holding a conversation with the world. These [English] writers are insuring that India — or, rather, Indian voices . . . will henceforth be confident, indispensable participants in that literary conversation. (56)

Putting Buford and Rushdie together, a less elegant way to put this might be: India and Indian culture are finally both exotic and intelligible; we now have direct access to their texts.

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As literary scholars we are arguably more immune to the kind of lazy scholarship on Indian literature that Rushdie would have us accept, too sophisticated to fall for his arguments about the respective representative merits of "vernacular" and English literatures. But we are nonetheless a major structuring part of the market that governs their production. Consider these sales numbers for Indian English fiction from David Davidar, the managing editor of Penguin India: "If we sell 500 copies in hardback of a first novel, we consider it a success . . . in paperback the average sales are around 2,000 copies."[11] Few Indian writers make a living from writing. Yet associate editors at Penguin India are expected to sign at least three writers each month. What fuels this, of course, is the Arundhati Roy factor;

that every once in a while one writer will come along who will break the bank and return all the investments. And while *The God of Small Things* has sold well in India, those numbers are dwarfed by Roy's international sales: in the US, Roy spent the better part of a year on the bestseller lists in hardback and her book is on the lists again in paperback. And if it is too early to tell whether Roy's mammoth success indicates that Indian fiction is about to become "the literary flavor of the month" in the US, it seems clear enough that she is already academic flavor of the year. There are already panels at the MLA to do with her work, and her book is already a featured attraction on syllabi for undergraduate "Introduction to South Asian/Third World Literature" classes. Despite Roy's success at the local Barnes & Noble, these classes are likely to continue to be the places in which non-Indians encounter most Indian fiction. And as more and more Indian writers begin to become available through small redistribution houses and online bookstores, attention needs to be paid to the ways in which Indian literature reaches us, and the rhetorical strategies that pave those ways. (If nothing else, the rhetoric of globalism that I have attempted to highlight in my extended discussion of the *New Yorker* special issue might suggest that one of the most important things in teaching contemporary South Asian literature is to teach the market which brings it, the student and the teacher into the classroom.) It is also important to consider why it is that even in this age of increasing global availability so little Indian literature in languages other than English should be available either in the general bookstore or in the postcolonial classroom.[12] It cannot be a matter of preserving the language of composition — clearly translation from Spanish has not hindered the sales of books by Latin American writers or their use in world literature courses. Nor is it true that literature in other Indian languages is by definition thematically or stylistically inaccessible to Western readers. Indeed many novelists in other Indian languages would probably place themselves equally within traditions that would be easily recognizable to traditional literary critics— Krishna Baldev Vaid, for instance, writes novels in Hindi but has also written a book-length critical study on Henry James and

has translated Beckett into Hindi.[13] The answer, at least from the academic standpoint, may lie, as suggested earlier, in the ways in which Indian literature as a category was constructed in the early years of Commonwealth literary studies and the continuance of those frameworks in later critical work. And if we do not wish explanations such as Rushdie's to be the defining ones, it is important both to re-examine the earlier moment of entry of Indian literature into Anglo-American critical traditions and to reconceptualize the moment of entry in our own time. At the very least, this may mean questioning the dominance of the tropes of diaspora and "multinationalism" in postcolonial literary and cultural criticism. It is only once we have denaturalized these arrivals and critical lenses that we may be able to consider the possibility of conceiving of Indian literature outside the boundaries of colonial, Commonwealth, and postcolonial.

NOTES

1 For example, see Mongia; Loomba; Moore-Gilbert.

2 *ARIEL*, for instance has a composite issue on "Postcolonialism and Its Discontents" (26. 1 & 3 [Jan. & July 1995]).

3 See, for example, McClintock; Appiah.

4 See their articles in King, *New National and Post-colonial Literatures.*

5 A major exception, of course, is some of the recent work of Spivak. In her essay, "How to Teach a Culturally Different Book," for example, Spivak performs a characteristically difficult but nuanced and situated reading of R.K Narayan's novel *The Guide* — first published in 1958. It is telling though that when this essay is reprinted in the recent *Spivak Reader*, the editors seem to be under the impression that it was written in 1980 — the date of the latest US edition.

6 My exclusive focus, from this point forward, on Indian literature might possibly be read as a case of collapsing of postcolonial into "Indian." This is not my intention. While there are many similarities between the critical and pedagogical approaches to all the various "national" postcolonial literatures, the differences between the literatures themselves, and their contexts, are numerous enough to make broad generalizations dangerous. And while certain aspects of my reading of the reception and study of Indian literature in the American market and academy may well apply to that of, say, Caribbean fiction, it does not seek some larger representative status.

7 See the articles in Riemenschneider, Ed. *The History and Historiography of Commonwealth Literature*, especially those in the first section entitled "Perspectives of Literary Historiography."

8 Excellent translations into English include

Chugtai, Ismat. *The Crooked Line.* ["Terhi Lakir" (Urdu)]. Trans. Tahira Naqvi. Oxford: Heinemann, 1995.

Devi, Mahasweta. *Mother of 1084*. ["Hajar Churashir Ma" (Bengal)]. Trans. Samik Bandyopadhyay. Calcutta: Seagull, 1998.
Murthy, U.R Anantha. *Samskara*. ["Samskara" (Kannada)]. Trans. A. K. Ramanujan. New Delhi: Oxford, 1978.
Nagarkar, Kiran. *Seven Sixes are Forty Three*. ["Saat Sakkam Trechallis" (Marathi)]. Trans. Shubha Slee. Oxford: Heinemann, 1995.
Shukla, Shirilal. *Raag Darbari*. ["Raag Darbari" (Hindi)]. Trans. Gillian Wright. New Delhi: Penguin, 1992.
Vaid, Krishna Baldev. *The Broken Mirror*. ["Guzara Hua Zamana" (Hindi)]. Trans. Charles Sparrows and Krishna Baldev Vaid. New Delhi: Penguin, 1994.
Vera, Nirmal. *A Rag Called Happiness*. ["Ek Chitrha Sukh (Hindi)]. Trans. Kuldip Singh. New Delhi: Penguin, 1993.

In the early 1990s, Penguin India did a commendable job of commissioning quality translations. The more recent excellent "Modern Indian Novels in Translation" series from Macmillan India and the "Classics" series from Katha continue this effort in a more systematic way. For more information, contact Macmillan India, at 21 Patullos Road, Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600 002, and visit Katha's website at www.oneworld.org/katha. Heinemann's Asian Writers Series is, however, sadly, defunct.

9 Rushdie lists O.V Vijayan, Nirala, Nirmal Verma, U.R Ananthamurthy, Suresh Joshi, Amrita Pritam, Qurratulain Hyder, and Ismat Chugtai. While Chugtai herself is hardly a contemporary writer, Rushdie's list ignores such major figures of postcolonial Indian fiction as Shrilal Shukla, Krishna Baldev Vaid, Mahasweta Devi, Ashapurna Debi, Gopinath Mohanty, Ganeswar Misra, Sethu, and Kiran Nagarkar (see prevous note).

10 Nair's article was available from the online version of the Indian national newspaper *The Hindu* on 17 August 1997. Since the newspaper's web archive is inconsistent an exact citation is difficult.

11 Quoted in *The Week Online: Special Literature Issue*. This issue contains a number of interesting responses to the question of the authenticity of Indian literature in English.

12 Perhaps the best source of Indian literature in the US is South Asia Books at www.southasiabooks.com

13 This is not to suggest that these writers are in some sense merely English novelists who happen to be writing in other languages. Literatures in other Indian languages represent complex negotiations of Indian and European literary and cultural traditions — but it is important to stress that so too does Indian literature in English. The relationships, similarities and differences between all these different negotiations need to be studied if we are to arrive at any kind of understanding of the ways in which "Indian" identities are articulated and the differing levels of power that accrue to them.

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